

# The Mary Stewart Collect

This is the Season of District Annuals . . . and From Ottawa to Sarnia and Wallaceburg to Fort William, Members of the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario Will Be Repeating Together This Prayer.

By KATHRYN HANSULD.

SOME 47,000 women in Ontario alone know how Mary Stewart touched "the great human heart common to us all" with her collect which was first published in 1904 and is now used to open meetings of branches of the Women's Institute. Not only do the Associated Countrywomen of the World (of which the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada is a part) have as their own the Mary Stewart Collect, but year books of hundreds of groups around the world include this famous prayer to be used in their meetings.

The collect was first printed in *The Delineator*, a women's magazine no longer published, but then nationally popular in the United States. The first large women's organization to adopt it was the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

The author was a native of Ohio, but moved to Colorado when she was very young. Following her graduation from the University of Colorado she became principal of a high school in Longmont, where she wrote the famous collect.

The collect was introduced to the Women's Institutes in England by Mrs. Alfred Watt, M.B.E., who later presented it to the Associated Country Women of the World. She was president of the A.C.W.W. at the time and the author had given the copyright to that international organization. In a letter to Mrs. Watt, the author told how she came to compose the prayer.

"I wrote the collect when I was principal of the Longmont High School in Colorado. It was my first position after college and the friendly Longmont women made me a member of their Fortnightly Club . . . and the first gleam of what women, working together, might accomplish, came to me. It was written as a prayer for the day. I called it *A Collect for Club Women* because I felt that club women working together with wide interests for large ends were a new thing under the sun and that perhaps they had need for the special petitions and meditation of this aim."

This must be true, for the collect has found its way round the world, wherever women, especially English-speaking women, get together.

Miss Stewart was a very public-spirited woman. She helped organize the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs and was an enthusiastic supporter of women's suffrage. As well as being an educator (doing junior guidance work and placement work in its

pioneer days) she was a writer of some success. She contributed to newspapers and magazines and produced a volume impressively titled *Metric Translations From the Latin Lyrics of Poet Catullus*. In 1921 she became assistant director general of the U. S. Employment Service and from 1928 until a year before her death in 1943 was assistant director of education in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In 1927 she was honoured by her alma mater, the University of Colorado, which conferred a degree in recognition of her work in education, social and civic service.

All the early copies of the collect were signed Mary Stuart, a spelling used as a pen name which led to some error in credit of authorship. The composition has even been accredited to Mary, Queen of Scots, who was also Mary Stuart!

A few slight deviations from the original text were bound to creep in with so many groups using it. When the title was *A Collect for Club Women*, some organizations used the wording "The great woman's heart common to us all," substituting "woman's" for "human." Miss Stewart herself acknowledged the substitution, commenting that "groups may decide for themselves which form they like." She preferred the latter, explaining, "While one of the ways we still work most effectively is in women's groups, we work for ends that concern men and women alike, and our greatest need, as our greatest strength, is to think and act in terms that are human."

One mistake she deplored was the substitution of "as one" for "at one" in the text. "At one," she explained, "is a fine old English idiom with rich connotation. To be 'at one' in aim and in spirit is not necessarily to be 'as one.' In fact, we may have one common purpose, fix our vision on one high, far goal and yet move toward it from many directions, richer for their diversity and ennobled for the tolerance which they demand."

Before her death in 1943 she released her own version and comments through the General Federation of Women's Clubs in the United States.

Institute members everywhere have reason to be grateful for the author who found words for their deepest thoughts. It might have been yesterday, instead of almost a decade ago that she wrote to those who had adopted her prayer, "Indeed, we have need to grow calm, serene and gentle, if in these dire days our judgments would be generous."

## MARY STEWART COLLECT

Keep us O Lord from pettiness; let us be large in thought, in word and deed; Let us be done with fault finding and leave off self seeking; May we put away all pretence and meet each other face to face, without self pity and without prejudice; May we never be hasty in judgment and always generous; Teach us to put into action our better impulses straightforward and unafraid; Let us take time for all things; make us grow calm, serene, gentle; Grant that we may realize that it is the little things that create differences; that in the big things of life we are one And may we strive to touch and know the great human heart common to us all, and O Lord God let us not forget to be kind.