

A voice that cried in the wilderness

By **MARCUS VAN STEEN**

THREE-quarters of a century ago, a baby boy died in Hamilton at the age of 18 months. In those days, however, one child died in five and every family had its small graves in the churchyard.

What made this case different was that the baby's mother refused to accept the situation with resignation. She set to work to find out why her own child died, why so many other children died, and studied ways to lessen this sorrow and suffering.

What she accomplished has stamped her name—Adelaide Hunter Hoodless — on the honor roll of women's organizations in Canada and the world over. By the end of her brief 52 years of life she had founded or helped found: the Young Women's Christian Association of Canada; the Victorian Order of Nurses; the National Council of Women; the Macdonald Institute at Guelph; and Women's Institutes across the world.

When Mrs. Hoodless learned that her baby's death was caused by contaminated milk, she was shocked that she herself could have been so negligent. She was even more shocked to learn that many babies were dying from the same cause, not only in Hamilton but all over the continent.

And her awakening had only begun. She soon became aware that, although a great deal of scientific research was being devoted to finding the best possible feed for pigs and cattle and even hens, little or no thought was given to finding the best food for human children. She noticed, too, that, where local farmers would entrust their horses to the care of only highly qualified men, they would often pick, as mothers for their children, women with no training at all in child care and household management.

"Canadian girls today learn a great many things, except those things which will be

of greatest value to them as women—the rearing of children and the proper management of a home," she said. Thanks to her efforts, this cannot be said with the same degree of truth today.

Mrs. Hoodless was born Adelaide Hunter, youngest of the 12 children of David and Jane Hunter, whose small farmhouse still stands off Highway 5 between Brantford and St. George, Ont. Her parents were hard-working Irish Presbyterians who had come to Canada in 1830. By the time she was born, Feb. 27, 1857, her father was dead, and during her earliest years the family had a serious economic struggle.

Adelaide's only formal education was at the nearby school in St. George, but she had enough refinement, social charm and natural good looks to marry a very well-to-do Hamilton businessman, John Hoodless, when she was 24. The rest of her life might have been spent in a quiet, unassuming round of social

raising the general standard of the life of our people."

Mrs. Hoodless made her first big step toward her chosen goal when she became president of the Hamilton YWCA, which took her to Chicago in 1893 as a delegate to the World Conference of Representative Women. The 17 years of her life which followed were years of achievement. They were also years of nerve-straining work, and tireless efforts to break down firmly entrenched prejudices.

In 1894 she sponsored a resolution before the newly formed National Society of Women, asking that Canadian schools introduce manual training — which, for girls, meant domestic science.

"When I started to prepare a paper to accompany my resolution I found it impossible to get any up-to-date information in Canada," she related. "The subject had not even attracted the attention of our educators, as I soon learned, and as Mr. G. W.



O.A.C., Guelph, Ont.

This portrait of Mrs. Hoodless is at Macdonald Institute

Hamilton mothers no longer able to teach their daughters how to cook?" asked the Hamilton Spectator. And the suggestion made frequently in letters to the editor, from public platforms, and even from some pulpits, was: "Why doesn't she stay at home and look after her own family?"

It is difficult to appreciate fully what Mrs. Hoodless accomplished until we remember the social prejudices of

It calls for higher ideals of home life and more respect for domestic occupations. In short it is a direct education for women as homemakers."

Just as the determination to start these classes had been one of the main reasons she accepted the presidency of the Hamilton YWCA, the same aim next prompted her to found the YWCA of Canada so that the knowledge of her Hamilton classes might spread to other YWCAs across Canada.

As an indication of how far in advance of her time Mrs. Hoodless was, many of her speeches, delivered 60 and more years ago, still read very much like yesterday's editorial or next week's address by a child psychologist to the local PTA. Long before the First World War and the motor car had torn the Victorian home asunder, she was preaching the vital importance of a stable home to a stable society. She blamed "the rising tide of lawlessness, the empty churches and the disturbing increase in divorce statistics" on the weakening of the home ties.

"The management of the home has more to do in the moulding of character than any other influence, owing to the large place it fills in the early life of the individual, during the most plastic stage of development," she said on one occasion. "We are, therefore, justified in an effort to secure a place for home economics, or domestic science, in the educational

Continued on Page 20

**Adelaide Hoodless dared
to call running a home important**

pleasures and civic duties, if she had had a better milkman. It was the death of her first baby that gave her life its purpose.

What this purpose was, Mrs. Hoodless herself summed up in a remark she made shortly before her death: "Apart from my family duties, the education of better mothers to make better homes has been my life work." Nor was she any less clear as to what she thought was needed in the education of women of her time: "... a special attention to sanitation ... a better understanding of the economic and hygienic value of foods and fuels ... and a more scientific care of of children with a view to

Ross, Ontario's Minister of Education, admitted."

She discovered, however, that a great amount of work was being done in domestic science education in Britain, Germany and the United States. Still she was not able to convince Mr. Ross or anyone else. Nevertheless in 1895, she went ahead and started a household science class in the Hamilton YWCA as a practical demonstration of what she was proposing. As she later put it: "I started my class almost alone, and in a small way, but in strong faith."

She needed the faith, because the opening of her class was accompanied by a chorus of scorn and derision. "Are

her time. Although she eventually won a great many people over to her cause, at no time during her life was she ever free from criticism and even calumny. But as she herself said, there were magnificent compensations.

The first thing Mrs. Hoodless' school demonstrated was that domestic science education was not just a matter of cooking and sewing. "Domestic science," she explained on many occasions, "is the application of scientific principles to the management of a home. It teaches the value of pure air, proper food, systematic management, economy, care of children, domestic and civic sanitation and the prevention of disease.

Mr. Van Steen is a Brantford free-lance writer.