

Ontario Women's Institutes

GEORGE A. PUTNAM

SUPERINTENDENT

PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, TORONTO

Idealizing the Commonplace

By MISS HINDLAY, Ospringe

Read at the Wellington County Women's Institute Convention held in Guelph, December last.

I WAS led to choose this subject by frequently hearing my friends envying the lot of some one who had, as they thought, greater advantages in life. We all would like some one else's talents or education, or opportunities, or wealth, and fondly imagine that we could make much more of our lives if we could change places with some neighbor. Our own surroundings and work are so commonplace that it is not worth our while making an effort, but, if we could only sing, play, paint, or become a great teacher or writer, we could make our mark in the world. We envy these so-called great personages, not knowing the hard training that was necessary to bring them to these high positions and never thinking that the genius of a Burns or a Shakespeare would avail us nothing with our present lazy habits.

I am not going to dwell just now on the evil effect of discontent with our lot any more than to say that Providence knows much better than we do what circumstances are best for the development of our character, and, when we grumble at the fate or luck that has placed us where we are and made us what we are, we are simply faulting the plans of the Infinite. We are all characters in the making, and this life is but a discipline by which our characters are developed, and He knows best where to place us for that purpose. I like to think that each of us can do our own work better than it could be done by any other person. It is certain that no one else has the same opportunity to do it that we have, and if we neglect it, our particular corner of the world is made commonplace where it might have been made ideal. What matter how lowly the task, more bread makers are needed than poets, and it is infinitely better to do a humble duty well, than a great one indifferently. Philip Brooks gives us this beautiful thought on duty: "This truth comes to me more and more the longer I live; that in what field or in what uniform or with what aims we do our duty, matters very little, or even what that duty is, great or small, splendid or obscure, only to find our duty certainly, and somewhere and somehow to do it faithfully, makes us strong, good, happy, and useful men and turns our lives into some feeble echo of the life of God."

One comfort for those of us who find our duty in humble places is that we have lots of company. The great bulk of the world's work must always be done amidst lowly surroundings away from the praise of the multitude. It is only the few who stand before the footlights. Some one has said that God must have loved the common people, He made so many of them.

The fight with poverty, uncongenial surroundings and work that grinds down and becomes drudgery often develops a sweeter spirit and a nobler life than more congenial surroundings. I think of one woman who left a comfortable home in Ontario, went west and found herself in a leaky sod shack on the prairie. Her husband proved to be neither an agreeable companion nor a support to her and her children in her home. She toiled early and late, through the weary years, sometimes only to find her hard earnings collected by the worthless husband and father and spent in foolish speculations. She managed to rear and educate her children until they were able to take honorable positions and support her, but this is the great thing about her, that through it all, she did not allow herself to become sour or cynical, or discontented. She said, "I am determined to smile no matter what happens," and her nearest relatives say she did. I say that woman was one of the world's heroines!

Along this line of triumphing over the homely, but very real, trials of everyday life, I don't think I can do better than quote Pearlle Watson's school composition on "True Greatness," taken from Nellie McClung's delightful book, "The Second Chance."

"A person can never get true greatness by trying for it; you get it when you are not looking for it. It's nice to have good clothes; it makes it a lot easier to act decent, but it's a sign of true greatness to act when you haven't got them, just as good as if you had. "One time when Ma was a little girl they had a bird at their house, called Bill, that broke his leg. They thought they would have to kill him. But next morning they found him propped up sort of sideways on his good leg, singing. That was true greatness."

"One time there was a woman who had done a big washing and hung it on the line; the line broke and let it all down in the mud. But she didn't say a word, only did it all over again, and this time she spread it on the grass, where it couldn't fall. But that night a dog with dirty feet ran over it. When she saw what was done, she sat down and didn't cry a bit. All she said was: 'Ain't it queer that he didn't miss nothing.' That was true greatness. But it's only people who have done washings that know it. Once there was a

monotonous at times, we do not need to descend to the level of the homely task. We can bring the task up to the level of our minds. While we do the oft-repeated cleaning and polishing what a chance we have to think of the many books we have read or the lectures or concerts we have attended, and what a boon it is to have time to think.

Another way we make our home-making commonplace is by a lack of appreciation of the proportionate value of things. A model housekeeper very seldom is a good home-maker, because she values spotless floors and perfect house decorations more than she does people and their comfort. We must learn that the people we house are more important than the house. The woman, who is the centre of the home, must go one step further, and realize that her first duty is to herself. If she neglects her own health, in order that the house may be kept faultlessly clean, not only she, but the whole family and house are going to suffer. If she neglects her appearance and accomplishments that the younger members of the family may be better dressed, and have opportunities for culture, she will reap her reward in the selfishness and neglect of her children.

A woman who wishes to keep her place as queen of the home, will find scope for the exercise of the greatest

who runs about and tattles. 3. To talk too much.

There are two kinds of Criticism and Gossip; the good natured, kindly kind, when we sit down and talk, but do not hurt one another's feelings or make unkind remarks about our friends, or when we tell some one of something they are doing or saying that would be better left unsaid. We criticise then with a good purpose, or with the object of doing good, but I admit it is a delicate thing to do and we must be careful how and when we do it.

Then there is the other kind, when we cannot find a good thing to say of anyone and start some little story rolling that at the end of a week we could not recognize as our own words.

As a rule women get the credit of gossiping more than men, but, as the old Scotchman says: "I hae my doubts about it." But I am sorry to say woman is a more harmful gossip than man and a more severe critic, especially of her own sex.

When Mrs. Jones says to Mrs. Smith, "Did you hear about Mrs. So and So? Well it is awful the reports that are going round about her," and goes on to retail what she has heard (remember it is only hearsay), then Mrs. Smith turns it over again with a few more words and looks added on, until poor Mrs. So and So might just as well leave town as try to overcome or live down the report.

It is impossible for some people not to have something to tell, and I have one person in my mind that, really, if I heard all the unkind things she does, and repeats and believes them, my hair would be grey. Others again never hear anything, and what is more, do not want to, and oh! that they were in the majority.

Women, are we careful enough at what we repeat, or do we hear a sentence and then repeat and multiply to someone's sorrow and distress? Remember there are always two sides to every question, and do not be ready to believe all you hear repeated. Wait until you hear the other side. You do not know what "Skeleton in a Closet" may be hidden under the cloak put on in public. Just possibly it may be a broken heart. We only see what is made public. We do not see behind the closed doors. You know not what may have led up to the present condition of things; so please do not start the stone rolling, especially "Do not always blame the woman." Remember, we might do just the same under the same conditions. This world is not an easy place to understand. Some of its happenings are of such a nature that to know them brings upon us a horror too great to put into words. There are things none of us wish to talk about, yet I believe that even in spite of them the world is a hopeful place to look upon."

"O, many a shaft, at random sent,
Finds mark the Archer little meant;
And many a word at random spoken
May soothe, or wound, a heart that's broken."
—Scott.

Life is serious. It is full of trouble and plenty of sorrow. But it is such a fine life after all! We can be so helpful, so useful to others, that it is more than worth while to even the women who are nursing their burdens and saying that it is a miserable old place with a black sky and grey background.

It has been said that "The greatest law in life is getting, gaining, and self-preservation," but that cannot be true of people who want to live real lives. I mean the giving of an overflow of life, as it were, of good thoughts, of sympathy, cheer, some service that will render a stranger your friend. And in giving and sacrificing, do not do it to win a reward, like some child whom you must bribe to do right because he wants to do wrong, but just for the pure joy of it.

Then there is the outspoken critic who says, "No, I have no use for her, the way she fusses over cats and dogs is the limit—calling them baby." Did it never occur to you that it might not be her fault she was cuddling a kitten instead of a baby. Did it never occur to you that she might long for children to cuddle far more than you in your self-satisfied life can ever vaguely imagine? Did it never occur



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Front Row, from left to right.—Dr. Jennie Smillie, Mrs. W. Dawson, Miss E. Robson, Miss D. I. Hughes, Miss S. Campbell, Miss G. Gray.
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Back Row.—Miss M. P. Powell, Miss B. Millar, Mrs. W. J. Hunter, Mrs. M. L. Woelard, Mrs. E. B. McTurk, Miss W. Brodie, Miss E. D. Preston.

woman who lived near a pig pen, and when the wind blew that way it was very smelly, indeed, and at first when she went there to live she couldn't smell anything but straight pig, but when she lived there a while she learned to smell the clover blossoms through it. That was true greatness."

These are very homely illustrations, but they go to prove the power there is in human nature to get the best out of the very worst conditions. Think of it, ye women who fret and fume because the dressmaker is a day late, or the new maid is hard to teach your system of table service or you are not invited to Mrs. Upperton's at-home. If endurance is the crowning quality, and patience, all the passion of great souls, these women were truly great.

One reason that we home-makers do not make our work ideal, is because we are not properly trained for it. We see nurses, teachers and dressmakers all taking a thorough course of preparation before they undertake their work. Why cannot we profit by their example? If we all took a thorough course in home hygiene, food values, the chemistry of cooking, house decoration and the care of children, we would not so often hear house work spoken of as drudgery. It is full of entrancing interest when you know the reason of things, and, if the ever-recurring routine becomes

cleverness, tact, skill and executive ability. But, having wisely given herself unreservedly to her task, she will in time develop into Van Dyke's splendid ideal of womanhood, "A serene and quiet dignity, a tranquil wisdom to counsel and restrain, a fine delicacy of feeling, quick to rejoice, tender to suffer, yet patient to endure; a subtle sense of the value of small, unpurchasable things, a power of great compassion and self-sacrifice almost limitless where love speaks the word and duty shows the task, a noble hunger and thirst for harmony, an impregnable strength of personal reserve, and an enthusiastic generosity of personal surrender. These are the native glories of womanhood. These are the things which, if true and well ordered, should deepen, unfold, brighten and harmonize in the perfection of a woman's character."

Criticism and Gossip—Its Influence

By MRS. ROBERT CRAWFORD

THE dictionary says:—Criticism is:
1. The act or art of judging nicely of any performance or production.
2. Pointing out faults. 3. Noticing beauties or faults.

Gossip: 1. Mere idle talk. 2. One