

Country Auxiliaries.

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A paper read at the annual meeting of the Winnipeg Presbyterian W. F. M. S.

When our President asked me to prepare a short paper on the benefits of meeting together in country auxiliaries, I consented for various reasons. (1st) Because it is so discouraging not to try to do what we can to help those who are expending their time and energies in trying to make these meetings a success; (2nd) Because it is long since I determined to try to do any duty which God in His wise providence placed upon me, although it might be with not very great satisfaction either to myself or others; and also because my effort might encourage some other inexperienced one to try, and consequently the burden of the work be borne by the many and not by the few already overworked ones.

That women in the country may be able to meet together once a month it is necessary that they overcome some difficulties, and this in itself is a benefit. Of course most of you know that for women in the country to meet together means not only an hour or two as it is with those in the city, but a whole afternoon. This is not a small item when there may be just one pair of hands to do the general housework, including the laundry work, baking, butter-making and sewing, for, it may be five or six of a family. This makes one endless round of toil for the noble woman who is heroically trying to do her part on the farm, and we do not wonder that until they are interested in our meetings they do not feel like taking time to go. If once interested they will *make* time, for "where there is a will there is a way." No doubt we have all experienced that with a definite object in view we can accomplish much more.

Of course it would cast a reflection on the propriety of attending even a religious meeting to leave the home in disorder and confusion; consequently for days before, the work is so planned and executed that when the day of the meeting has arrived, everything is in order and the happy house-wife has the benefit of knowing that she has overcome one difficulty and consequently is better prepared to meet the next one courageously, and that may be to cross three or four miles of prairie on foot. This is not an unusual one and surely nothing but the love of Christ, and zeal for His cause would enable any woman to persevere under this *difficulty from time to time*. I am afraid it would test some of us pretty well. To the credit of the farmer be it said, she rarely has to return on foot, for by the time he has taken one meal without her, almost unconsciously he is driving across the prairie to bring her home. Hence another benefit "Love lightens labor" and she enters her home glad and happy, not to rest for a while on a couch or in an easy chair, and to take up the endless round of work where she left it, but with a lighter heart for having been absent from it for a while and with so much to think about and talk about which breaks the monotony of the usually quiet country life.

With many in the country too they have the difficulty of preparing their lesson without many helps. When the subject is a Bible lesson this may not be a great misfortune, for we have to trust more to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and He is His own interpreter and He can make it plain. I might just mention an illustration of this. At one of our meetings in the country one of the ladies said she had turned to her Bible over and over to get a text bearing on the subject, but failed. She saw she was "leaning too much on her own understanding" so she took it to the Lord in prayer, and just as she was starting for the meeting she opened her Bible, when a most suitable text presented itself.

We think we are socially benefitted by meeting together in these country auxiliaries. Doubtless many of us have felt at times so depressed in spirits from various causes that nothing but a keen sense of duty would impel us to go, but the path of duty is always a safe one to walk in, and we have gone forward, relying on the promise that "I will perfect My strength in thy weakness." And have we not felt the cloud beginning to rise as the genial farmer meets us at the gate, to take our horse (if we have one) or to bid us welcome with a shake of the hand that he alone knows how to give. Still it rises as we meet the kindly greeting of his lady at the door, and by the time we have exchanged greetings with all present, the last vestige of the cloud is lifted and we are in a happier frame of mind for taking part in the lesson. Who has not experienced this and been reminded of the beautiful words of Cowper,

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercies and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Socially too we meet on one common level; whether dressed in satin or cotton (satins are scarce) we each feel we have a right to be there and we each take an interest in the other, and who has gone from one of these meetings feeling that she was not wanted there and was not the better for being there? I have not met one yet.

We are benefitted by the study of the lesson, whether it be a mission field or a Bible lesson. If the former, it recalls and refreshes in our minds people, places and things partially if not altogether forgotten, and gives us an insight into the social and religious standing of that field, of the advancement that has been made by the Gospel of Jesus being preached in it, of what the devoted missionaries have had to suffer in bearing the good news to it, and of the great change which nothing but the old, old story can make in enlightening these darkened places of the earth. If it be a Bible lesson, who has not been benefitted by the study of it? And if the lesson be only imperfectly studied at home, when we meet together and discuss it, each one taking some part, if nothing more than speaking a text bearing on it, that text may bring out some point which has not yet been discussed and which may have to be left for further study at home. As a result we get the most out of each lesson. And who can tell the benefit it may be, not only to ourselves but to those around us. These truths impressed on our minds may prove a blessing indeed, not only in health and prosperity, but also in times of adversity, sickness and death, for

"Tis religion that can give sweetest comfort while we live;
'Tis religion can supply truest comfort when we die."

The benefit of this Bible study is felt in the community by the absence of gossip and evil speaking of others, by the willingness of each to help the other in time of need, etc. It is also felt in the congregation. Those who prepare these lessons know something of the effort the minister has to put forth to prepare his sermon; consequently can more fully sympathize with him and appreciate what he says.

We are benefitted also by our failures in these meetings, and are encouraged to make stepping stones of them to better things. If we should each give up when we thought we had not done as well as we would like in taking part, our meetings would soon come to an end; and when we make mistakes or have caused another pain, we try not to do so again.

Being at one of these meetings in the country lately we were a little surprised when at the close of a very interesting meeting the President asked for a few short prayers, there were but two where I know we might expect five or six. In conversation with one of the usually quiet ones I asked if she knew the reason why, she said one was just waiting for another and thus lost the opportunity. For herself she said she scarcely slept that night for thinking of it. Another told me she regretted it too. If that President is here she may take courage. I trust she will not have that cause for discouragement again. Surely any of us can say a few words in prayer. God does not hear us for our finely finished sentences, but as we express the real desires of our hearts.

The invariable answer I got as I asked different ones what benefit these meetings had been to them, was that the study of the lessons had been a great benefit; the studying of subjects which otherwise they would not have studied; and they had been a great help in their Christian life. Doubtless there might be many other benefits mentioned, but my papers is, I think, sufficiently long.

Some may say why not contribute more largely if they receive so much benefit. Perhaps if those who would ask this question were to visit many of their homes and know of the sacrifices they make to give ever so little, they would be ready to say "She hath done what she could." We do not think the funds are the main object. The following extract from a little poem in the Canada Presbyterian might be suitably quoted—

Two cents a week and a prayer
'Twas the prayer perhaps, after all,
That the work was done and a blessing brought
The gift was so very small.

Two cents a week and a prayer
A tiny gift may be;
But it helps to do a wonderful work
For our sisters across the sea,