

A Message to the Women's Institutes

By NELLIE L. McCLUNG. (Copyright Reserved.)

The Women's institutes of Canada, numbering about four hundred thousand women, have been for years a great force in social welfare. Made up largely of country women, they have a seriousness of purpose, and a courageous spirit in facing problems. They do not go to conventions because of the social features. It is not a dress-parade for them, though my memory of conventions is of a large hall, usually in a church, full of bright faces and pretty dresses, great bouquets of peonies and roses; a long table where the officers sit, clear voices heard distinctly at the back of the hall, and meetings that begin and end on the minute.

The Women's institute has the advantage of being an international body, and here in Canada we have the joy of knowing that it was a Canadian woman who took the idea across the sea—Mrs. Alfred Watt, of British Columbia.

I had the pleasure of addressing an institute meeting to-day, and it awakened memories of many other such occasions. It has a flavour all its own, this society which has for its motto "For Home and Country."

Provision is made in the institutes for the two types of worker. There are in the institutes (as there are in the churches) the women who want to do their work at home. They will arrange for bazaars, and raise the money for a rest room, or a local library. They will see that the undernourished children in the schools are given a drink of milk at 10 o'clock. They learn to weave; or make baskets, and will put on a fine home cooking sale. Then there is the other type who delight in the educational side of their work. They want to study the problems of the world, so they sponsor lectures, and essay contests, buy books and review them.

Some times a conflict arises between the two elements, the Marys and the Marthas. But it does not come to an open break, for the sound reason that the Marys and the Marthas overlap. On the extreme right, and extreme left, there will be the pure Martha and incorruptible Mary, but between these extremes there lies the solid membership—the knitting women, who read while they knit; the basket maker, who writes poetry; the best pie-maker in the district, who also leads her society in the discussion of current events.

To-day, when I spoke to this particular society, I hoped they would for this hour be all Marys, for I wanted to lead them away from teas and needlepoint, and discuss with them the value of the League of Nations.

This June meeting will be the last one for the season, and the matter of finances is in their mind, for the conventions are not far away.

Now the League of Nations is far away, and under a cloud at the moment, and doubts have naturally assailed even the Marys, as to the wisdom of continuing to pay the ten-dollar sustaining fee to the League of Nations society. Ten dollars is a tidy sum when one considers the hard ways in which women's societies make their money.

The King, when he spoke here in Victoria, closed with a vital sentence. He said: "Some day the nations of the world will live by co-operation, not conflict." So I began with that. That is the hope of the world.

The League of Nations, far from being dead, still stands as the greatest effort ever made by men to substitute co-operation for conflict. And we simply cannot desert it in its hour of need. The League of Nations society, to which the sustaining fee is paid, deserves much more support than it is getting, because of the books it makes available at the cost of production—books which are authentic and unbiased. The headquarters is in Ottawa, at 124 Wellington street, and there obliging secretaries will advise any society or individual who wants to be informed on the international situation.

The League of Nations may change its form, but the idea of collective security on which it was formed will not perish, for we cannot be safe any other way in the present condition of the world.

No one need apologize for the league, even though it failed as a peace maker. Let us look at just one department of its social work, and see what it has done for the health of the world. Disease is no respecter of national boundaries. Rats travel in ships. Foul conditions in one country menace the safety of other countries. The league, by its health organization, has sent doctors and experts to many parts of the world. I heard a delegate from Egypt tell of the health units along the Nile, and the improvements made in rural areas under league guidance. Ships are watched for contagious diseases, and many an epidemic has been prevented. Nutrition boards have been set up in many countries. We have one now in Canada. Nutrition boards make recommendations regarding tariffs, to the end that people may get the food they need at a reasonable price.

Now, even more important than these practical benefits, is the spirit of co-operation between the countries. International co-operation to achieve common ends goes on quietly. It is the very principle on which the League of Nations stands.

Norman Angell in his book, *The Great Illusion*—Now, has an illustration concerning two cannibals, who met one day with grim intention. One said something like this to the other one: "I must eat you, not that I have anything against you, but I am hungry. You are the only food I see. So it's just too bad for you! I hope you won't mind being eaten." It looked like a bad day for both, for naturally neither would consent to be eaten. But they suddenly noticed there was fruit above their heads in the trees, fruit which they could reach if one stood on the shoulders of the other one. So they did this, and co-operation began!

All nations were cannibals at first. One nation's gain had to be another's loss. But time has brought wisdom. One by one, nations have begun to see the fruit in the higher branches. The League of Nations was formed in the hope that all would see it. But some of the nations saw what they thought was a quicker way to get what they wanted, and so have reverted to cannibalism!

But there are men and women even in these countries, heart-sick of this endless circle of misery. They cannot do anything. They are prisoners of cruel circumstance, but we, in Canada, can strengthen the forces of co-operation. We can support the League of Nations society, in fact and in principle. We can inform ourselves as to the work which is being done; we can, as individuals and as a society, show forth that spirit which makes co-operation possible. We can build the new "Jerusalem in this green and pleasant land."

It is a good slogan the King gave us—good in the home, in the nation, in the world—a good slogan for the year—"Co-operation instead of Conflict."

Lantern Lane, R.M.D. No. 4, Victoria, B.C.

NELLIE L. McCLUNG.
June 1939.



THIS IS HOW AND WHERE THE FIRST WOMEN'S INSTITUTE ORIGINATED

STONEY CREEK, Feb. 19, 1897 — One hundred and one women and one man, Erland Lee, attended a meeting tonight at Squire's Hall here. The following are the minutes of the meeting:

"Mr. Lee was chairman and an address was given by Mrs. John Hoodless.

"Moved by Mrs. Melson and seconded by Mrs. E. Lee, that we organize a Women's Department of Domestic Economy in affiliation with the Farmers' Institute.—Carried.

"It was decided that the name should be the "Women's Department of the Farmers' Institute of South Wentworth.

"The following officers were elected: Honorary president, Mrs. John Hoodless; president, Mrs. E. D. Smith of Winona; vice-president, Mrs. J. J. Dean of Fruitland; secretary, Miss M. Nash of Stoney Creek; treasurer, Mrs. J. H. McNeilly of Fruitland."

SQUIRE'S HALL, Feb. 25, 1897 — The second meeting of the Women's Department of the Farmers' Institute of South Wentworth met here this evening. The following are the minutes:

"Name of society discussed.

"Moved by Mrs. F. M. Carpenter, seconded by Mrs. Melson, that the name be changed to 'The Women's Institute of Saltfleet.' — Carried.

"The constitution and by-laws are prepared by the committee was submitted. After the constitution was read it was moved by Mrs. Dean, seconded by Mrs. Melson, that said constitution be adopted. — Carried.

"Letter read by secretary from Hon. John Dryden, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, to Sec. Erland Lee in reply to a request for a grant.

"Address by Miss Watson who gave an interesting paper on foods.

"Directors were then appointed.

"Moved by Mrs. Carpenter, seconded by Mrs. Petit, that Mrs. Erland Lee be a director. — Carried.

"Moved by Mrs. McNeilly, seconded by Mrs. Melson, that Mrs. C. Dewitt of Tapleytown be a director. — Carried.

"Moved by Mrs. Marcus Lee, seconded by Mrs. Dean, that Mrs. F. M. Carpenter be a director. — Carried.

"Auditors were then appointed.

"Moved by Mrs. Melson, seconded by Mrs. McNeilly, that Carlotta Orr be an auditor. — Carried.

"It was also moved and seconded that Mrs. (Dr.) Thompson be an auditor. — Carried.

"It was decided to hold meetings once every fortnight, Thursday afternoon at 2 o'clock.

Pres., Mrs. E. D. Smith,
Sec., M. E. Nash."

MESSAGE FROM LADY TWEEDSMUIR

Dear Fellow Members:

I am thrilled by the news that at your Fifth National Convention you are having a celebration of the Tweedsmuir Histories. How well I remember the time when I and other W.I. members started them, as a means of recording so much that was rapidly passing away.

What a fine piece of work has been done by these Histories. You have recaptured so much of the past that is valuable, and have presented it to Canada in the form of interesting and attractive books.

In the world today past history has so much to teach us all, and I know how much the historians nowadays and tomorrow will value what you have done.

All my congratulations and best wishes for your splendid work now and in the future.

Susan Tweedsmuir