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Canadian Women's Societies

"The High Cost of Living"
 and the
Housewives' League

THE price of food is doubled by transportation, wholesaling and retailing; and it is therefore necessary to cut out these middlemen's profits as much as possible to reduce the cost of food to the consumer. To do this, by improving and establishing markets in the larger cities has been the first aim of all the Housewives' and Consumers' Leagues. They work in connection with the Farmers' Associations which fully appreciate their purpose.

The Toronto Housewives' League, under the presidency of Mrs. F. S. Mearns, is going to establish more markets, for the St. Lawrence market, the only one so far, is right down town, and inaccessible from the suburbs. Even the groceries, the retail shops, would not lose, but be benefitted, Mrs. Mearns holds, by having markets near by, for the farmers coming in to market could shop there instead of going down town. These markets, desired by all ratepayers, are not yet achieved; petitions to the council are now being signed; in the mean time the St. Lawrence market has been kept in proper shape—even this matter requiring some insistence in the Council.

Besides this, the larger aims of the League have been maintained: efficient housekeeping, food of good quality; clean shops; early shopping; supervision of weights and measures. The League asks: As shopkeepers say delivering goods adds 15% to their cost, are buyers carrying their parcels, not entitled to a reduction? Another capital suggestion is: that shoppers should order once or twice a week, for this is a benefit to the shop-keepers as well as to the grocer whose cost of delivering is thereby lessened.

The report on the work of the Montreal Housewives' League, contributed by Mrs. R. W. Ashcroft, shows what women organized in a society can achieve. No one can withstand their influence. Mrs. Ashcroft says:

"The aims and objects of the Housewives' League in Montreal, since its organization 10 months ago, have been along the lines of educating women in practical ways as to the best methods to use in order to ensure pure food, honest weight, sanitary shops and markets, meats endorsed by the Government stamp, and better milk. There are about 500 members interested in these matters, and the response they meet with from dealers, shows how true it is that the latter realize that they must look to women as purchasers of the household supplies, and that to satisfy them means to secure their custom."

"The gentle yet persistent movement toward having grocers cover all perishable goods, such as candy, figs, dates, cakes and cheese, is having its reward; the dealers welcome rather than discourage, the visits of these self-appointed inspectors, and the grocer who wins the right to display the Housewives' League card of recommendation, always puts it in a prominent place. The question of improving the milk supply, and instructing mothers how to care for milk, thus lessening the high rate of infant mortality, is an important branch of the work."

"So far as attempting to control the high cost of living in Montreal, the main effort of the Housewives' League is the weekly publication in the press of market reports covering meats, fish, poultry, game, butter and eggs. These weekly bulletins are now consulted by hundreds of women each Thursday morning and evening, and dealers are beginning to reach for the "blind" advertising which the Housewives' League gives to the right article at the right place."

Progressive Edmonton

When The Consumers' League was organized at a meeting held May the 8th, 1914—writes the President, Mrs. A. N. Mout—

"So many avenues of work opened up before us that we felt we could not undertake all at the outset, we decided that our first efforts should be directed to the improving of the Market. With this end in view committees visited the market at

all hours and every day, studying conditions, taking notes and also comparing quality and prices as they obtained at the market and in the stores. This data was brought to our meetings and discussed.

"We learned that we as householders are responsible for most of the high cost of living. The cost of delivering goods in Edmonton is very high and if we ordered groceries only once a week this cost would be minimized. Then the grocer now handles all his goods in cartons, bags and packages which of course materially adds to the cost. I will not believe that we as householders are responsible for this. Probably the wholesaler and retailer find their stocks more easily handled when so put up and no doubt it is more convenient for the consumer as well but I feel sure the change did not originate with the householder. We were also told that currants and raisins are put up in 10, 12, and 16 oz. packages so that the grocer instead of charging 15c straight as he might have to do for larger ones might sell the smaller one two for a quarter, and mark you, while there is a difference in weight there is little if any difference in the size of the package. Besides this, different grades of these and other articles are put up in packages so much alike as to be most misleading. It is our hope that we shall soon some day be able to undertake educative meetings along these lines so that we shall all know what we are buying and what the cost should be.

"In June the Edmonton City Dairy invited the executive to be their guests at their plant. We spent two hours there and we found the most modern and sanitary methods, for the handling of milk, cream, butter, cheese and ice cream were used. After partaking of their toothsome ice-cream we were shown their method of candling and grading eggs. We learned that each days' evaporation shows on an egg and that eggs fresh from the nests were much heavier than those even a few days old. We would therefore like to see eggs sold by the pound in Edmonton, as we could in this way better judge their freshness.

"I think to the Central Market should be given the credit of the enormous reduction in the price of meat. On special days T bone and sirloin steaks and roasts are sold for 16c a pound; brisket at 8c and all other cuts equally low. I visited the South Side Market last Saturday, and found very choice cuts exceedingly low. We are hoping for great reductions in prices in the new Market. I may add that these prices are much below the prices published in Winnipeg.

"We welcome the opening of as many markets as possible as competition is the life of trade, and in this way we hope to get cheaper produce. We patronize all but ally ourselves with none. Then we are free to criticize and offer suggestions to all. We are making a strong appeal for members as we feel that in numbers there is strength; if we had 1,000 members almost anything we asked for we could have.

"We are lending our support to the establishment of a public abattoir where all animals sold in the city must be killed or brought in immediately after killing, to be inspected by a Government Inspector as we feel that only in this way can a proper inspection be made and until this is done we do not feel that we can recommend all the meat sold on the market.

"Among the many questions to be taken up and studied by the League are—Why in the midst of a dairy district our dairy products should cost as much as they do in London, England."

Of all the Womens' Societies which are accomplishing so much for the country, it is doubtful whether any will achieve more than these new Housewives' Leagues.

The Object of this Department

On this page every month will be noted the most noteworthy of the activities of Canadian women organized in various societies and clubs. While the Editor is in correspondence with the secretaries of the most active societies, any information or suggestion will be gladly received as the Editor wishes the Department to be of real service to the women and Women's Societies of Canada.



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