

THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

THURSDAY, AUGUST 31, 1939

Women Write Editorials

With this issue the series of guest editorials written by members of the Lions Club, Rotary Club, Agricultural Society, Town Council and Women's Institute are completed. True to form the women are having "the last word." To use a modern expression they have also "gone to town in a big way" as to quality and quantity of their editorials.

We have often commented in these columns on the practical work and accomplishments of Women's Institutes of Durham County. That favorable opinion and reputation have been further enhanced on this occasion. Through the capable and energetic leadership given by the District President, Mrs. Johnson Thickson of Bowmanville, every one of the nine branch Institutes contributed at least one editorial. Furthermore, the copy was clearly written and all in on time, which is further proof of the thorough and businesslike way these women go about any job they tackle.

It is taken for granted that our women subscribers will read these editorials, but we are more interested in having the men read them. For, if they are not already conversant with the activities of the W.I., they are going to receive a jolt that will surprise them. They have discussed a variety of subjects in an impressive manner, which affects every man and woman in this country. After reading these editorials we are more convinced than ever that our Institute women not only preach but practice good citizenship in the wide scope of being real community builders in following out the Institute motto: "For Home and Country."

—The Editor.

Neighbours

"Mother" is the sweetest word in our English tongue, but close behind it comes "Neighbor." When ever we think of true neighbors, that old and beautiful picture of the Good Samaritan comes before us as the ideal of what a good neighbor really is — one who always stands by in case of need. This is also the secret of "Mother's" sweetness.

The test of true neighborliness which the searching light of need supplies, is the test of the charm of the Women's Institute. We come to it with our varied needs and it meets them.

It not only supplies quilts to those who are cold, food to the hungry, clothes to the poor, but it also provides warmth for cold hearts, food for hungry minds, and clothing for the despairing soul.

Every heart has an aching corner tucked away somewhere, just as we tuck in the unruly ends of our hair and pin them out of sight. Some hearts may be troubled with the cares of poverty, while other hearts are equally troubled with the cares of riches, with the disillusionment that comes when humans everywhere seem stretching hands for what they possess, not for themselves. Some souls may be quivering with the open wounds of disloyalty and ingratitude. One mother may be stabbed with the waywardness of a son or daughter, while another aches for "The touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still."

They come with their gay clothes, their smiles and their laughter, but in behind, tucked out of sight, are the aching corners of their lives, seeking healing.

The secret of the growth of every little branch of the Mother Institute Tree is the supply of the vital sap of life which flows one to another as we give freely of ourselves to our neighbors.

The Women's Institute meetings should be practical meetings where we may banish failure and achieve success. They should be places where we learn better cooking, better sewing, better home management, but let us not forget that the master key to success lies in the inspiration we receive, neighbor to neighbor, to be more helpful women in every time of need.

EDITORIALS

History of Women's Institutes

Their Origin:—

The first Women's Institute was organized in Saltfleet Township, Wentworth County, the 19th of February, 1897, with a view to meeting the express desire to acquire information which would insure greater efficiency on the part of the women of the rural sections, in those varied responsibilities resting upon them in the home, and as citizens.

Mr. Erland Lee a prominent broad-minded and public-spirited young member of the Farmer's Institute, living in Saltfleet, in the vicinity of Stoney Creek, attended the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph. While there he heard Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless deliver a very stirring address on the value and need of having Domestic Science and Sewing taught in the Public Schools. Mr. Lee was much impressed and resolved to have Mrs. Hoodless address the women of Saltfleet.

Mrs. Hoodless had become interested in the need of teaching Domestic Science through the death of her first child, a little boy eighteen months old. He had died from being fed impure milk, and she felt she was to blame. Over his coffin she took a vow, that she would do everything possible to save other mothers from making the same mistake.

She believed the educational system in force in Ontario at that time to be absolutely wrong — the system of educating boys and girls along the same lines, when their life work was so vastly different. To use her own words: "We are educating our girls to be home-breakers, not home-makers." She said girls should be educated to fit them properly for that sphere of life for which they were destined viz. — home-making, and to do this they should be taught Domestic Science in the Public Schools.

Enlisting the co-operation of her husband who at that time was chairman of the Hamilton Board of Education, she finally succeeded in having Domestic Science added to the curriculum of Hamilton Public Schools.

When plans were being made in January, 1897, for the Farmer's Institute meeting Mr. Lee suggested that Mrs. Hoodless be invited to address the evening meeting when women might be present. A majority of his fellow-members objected so he took the responsibility himself of asking her to come. Born on the farm her sympathies were with the country people and she graciously accepted.

Her speech made a deep impression with both men and women. She suggested that the women form an organization similar to the Farmer's Institute, but as there was not much time left for discussion it was decided that she would come again the following Friday. During the week Mr. and Mrs. Lee did all they could to arouse interest in the venture, and when Mrs. Hoodless returned, instead of the thirty-five who had promised to come there were one hundred and one women, and one man. That man was Mr. Erland Lee.

Mr. Lee took the chair and Mrs. Hoodless en-

larged upon the need of an organization for women whereby they might be helped in home-craft, mothercraft and all that it meant, in the same way as the men were helped in raising better and larger crops. The result was the organization of a Department of Domestic Economy in affiliation with the Farmer's Institute, to be called the Women's Department of the Farmer's Institute of South Wentworth. At the next meeting the name was changed to the Women's Institute of Saltfleet, and this was later changed when other Institutes were organized in the township, to the Stoney Creek Women's Institute.

Their Growth:—

In the early records one finds the real objective of the pioneers: "A nation cannot rise above the level of its homes, therefore we women must work and study together to raise our homes to the highest possible level."

In 1900, thirty-three Women's Institutes were functioning in the Province. This number has increased until now branches may be found in every inhabited section of Ontario. In 1935 there were 1,371 Women's Institute branches with a membership of 42,000.

Women's Institutes or similar agencies are now organized in every Province in Canada. The Women's Institute was organized in the British Isles in 1915 by a Canadian, Mrs. Alfred Watt. Mrs. Watt has the honour of having organized the Sandringham Women's Institute when Queen Mary was chosen President. For more than two decades Her Majesty graciously consented to act in this capacity and now she and Queen Elizabeth are joint presidents. Nothing has given greater impetus to the movement in Canada in the past few years than the interest of Her Excellency, The Lady Tweedsmuir. To-day Women's Institutes or similar organizations are to be found in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa.

Their Value in the Community:—

Not only have the Institutes grown in numbers and membership but their function has developed in line with the ends of the changing circumstances of living. With the steady progress of science and art greater returns are possible each year to the home-maker who is a member of the Institute.

Through the Institute rural women are learning:

- (1) A better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods, clothing and fuel.
- (2) More understanding of scientific care and training of children with a view to raising the general standard of health and moral of our people.
- (3) Knowledge relating to domestic economy including household architecture with special attention to home sanitation.

Activities for community welfare such as provision of improved educational facilities, health services and recreational opportunities have deepened the satisfaction of life in rural areas.

Stimulation of a sense of civic interest and responsibility has created an ever-increasing volume and quality of leadership among rural women that has enriched rural living. It has aided rural youth to find satisfaction and constructive self-expression in this period of restricted opportunity for employment.

Rural women have increasingly enlarged their horizons and deepened their interests. They are concerning themselves with their responsibilities as world citizens. The achievements of the Canadian Women's Institutes in the preservation of materials and data concerned with local history is a notable illustration of stimulation of civic pride.

The consideration of any problem or the carrying on of any line of work, which has as its object the uplift of the home or the betterment of conditions surrounding country life is the foundation of the motto "For Home and Country" which the Women's Institutes have adopted and endeavour to keep uppermost in their worth-while organization.

—Mrs. Grant Thompson,
President Nestleton Women's Institute.

—Mrs. Cecil Ferguson,
1st Vice-President West Durham District
and President of Victorian Women's
Institute, Blackstock.