

What Loving Hands Are Doing

The Spirit of Women who are Working for Our Heroes Overseas
Through the Women's Institutes—Illustrated by a Talk
with Mrs. Kitchen of the St. George Branch

By LAURA E. NIXON

Editor's Note.—Of course you have a Mrs. Kitchen, or some one like her, leading in the good work in your community. If not, you will undoubtedly want to look around and get such a person busy taking the leading part.

The St. George Institute, and its work, as portrayed in the following personal interview, is but representative of similar work going on in hundreds and hundreds of other small centres, everywhere throughout Canada.



A SLIGHT little lady in black, with white hair, a kindly gleam in her eye, and a world of energy rose from a low chair beside the shaded lamp and came forward to meet us. We had passed up the gravel drive redolent with the scent of orange blossoms and the little figure that welcomed us seemed a component part of such a setting.

"Mrs. Kitchen?" we asked. Yes, she was Mrs. Kitchen, and she let her busy fingers rest for an instant from the knitting of a trench cap.

"Knitting, knitting," we remarked—"always knitting?" We had heard naturally, of Mrs. Kitchen long before we determined to call on her.

"Do you know," she replied, "I do believe I could knit in my sleep. The boys must have their caps, you know, so I'm looking ahead to the winter. Last year, one of the boys wrote that he was sure his 'hair would have froze' if we had not sent him a trench cap."

Mrs. Kitchen is typical of many a Canadian patriot. She lives at St. George, Ontario—we hadn't told you that before. She is the dominant force in its local Women's Institute, and, consequently, in the Red Cross work of the village. She is as whole-souled as she is active, and there is a kindly spirit, a sort of warmth about her that endears her to you the moment you meet her. And when she begins to tell you of the work of the Women's Institutes, especially that at St. George, she makes you forget that your train is due at 8.50, in fact that time has any significance.

WHERE THE MONEY COMES FROM

"TELL us all about the work you women of the Institute here are doing," we urged. "We heard you tell something of it at a canning demonstration recently and it gripped us so, we are just dying to hear more. We want to know, for instance, where you get the money to do all the buying you are doing, and where you do the buying to the best advantage, and—oh, everything."

Over her countenance a smile spread that developed into a chuckle. We knew she would rather talk about this work for "her boys" at the front than anything else in the world. She has no boys of her very own, but her mother heart is great enough to take in every boy who has gone to the front from that community. Indeed, her love for them is all-embracing.

She adjusted the trench cap to a new angle and began.

"First, there is the financing of the work—an all important point, I can assure you.

"Up to last March we raised the money in any way we could. We just had to have a hundred dollars every month and we managed to dig it out from somewhere, though it was hard digging.

"We tried a Red Cross Tea Room for a while and sold home-made baking as well as ice cream. But it was hard work and it all fell on a few of us and the rent for the rooms made a big hole in the money we took in.

"We did get quite a lot of knitting done for we had a sock started for every table and everybody who came in knitted while waiting to be served, even the waitresses helping when they had time. Then in the winter we had the usual round of bazaars and sales and managed to get along not too badly.

"Our lucky turn came in March. The men of the village decided to do Patriotic League work. They aimed to raise \$10,000.00 by subscription. They said we could have half if we would promise not to raise money by any

other means, and they would pay us at the rate of \$150.00 a month. You can guess how we jumped at the offer! "Will you believe it! Over \$11,000.00 was raised by our little village and the community around."

PARCELS FOR THE BOYS

"WE had a good time all spring with our \$150.00 a month. We bought flannelette galore, wool for socks, materials for comfort bags and small kit bags and all sorts of things to go in them.

"By August the Winter began to loom up ahead. We knew we must lay in a good stock of supplies. It took nerve to request an extra \$500.00, but we asked for it and we got it too.

"Every month a parcel goes to every boy who has enlisted from our community. Many of our soldiers are English, Irish and Scotch boys who were working on farms around here when they enlisted. But we treat them just the same as the boys who ran around our town when they wore rompers. The same rations govern all—three pounds each month to those who are in England and four pounds to the boys in France.

"We try to make the boxes different each month. There is always a pair of socks in each and the other articles may be candles, shoe laces, handkerchiefs, the condensed coffee that is made in St. George and which tastes particularly good to the boys because it was made in 'Our Town,' peanut butter, maple butter, note paper, home-made jelly—anything and every-

thing that loving hearts can think of and loving hands can pack that the boys might like.

"For two years now we have packed about sixty boxes each month. Last month there were fifty-six. At Christmas time we send an 'extra-special' box carrying a delicious home-made fruit cake to each boy as well as a pair of socks and many other things.

"But that isn't all we have done. Well, I guess not! For two years besides the boxes to 'Our Boys' we have sent from two to five cartons every month to the Red Cross Headquarters—hospital shirts, convalescent robes, socks and bandages go every month. To the Field Comforts we send comfort bags and small kit-bags containing soap, tooth brush safety razor, shaving soap, brushes, etc."

"Where do you buy all your supplies?" we asked as milady stops for breath. We went through a hasty calculation. To make 140 pyjama suits each month takes a lot of flannelette and 100 pairs of socks each month calls for a good lot of wool. One needs to buy wisely to make the money go as far as possible and get the very best materials that can be purchased.

"We buy our materials from the wholesale houses from samples that our local merchant shows us. Sometimes we get them from one wholesale house and sometimes from another—just wherever I can get the best results for the least money. Sometimes our stock of flannelette runs out before anyone realizes that it is so low and a raid is made on the three mer-

chants of the town. We take every last yard of flannelette from their shelves to appease the hungry scissors of the 'cutters-out.'

WHAT TWENTY-FIVE CAN DO

"YOU will think it must keep a great many workers busy to send all this stock of supplies out every month, but let me tell you that twenty-five women do it in the little spare time they have. That is, the bulk of the work is done by twenty-five, although there are about twenty others who are knitting a little and help once in a while in other ways.

"These twenty-five faithful ones meet every month and cut out the pyjamas and the convalescent robes. You should just see how we piece and piece to make the material go as far as possible. Often we cut up 1,100 yards of flannelette in one afternoon and do some other work as well.

The material for the convalescent robes makes the money disappear. It is heavy grey material costing sixty cents a yard. The buttons and domes cost a lot too, even though we buy them in large quantities. The tape, also, is a formidable article when it comes in huge bundles of a thousand yards each.

"Now here's a convalescent robe I just finished to-night," continued Mrs. Kitchen, as she displayed the garment. "Doesn't it look nice? But it was a heavy old thing to work on and there's such a lot of sewing on it. There is some satisfaction, though, when one is finished. Perhaps a cord would look a little nicer around the waist than this belt of the same material, but it would cost more money and the belt with its big white button does just as good service. A tie to finish it off at the neck might please a sick man, but if he wants it he'll just have to supply it himself, for I think this collar looks pretty good without one.

PACKING DAY FUN

"PACKING day is the most fun of all. We used to rent two rooms in the early days, and kept all the supplies, boxes, etc., there, and when packing day came just went there and packed. We needed the money so badly for other things that we decided it was a crime to let it go for rent so now we keep the supplies in the homes on this street and go to the assembly room across the street there to do the packing.

"First we pack the individual boxes for the boys. The women sit along the sides of the long tables, the boxes are passed along and each one puts in the article that she has in charge. They work quickly and they talk just as fast!

WAR TALK TABOOED

"THERE is, however, one subject about which they do not talk—the war. No gloomy forebodings are allowed. No doleful tale of deaths or shocking injuries of this one or that one in the firing line? No repeating of heart-breaking stories seen in the morning papers!

"There are plenty of happy things to talk about.

"Some societies do not allow any talking on packing day. But the St. George ladies can work just as well and even faster when they are talking and it's lots more fun. In the midst of all this babble and laughter, I have only to say 'Just a minute, ladies,' and you can hear a pin drop, while I make some announcement or explain some little detail relative to the work.

"Just as soon as I see a little group getting behind because of too much talking I say 'No more talking over there until you catch up,' and they go to work 'double-quick.'

"Our corrugated pasteboard cartons to go to Red Cross Headquarters we get from the Hydro Electric Company in the city. Two or three of the good men of the village come in and cord them after we have them packed and the Express Company carries them free of charge!

"LICKING" STAMPS AND LABELS

"OF course the boxes for the Boys do not go free of charge. They have to have postage stamps and declarations on (CONTINUED ON PAGE 40)

Helping One Another Through The Women's Institutes

A MESSAGE FROM NELLIE McCLUNG

THE Woman's Institute enjoys an unique position, in that it is composed of city women and country women, women of all creeds, beliefs, attainments, and ambitions who are banded together, not to promote any particular belief, or object other than mutual helpfulness. Mutual helpfulness is the exact meaning of national service. When we help our country we help each other, and we help ourselves. The basic principle of national service is co-operation, submitting our own will and wishes to the general good, and that carries with it the idea of sacrifice.

All this goes hard with people who have been trained as we have been. We have been boastful of our independence; our own wishes have been our guide in the matters of conduct, in the days of peace. But now, when we must go forward in our full strength to meet the enemy at our gates, it becomes necessary for us to resolve ourselves into as powerful a machine as possible.

WHY GERMANY PERSISTS

IN a perfect machine each part must work in unison. When one part begins to display "ways of its own," there is serious trouble. That is why Germany has been able to stand off the world for three years—because the German nation has resolved itself into one great machine.

What they have been compelled to do by their powerful military

autocracy we can be persuaded to do. Our love of country should be more of a compelling force than fear of authority.

It simplifies matters for those of us who are anxious to serve our country, if we think of the soldier's sacrifice as the basis of comparison, and keep that thought in mind, when trying to decide what we should do. That will leave still a wide margin between us and actual hardship,—and will help us not to feel sorry for ourselves. The soldier gives up all, even to his life,—to serve his country, and engages in work which is hard, dangerous and distasteful. So, if we keep this in mind, it may help us to overcome our natural aversion to discomfort.

DISTRIBUTE ENERGIES

EACH person has a certain amount of energy, capable of being actually measured, and it seems reasonable to say that if it is spent in one way, it cannot be in another. Therefore, the time has come when we must each take an inventory of what energy we have, and see if we can re-distribute it in a way that will be of greater benefit to our country:—Energy spent in worry, self pity, unkind remarks, and gossiping is lost to the country. Energy spent in lying awake nights because of unkind and uncharitable remarks is lost to our common cause. Inexpert workers waste a great deal of energy.

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