

Rural Clubs for Boys and Girls

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Irene Parlbly, President of the United Farm Women of Alberta

A short time ago I read in a Winnipeg farm journal a little editorial headed, "Why Another Organization?" In that editorial the writer very gently and kindly rebuked various associations for duplicating work by each trying to develop junior branches of their organizations instead of getting behind their various provincial governments and backing their agricultural club movement.

If I could take the writer for a little tour through some of the Western rural districts, if she could see the groups of 'teen age boys lounging their time away in miserable little village pool rooms or "Chink" restaurants, if she could catch a few sentences of the kind of conversation that prevails in those places, perhaps that would be all that would be necessary to convince her that something more than even Government Pig and Calf Clubs were necessary for the development of our future rural citizens.

Again, the writer of that editorial takes issue with the idea of trying "to keep the children in the fold, as it were, so that being trained in the ways of the parent society when they are young, they will not depart from them when grown."

Speaking for the only organization for which I am at all qualified to speak—the organized Farm Women's Association—I should like to point out that this does not convey at all the fullness of our thought with regard to the junior branches we are trying to build.

In the first place, those who have the greatest sympathy and understanding of the farmers' movement do not look upon it merely as a movement which will benefit one class. The ideals of the organized farmers are the ideals of democracy the world over. Economic justice, work and opportunity for all, a square deal for humanity and special privileges for none, clean government, a keen sense of the responsibilities as well as the rights of citizenship—these

things are surely no class creed, but a working forward to that Christianizing of our social order towards which all thoughtful people are looking.

And for the purpose of inculcating these great principles, best learned in youth, the farm women's organizations formed their junior branches. In those junior branches they look to develop leaders in those principles among the growing boys and girls which will be of inestimable value to the future of the country. Are these principles taught in the government controlled club movement? Perhaps they are. I do not know. But are we not running into almost too much paternalism in our governments? Should we not develop a stronger type of people by encouraging them to have the initiative to develop their own organizations? Continual leaning on the government and the public treasury is not the best way to push the grabbing hand and the patronage system out of existence. It is not only in government offices that the patronage system exists, and government controlled organizations give the politicians a wonderful lever should they wish to use it for their own ends.

Agricultural boys' and girls' clubs will doubtless help to impart the knowledge of scientific stock feeding and development, and so help to better farm conditions, but we are not so sanguine that they will develop a higher type of Canadian citizenship, and some of us are more concerned with developing this last than in developing the stock industry. We would not, of course, dare to make this statement before any of our honorable Ministers of Agriculture.

Only the other day it was announced in Alberta that the Hon. Duncan Marshall was going to spend \$35,000 for the purchase of two stallions for the province, and the press gave him big headlines and much publicity for his generosity. In another little column it

was announced that the same government was going to allow \$25,000 for mothers' allowances. Something distorted about the two sets of figures, isn't there? But, then, the horse industry is of such importance to Alberta, is it not? We can always get immigrants to fill up the land, and a nice, little bonus of so much a head will bring all we need, so why worry about the widows and orphans in their affliction.

Self Help

Somebody once wrote a book on "Self Help." I think we should have a new, up-to-date book on the same subject for the benefit of the Canadian people. Of course, we are working towards different degrees of State Socialism and we may arrive at the time when our paternal government will tell us when to get up, and when to go to bed, what we may eat, and where withal we may be clothed. What effect all this is going to have on the individual I sometimes wonder. The strongest, stoutest, most finely developed trees are those that from the days when the seed first sprouted from the soil have stood alone, without props or shelter, because the winds of Heaven battered them from every quarter; they sent down roots strong and true to hold them firmly in their place. On their own strength they relied to meet whatever tempest beat about them. The same principle has developed most of the world's finest men and women. The same principle develops the finest organizations. Effort is what develops men and women; self help is the tonic we all need.

Personally, I do not think any people who are bottle-fed from the government treasuries can ever develop a clean, sturdy citizenship, free from the taint of the patronage system, and unclean politics. So long as we keep on taking favors from a government, so long shall we hear the common remark from political workers before election time, "Of course, you could not think of voting against a government that has been so good to you!" And probably you

wouldn't though in your heart you realized they were rotten to the core!

The Average Rural Community

Some of the editors of our farm papers have lived many years in cities, and have perhaps lost touch a trifle with the real rural life. They do not any longer seem to see a vivid picture in their mind's eye of an average little prairie community, the drabness, the crudeness, the lack of romance about it all—that picturesque romance which breathes from every cottage and hedgerow of the old European countries. Think of a little English village nestling among its centuries-old trees, the village green, the winding village street, with its vine-covered cottages, and their little front gardens gay with flowering things, and contrast it with one of our prairie villages; The ugliest building man can perpetrate, wanting in paint, adorned with weeds, in cans, ash heaps, treeless, flowerless, devoid of any beauty, or any pride. Instead of a village green, where on summer evenings gather the boys and young men of the neighborhood for games of cricket, we have the ubiquitous pool room for sole recreation of the prairie boys.

Whose business is it to provide an alternative to this? We have abolished the bar, let us hope forever. Some talk of abolishing the pool room. But abolishing the bar has not abolished drinking by any means. The Attorney-General for Alberta is responsible for the statement that 60 per cent of the men of Alberta are breaking the liquor laws. Not a very good advertisement for Alberta men by the way. Abolishing pool rooms will not help prairie boys very much if we do not put something else in their place. And here again, is where organization comes in, and more especially the farmers' organizations and the farm women's organizations; they beyond anyone know the needs of their own boys and girls. If in their homes they cannot provide the recreation required, let them organize their community for recreation, let them build their own community hall, and have pool there under proper conditions.

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