



THE third annual conference of the National Council of Women of Canada was held in Montreal during the week beginning the 11th of May.

That it was a conference exceptionally successful in work and results, and that the uplifting influence of it, not merely upon the status of Canadian womanhood, but upon Canadian national life at large, may not be measured,—none who had the privilege of being present will gainsay.

To those who have watched the growth of the movement from its inception, three years ago, to the present time; who have seen something of the struggles it has undergone—in misconception without and friction within—the recent Montreal conference revealed one clear fact,—that the testing time has passed, that the way of the National Council is henceforth assured, and that, whatever changes in the personnel or conduct of the Council may come, the organisation will endure.

More than this,—year by year, by internal development, larger outreaching, and broadening ideals, it will increase in vigour until it becomes one of the most potent influences in the national development of our country.

* * *

It would be impossible, within the confines of this department, to attempt any detailed report of the proceedings and the work accomplished at the recent conference. The official business transacted for the further perfecting of the organisation was in itself worthy of record; while the papers read and debated should have full public reproduction, that they might be read by not merely every Canadian woman, but every man also.

We hope that during each month of the ensuing year this department of the CANADIAN HOME JOURNAL, which will henceforth be under the complete control of the National Council, may find space for reproduction of many of the papers.

A feature of these papers or addresses was the amount of knowledge shown by the writer or speaker. Whether on the question of 'Woman Immigration,' of 'Associated Charities,' of 'Medical Aid in the Northwest,' of 'Manual Training,' of 'The Establishment of Public Baths,' of 'Women in Athletics,'—of many other topics demanding investigation and technical knowledge of the subjects,—the speakers might almost be considered specialists, each having given time and study to her special subject for many years. Time was, when we allotted such discussions to men alone, yet who should know and grasp these things which so closely affect womanhood and the home life better than the keepers of the home?

* * *

The conduct of the conference throughout bore some remarkable features to those who

have hitherto considered such gatherings the special province of men:—in the knowledge of official procedure and the conduct of business according to the recognised rules that govern public assemblies; in the absence of undue sentiment, and the marked prevalence of practicalities; and yet again in the strong current of earnestness that underlay the discussion of topics touching closely upon the purity, protection, and holier keeping of womanhood and childhood.

There were seasons during those busy sessional days when official business was discussed in matter-of-fact manner, yet with admirable skill. There were hours when lighter mood prevailed, and by reason of some happy topical discussion the laughter came. And there were times when the electric current of a passionate earnestness solemnised that gathering of representative women—flushing them not into sentimentality, but into a renewal of solemn purpose.

* * *

To say that this or any conference of women is educative is to say a little thing. Every conference worthy of the name must be this,—'bearing' thought 'together' and then carrying it out into the world. But the National Council of Women is educating not only its members, but the great outside public, who year by year are coming to better understand its purpose and work.

This is made palpable by the requests from outside organisations forwarded to the secretary during the past year and read by her at the recent conference: From the Dominion Trades and Labour Council expressing sympathy and appointing a delegate to attend the conference; from the Prison Reform Association asking for sympathy; from the promoters of the scheme of Consumptive Sanatoriums requesting support, and from the Historic Exhibition Committee, with like petition.

Such letters and petitions show that the outside world is beginning to realise the power of the National Council not merely in influence, but in investigation and in securing practical results.

For we must always remember,—and because of misunderstandings of the purpose of the Council that still exist, we cannot repeat it too often,—that the National Council of Women is not a propaganda, but rather an affiliation of all helpful propagandas,—a council representative of Canadian women's societies; an organisation of organisations, with its representative Executive and its annual parliament which is equally representative.

* * *

What a power lies in that word 'representative.'

The realisation of it came as we sat day by day in the recent conference. Each one

of these women spoke not for herself, but for a body of women, who, down by the Atlantic, out on the prairies, in the busy central cities, or beyond the great Rockies, were working together to uplift humanity,—by education, by benevolence, by culture, mental or physical, or by gentle ministrations.

Each paper read was the thought of many women, each voice that spake, that voted its 'nay' or 'aye,' was the voice of many women; and in this assemblage of delegates rang the sentiment and thought of a large proportion of Canadian womanhood from ocean to ocean.

A conference of organisations of like purpose is good; but such a conference as this is infinitely better in its stimulating friction and consequent broadening.

It is given unto the human mind, especially the mind of the social reformer, to believe that his or her shibboleth is the only correct and effectual password into the higher life. We narrow down even in our upliftings.

But in such a gathering as this National Council we are brought to see that truth is prismatic, flashing in many colours, yet always producing light.

The gentle little lady who has devoted herself to the labour problem, and who believes that in the solution of this alone lies the race regeneration, meets one who has worked heart and soul to securing woman's suffrage under like belief. The lovely lady of charities meets the earnest champion of prohibition; the young woman doctor, who is assured that the regeneration of the race depends upon its diet, comes in touch with one who believes that only the dissemination of good literature can accomplish this, or another who has devoted all her powers to educating the people by art or music; while the homekeeper and the King's Daughter move among all these,—each holding the thought that their way is the first and most effective for human uplifting—but discovering that it is not the only way.

Canadian women needed this Council, and, because it is a need which every year makes more clearly recognisable, it shall endure.

* * *

One of the revelations of the Council—and not the least—was the number of really clever, bright and sensible women who attended and took part in the discussions.

As the week advanced, and the representative members began to lose their first restraint and feel more at home, the discussions increased markedly in interest; not only was the knowledge shown about various topics remarkable, but the common sense, the practical view, the dispassion and moderation, together with the bright business tone prevalent, gave those who hearkened an enlarged conception of the ability of Canadian women.

When one considers that, as a whole, our women have not been accustomed to taking part in public gatherings, this is the more remarkable. And while there is no doubt that much of the success of this conference,—as of all the work of the National Council,—is due to the skilful, broad, yet gentle guidance of its president, the Countess of Aberdeen, and the executive work of its indefatigable secretary, Mrs. Willoughby Cumming;—yet there remains the acknowledgment that these ladies were but guiding a wonderfully bright gathering of women; many of whom were hardly aware of their own power in this direction.

Canadian women, in the years to come, will reach a higher and more solid standing than that of their American sisters, in organised work; since, when the intolerance