

FARM WOMEN OUGHT TO HAVE

A STATUE

*United Farm Women of Alberta,
Their Aims and Achievements.*

By CHARLES STOKES

FROM the conclusion of Norman Lambert's article on the western farmers' movement, in a recent Courier, I practically read myself into the hall at Edmonton where the United Farmers of Alberta were sitting in annual convention. If any reader of this journal still cherishes the idea that the raison d'être of a western farmers' convention is to deliberate the difference between the tame and the wild cat or the symptoms of hog-cholera, he is evidently out of touch with events. With a growing realization of their political strength (which will be prodigiously increased if the cherished project for amalgamating all the farmers' associations and co-operative elevator companies in the prairie provinces is consummated, thereby giving them a membership of between 100,000 and 150,000), the delegates had just brought in a political platform calling for wholesale reductions in the Federal tariff, reciprocity with the United States, direct taxation of unimproved land values, income tax, proportional representation, nationalization of railways, telegraphs and express business, and Lord knows what else. Without one dissentient voice, and with the utmost tranquillity, these 800 delegates, representing some 20,000 farmers, calmly proposed to initiate what a mere urban reformer, yapping at the heels of the most minor abuses, regards as Utopia.

Not the least notable achievement of the western farmers' movement is to be found outside of its own organization. The United Farm Women of Alberta is an extraordinarily successful offshoot of the men's endeavours; how exactly it came about I do not profess to know. The legend that it was initiated by a cynical delegate to keep his own and other men's wives out of the shops will hardly bear investigation when you study the resolutions presented by this convention of women.

Do you think they discussed babies, or how to make over a packing-case into a cosy corner? Do you imagine that their agenda concerned itself with the hundred and one ways of cooking fudge or the latest palpitations of the hat fashions? I submit that no convention of city women would have omitted these subjects; but these farm women did. Yes, sir. A better banking system was what they discussed, and the nationalization of munition fac-

tories, the compulsory segregation of the mentally deficient, and the married woman's separate vote—(Say, do you remember when we used to apologize when we proposed handing over to women the administration of certain things that came altogether within women's legitimate sphere?)

As far as I could see and hear, there was only one baby there, notwithstanding—a perhaps significant fact—that every delegate answered to the roll-call as a "Mrs." There were other significant facts aplenty. For instance, not one of the delegates referred to a previous speaker as a "cat," as some of us men imagine is their regular habit. The atmosphere was entirely purposeful. There were no references to clothes.

Possibly over their four o'clock tea, the society women of Edmonton had no small laughter amongst themselves at the "weird" costumes of these farm-women delegates. Possibly in their secret hearts the farm women paid envious tribute to the toilettes of their city hostesses. Possibly a few delegates were seduced from their high and serious resolves by the apparent superiority of the specially-decorated shops over their own Main Street General Emporium. But no city woman could have sat ten minutes in the convention room without being smitten with a consciousness of her own triviality. That same ten minutes, too, might have given her a better line of what "Back to the Land" really means (in case her own husband ever gets the fever) than a ton of literature on the Glories of Labour.

When you come to think it over, the farm woman ought to have a statue. With all due respect to her horny-handed lord and master, the most serious burdens of the agricultural community are carried by the farm wife and inherited by the farm daughter.

It is the wife who largely determines the extent of the farmer's vision—it is she who creates the atmosphere that lies behind his success or failure. And, remember, she does so at a handicap. She has seldom any of the time and labour saving devices that the city house-wife calls indispensable, and, when she takes the bull by the horns and suggests the acquisition of the same to her husband, he, as often as not, calls it insanity that his wife should want a machine to make her work easier just because he happens to contemplate buying some more machinery to make farming easier.

The farm wife has few of the little fripperies dear to the feminine heart. She has less new clothes and still less chance to display them than her city sister; and a Red Cross tea or a church social is her superlative memory. She has less opportunity for acquiring culture and polish, a smaller and meaner circle, composed principally of the old man and the hired hand. And when to her come the sorrow and tribulation of bearing children, she can't avail herself of any twilight sleep frills. It's grim, old-fashioned travail for her. And because the farm wife discharges all her splendid functions without grumbling, it is a pleasure to pay her this one small tribute. Her ideals of home comfort are not of the highest. She covers her floors with oil-cloth instead of carpet because the mud off the men's boots can be washed up. She may so lack aesthetic taste that her living room contains shell ornaments, 15-cent vases and chromos, and no Chesterfields.

The women of the west are already bearing many extra burdens besides those that have seemed their lot. Some of us scarcely appreciate that the extra labour imposed by the present shortage of labour, which is likely to be intensified as the war is prolonged, is borne largely by women. And upon the women of the west will chiefly devolve the fusing of nationalities that is one of the problems of that cosmopolitan young country. When the American, the English, the Ruthenian, the Dane, the Russian, the Finn and the Italian lie down side by side in friendship and in understanding, it will not be due to Canadian Club eloquence; it will be due, rather, to the church social, the women's institute and the women's sewing party.

In conjunction with the growth of the farm women's associations must be noted the greater breadth of vision that now animates agricultural education in the west, whereby more liberal provision is made for the education of the farm daughter. No agricultural school or college lacks its girls' department. True, they teach only domestic science, and their graduates, not yet having assumed the serious responsibilities of farm wifehood, are no less frivolous than the city girl of the same age. But the farm girl is a home-builder of the future to a greater extent than the city "stenog."

It was a hard enough struggle to get agricultural education for boys "by." Dad's proverbial attitude towards the agricultural college was that it put a lot of ologies and isms into the lad's head, but didn't teach him to milk a cow or hustle in a crop; but he gave way when he saw results. That conceded, however, it was a very different matter when it came to the boy's sister: that she needed education in those departments that make for more efficient and more comfortable homes was beyond Dad's and the average ken. And if we erect that statue to the Farm Wife, we want another—scarcely a cubit smaller—to the Farm Daughter, who, seeing in her mother's premature old age the results of a life-long struggle with the work that was never quite done, cheerfully and uncomplainingly assumed in the next generation the same narrow environment and the same apparently meaningless succession of drudgeries.

The better education of the farm girl in domestic science, in the midst of a wider companionship and cultural contact, is going to produce some remarkable changes. When the farm boy who is at present working his way through the agricultural college goes off and gets married to the farm girl who is still in the domestic science department, the

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000 tons. CBA women also seem to be working for the future. This is woman's opportunity. The Home at the end of the Convention in Winnipeg recently passed several drastic resolutions. Among them was must be re-se the hearty endorsement by the Convention of the national service scheme, to be carried Germany can national government; further, the wealth of the country should be mobilized for war purposes by a graduated income tax with the least possible delay. It is obvious that six or seven months.