

The Country Homemakers

Conducted by Mary P. McCallum

REVIVING REAL CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

There is a kind Providence. All last week I intended to write this Christmas letter to my readers and so take time by the forelock, but as often happens to letters, it was delayed. So closely on the heels of the disaster in Italy it would have been hard to find a spark of Christmas cheer left. Now we are living in the first glow of exuberance over the greatest Allied victory of the war. Von Hindenburg's line has been broken and the Allies are sweeping on to victory. Someone said that Von Hindenburg's line was impregnable, and I am wondering if we did not think so, too, in our gloomy moments. We wondered when the breaking point would come.

We are to spend a fourth Christmas at war. It is an almost unbearable, unspeakable thought, and yet it is utterly impossible for our Allied armies to eat their Christmas dinner elsewhere than in the trenches. But this new development in the theatre of war fills us with the hope that before a fifth Christmas of war comes, wars will have passed from off the earth for ever and ever. We are by nature an optimistic people. How light-heartedly we entertain real Christmas thoughts just now. The real spirit of Christmas, that of Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men will triumph in spite of a fourth Christmas of war. I believe we have more faith in the message and promise of Christmas this year than we have had for the last three and a half years.

It has been so easy to forget that the whole Christmas story teems with promises and assurances of peace to men. Even to the bravest and most faithful it has been hard to make the Christmas story a reality in the face of the conflict overseas. During the last years when prosperity has been rampant we have been making a fetish and artificial demonstration quite out of keeping with the birthday of our Saviour. How many of us ever gave a serious thought to what the Christmas Day really represents. In our lavish gift-giving we have lost sight of the circumstance of the humble inception of our Saviour into the world. We do not remember that it was in a manger with no crib for a bed that the Little Lord Jesus first entered the world.

The first Christmas gifts ever presented were those brought by the Wise Men of the East and by the shepherds. They brought gifts of homage and love and promise of devotion. The first Christmas presents were tokens of love and worship. How cruelly artificial and hypocritical appears much of our Christmas giving of gifts in the light of the first Christmas giving. Too often we wonder what our friends intend to give us and we get out the catalogues of the mail order houses and spend long hours poring over their contents. Many of our gifts we choose and give out of a sense of duty, not of love or worship.

Fortunately not all of our Christmas giving is like that. For those near and dear to us, for our parents and special friends we do fill our giving with all the love of which we are capable. Only in so far as our giving contains that spirit do we fulfil the mission of the true Christmas. All else is but a fetish and hypocrisy. If we could only get back to the elemental spirit of Christmas giving such as the three Wise Men brought to the little infant in the manger in Bethlehem, what a revitalization of the Christ-spirit there would be around Christmas time. After all, Christmas Day has been set aside as a day on which we renew our covenant of worship and faith in the Man who so humbly lived the life of mortals. We renew that faith by doing and giving for those we love on earth. We do not renew it when we buy a great number of presents, which we can scarcely afford, and give them to those whom we think we ought and whom we are inclined to think will remember us. There would be no decrease in the amount of love distributed on Christmas Day if we eliminated that kind of giving from our list. These are days when the human race is getting down to elemental things. They are days when the artificial and the unreal do not count. Why not mark this fourth Christmas of war as the one on which we abolished all unreal and unloving giving, and gave to only those to whom we wished to tender a token of our love and homage and devotion. It will not be any loss, for a gift is only valuable to the giver in the proportion to which he sends love and cheer with it. There will be just as much of love and happiness and cheer if we bring our Christmas giving back to the spirit of the gift-giving on that first Christmas, more than nineteen hundred years ago.

SOCIAL WELFARE CONGRESS

On November 23, 24, and 25 there was held in the city of Winnipeg the second annual convention of the Manitoba Social Service Congress and

of the Manitoba Social Service Council. A growing interest on the part of the general public in these affairs was evidenced by the large number of people who attended the sessions.

On Thursday afternoon, Mrs. J. H. R. Bond spoke on "Maternity Care in the City." Mrs. Bond pointed out that at present there was not sufficient nursing facilities to take care of the city patients. She suggested that for the foreign mother the situation might be relieved if the older girls were trained in mid-wifery to enable them to help the women of their nationality. She thought, too, that the foreign-speaking girl from the country should be able to receive such a training as would be useful in the rural communities. In the discussion which followed, Dr. Halpenny said he doubted the wisdom of such a step. For the rural delegates in attendance the discussion was a little disappointing, in that no solution was offered for the serious inadequacy of medical treatment in the country.

The addresses on Thursday evening were among the best of the congress. Professor Osborne spoke on the "Abolition of Patronage," and made very clear that if we continue increasing the number of public utilities we must abandon the practice of patronage, or else the whole commercial and in-



HIS VERY OWN

dustrial fabric of the country will become demoralized. If railroads, national resources, telegraphs, and other concerns come into government ownership there must be no stigma of patronage attached to any of the offices or office-holders. Professor Osborne said that Hon. T. A. Cramer, speaking for the government, said: "All patronage lists have been abolished." He pointed out that a Union government was best because it gave to the service of the people the best men from all the people, not the best men from one half of the people, and for that reason should be supported.

On Friday evening, A. M. MacDonald, superintendent of neglected and dependent children for Alberta, gave one of the most splendid addresses of the congress. One can understand the progressive state of Alberta's department of dependent children when one has heard Mr. MacDonald. His department works on the theory that an institution must be used only as a last resource. The real saving of a child for splendid manhood and womanhood can best be accomplished by placing the child under the influence of a real home, where there are those who will act as father and mother to him. In finding homes for the boys and girls, great care must be exercised in guarding against placing the child in a home where he will be used. Mr. MacDonald stated as an absolute necessity the medical examination of all children in schools. It was when a child was small that many of the defects could most easily be remedied. He spoke very highly of the work of the probation officers. They are said to be essentially a big brother or sister to the little delinquent, or dependent, or neglected child. Almost without fail they succeed in winning the confidence of the child, and of exerting an uplifting influence on it.

The last evening was given over to a discussion of the need for conservation of food, to matters of the high cost of living and a living wage. Mr. McGrath, secretary of the bureau of labor, gave a splendid address on The Living Wage and the High Cost of Living. He was, by virtue of his position, able to give much valuable information. He said that, according to statistics which he had compiled, the average wage in Winnipeg had increased only 14 per cent., while the cost of living had increased 60 per cent. This created such a disparity that it was almost impossible for even the well-paid workman to eke out a decent living. Mrs. H. M. Speechley of Headingly and Mrs. R. F. McWilliams were the other speakers of the evening.

This was without doubt the best conference the social workers of Manitoba have ever had the privilege of attending. At every session one saw the need of more rigid and careful work in social betterment. Those delegates who had the good fortune to attend will go back to their homes prepared to enlist the help of their neighborhood in this great movement for better social conditions.

CARE OF FEEBLE-MINDED

Ever since the bureau of social research for the governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta issued the little pamphlet, "Grown-up Children or Mental Defectives," there has been no excuse on the ground of ignorance for not considering and facing the problem of the feeble-minded in its true light. According to their preliminary survey in 1916 there are in the three prairie provinces 1,547 recognized mental defectives. The bureau further estimates the number of mental defectives in the three provinces to be 2,300. This state of affairs in so new a part of Canada is simply appalling.

The bureau knows what must be done to stamp this curse out of our country. It states as its future policy, stricter immigration laws, amended marriage laws, and all mental defectives to be regarded as wards of the state, "their mental incapacity and not their poverty or crime to be the motive for the state's interference." This involves, special protection (supervision, sterilization or segregation); special training, and in some cases maintenance. The bureau states that what is needed at once is an educational campaign, legislation, registration and research, a special institution, and a psychopathic expert.

Here indeed is women's work. We have a new minister of immigration and colonization, Hon. J. A. Calder. Those who know him either personally or by reputation know that he has the best interests of the West at heart, and particularly matters of public welfare, for he it was who was largely responsible for the erection of that splendid sanatorium for tubercular patients at Qu'Appelle. Let him know that the women of the West are looking to him to help establish stricter immigration laws and more effectual inspection, and let him know that he has your support and backing in any endeavor he may make to take this step.

We are glad that the women through the National Council of Women are taking steps to study this problem and to assist in combating it. Those who have the new 1917 and 1918 year book of the National Council of Women of which I told you a couple of weeks ago will do well to turn to page 77 and read Mrs. M. K. Stead's report on the committee's work for the care of the mentally deficient. Mrs. M. K. Stead is the convener of the national committee on this branch of the work. She is very anxious that this matter should receive serious consideration from the women all over the West. She has asked me to publish the following letter which she is sending out to all those interested in local councils and in federated societies with the purpose of getting a great movement of co-operation in this matter on foot.

"15 Quinspool Road, Halifax, N.S.

"Dear Madam:—Can we have a 'get-together' campaign this winter on behalf of the feeble-minded? The combined efforts of all our local councils and federated societies would make a powerful lever wherewith to move our provincial legislators. Will you then as convener of your local committee communicate with other workers, get specific information of cases of feeble-mindedness and report them to the authorities, take an interest in 'classes for backward children' already formed or agitate for such a class in your community, urge the provision for a permanent segregation of the graduates of such classes, when they are incapable of self-support or self-control, find out what is being done elsewhere for the feeble-minded, and do all in your power to obtain farm colonies and schools for the feeble-minded in your own province?

"Anything that I can do to help is yours to command. Your reply will be esteemed.

"M. K. STEAD,

"Convener of Com. on Mental Deficients, National Council of Women."