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EDITORIAL

March, 1918

The Mobilization of Canadian Women

By NELLIE L. McCLUNG



HERE is enough sentiment in Canada, at this present hour of writing to do anything that should be done! Everyone wants to win the war—everyone wants to increase production—everyone wants to have the home matters well looked after so that the men who come back will not be disappointed when they look around and see the sort of people and the institutions that they were fighting for. Everyone desires these things but there is a difference in degree! There are "some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold!"

But these desires, good as they are, will never win the war, or help conditions very much at home, so long as they are vague, diffuse and vapid. They have to be crystallized into action.

Let me illustrate. It is always discreet to draw illustrations from far-away places, and if possible from some better!

A woman in Pennsylvania, a widow with several small children, found her health failing through tubercular trouble, and appealed to Congress at Washington for help and advice. She said she had been able to manage her affairs, and keep her children together, but now she could not see her way ahead unless some assistance be given to her.

In reply to this she received a kind letter "regretting that there was no machinery to deal with such a case." The same session of Congress made a grant of several thousand dollars, for the purpose of combatting diseases among hogs, and the Philadelphia North American, which made editorial comment on this incident, drew this moral from it, "Be a hog, and worth saving!"

Now, of course, we all know there was plenty of sentiment, to help this woman, but lacking machinery, the sentiment did not do her any good.

I thought of this story to-day, when I got a letter from a certain section of our own Province, telling me heart-breaking stories of the way that some of the women are neglected at the time of childbirth, on account of the indifference of the men, as to the need of medical skill. The letter said that in one instance, the woman was in labor for three days, in the presence of her children, and with no assistance, but what they could give her, while the husband went on with the haying. Of course, you never can tell when it may rain, and besides, she had always pulled through all right, and there's no use wasting money on doctors.

At last, the doctor was sent for—and he arrived in time to pronounce it blood-poisoning. The child had been dead for hours. The woman had a very successful funeral. Everyone was sorry, and the bereaved husband said he would just as "soon have lost his best horse."

The doctor reported the case, and the man was tried before a local J.P., who fined him a trifling sum.

There were other stories, in this letter, of a similar nature and the writer of it closed with these words, "I wonder if you could do something, by putting this matter before some of the woman's organizations, and stir up some sentiment."

I KNEW it was not sentiment that was needed. We have sentiment enough to care for every woman and child in Canada. What we are short of is machinery.

Now, if it had been a cow, or a dog, it would have been easy. We all belong to the Humane Society. Indeed we do, and a short time ago we entered suit against a whole railway system for leaving cattle without water for forty-eight hours, and won it too! It isn't that there is more sentiment in favor of fair dealing for cows. There isn't. But the machinery works better. When I read this letter, I began to wish harder than ever that we had some way of gathering up all the perfectly good kind wishes and good feeling which exists in the hearts of our people, and make it all effective, so we could turn it on, like electricity to lighten the dark places, and cheer the lonely with its warmth and radiance, driving out ignorance, selfishness, greed and injustice.

This is what we used to say that woman suffrage would do, and what we still hope it will do. We worked so long for the vote that when it came, we felt that all good things would be added unto us. But now we know that all good things must be worked for. They only come that way.

And because some may have forgotten that there are serious problems here at home which vitally affect women I am going to set down some of them, and let us all remember as we read that we are law-makers now, and if things are not right, we are to blame. Listen!

The soldier in the trench has a better chance for his life than the child in the cradle. In one district, here in Alberta, children under one year died at the rate of four hundred in the thousand and we are the guardians of the race!

Crime among children has increased enormously since the war, and so far as I know, no serious efforts are being made to combat this.

There are about nine hundred vacancies in the schools of Alberta, because of the large enlistment of the men—and the inability to get women to take their places. There will be thousands of untaught children in this year of grace, 1918, unless something happens!

Canadian Women's War League

DO you want to be one of the Charter Members of the Canadian Women's War League? Do you want to have a voice in the affairs of the nation? The time to join is NOW! Read the Call to Arms on page 29. It is meant for YOU!

—THE EDITORS.

Tuberculosis causes one-third of all the deaths in Canada, and tuberculosis is a preventable disease!

The death rate is now so much higher than the birth rate, in all the warring countries, that the cry of race-suicide is becoming a serious one. In Germany there are societies to encourage reproduction, and their tenets are revolting and nauseating, to all self-respecting people. Even in our own country, there are those who hint at polygamy, in the times of reconstruction, and it is well for us to guard the sanctity of marriage, in these strange days, when there is so much twisting of the moral fabric.

The treatment of venereal diseases is touched. Public sentiment has not been sufficiently roused, but there are a few startling facts which we may well ponder. Smallpox patients are isolated and treated, but people suffering from this disease go abroad, scattering it at will. Once in a while, a place is raided, and the women fined or maybe sent to jail for a term, coming back more determined than ever to get even. The imposing of a fine, which merely supplies an added motive for making money, does not help the situation; neither are the penitentiaries places of reformation!

THESE are some of the problems which must be solved, if we are to be a clean and a righteous people, and women must think them out.

There are potential qualities for organization, for service, for unity, and for heroism in women that the average man does not yet realize. "I did not know that such women existed," cried Mr. Asquith, when speaking of the death of Edith Cavell. I have often wondered how his female relatives liked the implication! Women's work has been taken for granted—something that is always thrown in—like the paper and string!

Men have tried their best, to do all the big things in life, and their intentions in this have been of the kindest. We will not say all we might about the result! Like Mr. Asquith they have not known what we could do!

Nearly two years ago, in an enthusiastic meeting in Edmonton, the women of that city asked the Government at Ottawa to register all women in Canada, for national service, thereby obeying the women's natural desire for help. The Government ignored their request, then the women should have done what the Chicago women have done—gone ahead and registered themselves. One hundred thousand Chicago women, many

of them of foreign birth, have put their names on the dotted line, to indicate that they will do whatever they are asked to do, for their country. Already they have filled many gaps, which the draft has caused. The colored women of Chicago, have been trained in garage work, and now in large numbers are replacing the mechanics, women sold liberty bonds, women visit the schools and instruct the children in patriotism. There are women street car conductors in Washington, women postal carriers in New York.

We are not behind the women of any country in our energy, our ambition, our desire to help. But even now in this weary forty-second month of the war, there are many women wondering instead of working, and the conviction is heavily laid upon us that something clear, concise, and definite has to be done, something that will lay before woman a definite programme.

To this end, it would appear that the first step is the registration of all the women who have the desire to help. Let us see how many qualified teachers we have, not engaged in teaching, and then see if they cannot be induced, for love of country, to go and teach, as men for love of country have gone to fight. Knitting, which might better be done by machinery, is not the highest form of service, and the women will respond, nobly, generously, and heroically when it is put up to them. There are women in our cities, who would work on farms, inside, or out, to help to increase production, if a chance were given to them. Each woman who registers might well be given a button, or a badge to show that she has offered her services, and enrolled herself in Canada's last line of defence.

The registration might well be conducted by the Woman's Institutes. They are a provincial body, with corresponding societies, differing only in name in all the provinces. The other farm women's associations would co-operate with them for they are officered by big-hearted women who know no jealousies, or place-seeking.

The woman's institute is a society which touches both country and city and their members know the conditions of life in the agricultural district. This registration will band together for active service the greatest organization of woman that Canada has ever seen, for the basis of membership will be willingness to serve. In the cities, every woman's organization should co-operate. They should further the organization through the individual societies and amalgamate for every general meeting.

NOT only are the women's hands needed for their country, but their brains are needed too; and an educational committee could be selected from their membership in each province to prepare and disseminate, with the co-operation of the newspapers and cities, and country papers, articles dealing with the problems of the day, and matters of public information. Already one of the women, who is behind this plan, has pointed out that if the housewife would order all her groceries for the week, at one time, it would reduce the price ten per cent., for instead of each grocery having to keep a horse and man, at a cost of at least \$100 a month, one delivery wagon could as well serve several groceries, thus liberating men and horses for productive work.

There could also be a legislative committee in each province who would receive and consider suggestions for changes in the laws, and present to the sessions of the legislature well thought out and reasonable legislation which would bear upon our legislators with the impact of public opinion.

Governments cannot go far ahead of the people, and such an organization as this would stimulate public opinion to the point of government action.

We owe it to our men, abroad, and returned, and to those who will not return, that we do our best for our country in this hour of our great need. We cannot let children go untaught; we cannot let other women be overworked, or uncared for in their times of illness; we cannot allow land to remain fallow, if we have the power to bring about its cultivation. Our allies are depending on us!

The Great War Veterans' Association, which is a Dominion wide organization, is doing its best to solve the heavy problems of land settlement. We must keep pace with our men, and be able to help them, when the time comes. We have the desire, the willingness, the intention. Now what we need is the machinery.

Our country's business requires haste. There is a time limit. The time is now. Next year may be too late!