



The rapid growth of the movement reads like some Managing Director's dream: twelve Institutes formed before Christmas in the first year, and nearly 800 by the end of 1918! With such an explosive expansion, the movement might well have got out of hand, but it was fortunate in the calibre of its first Central Committee, headed by Lady Denman, who remained its Chairman from 1919 to 1946. With foresight and self-restraint, these pioneers forebore to impose a constitution on the new movement from above, but hammered out the underlying principles and ideals with the members themselves, giving the movement the democratic and self-governing basis on which it rests today. From the start delegates from the W.I.s attended the Annual General Meetings held, in those days, at places like Blackpool, where the speakers' voices were drowned in the roars of wild beasts from the nearby Zoo, and the Queen's Hall, London. Here, greatly daring, they used "Mr. Marconi's system of amplifiers" and found them helpful. Approving or vetoing the ideas put before them, countrywomen were learning not only to hold views but to get up

and air them.

The early activities of the Institutes in the villages were bounded by War conditions and shortages, and they made a noble contribution toward ultimate victory which could be reckoned in sheer tonnage. One small W.I. reported that one-and-a-half tons of blackberries had been picked for jam, another that over a thousand pounds of wool had been knitted into comforts, and a third had made the distribution of frozen cod among the villagers its war-work, doling out 280 lb. a week, though the Institute was only twenty strong. In the economy drive, Institute members learned boot-repairing and saucepan-mending; they converted waste land into allotments, and started the first market at Criccieth to sell the produce. They formed Pig Clubs—"We have secured a pig and given partial support to the village nurse" wrote a proud secretary in her annual report. In a country faced with starvation, the pig would naturally rank first. Twenty years later, the Movement, now firmly rooted in the countryside, had to face an even stronger menace, and once more the members put