

# The Larger Family

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## IV.—Community "Special Meetings"

"Every group unit in the town having any conscience at all for the general welfare of the community was reached—the religious, the educational, the home, the municipal and the business. All meetings were well attended and were representative. . . . Church people and people who did not go to church took an active part. . . . At the last meeting of the series a large number of the principal business men met in the town hall. The meeting was presided over by the mayor. . . . The men were keenly interested, but the instructive feature of the meeting was that in the general discussion that followed while several matters of economic interest were referred to, what occupied more than an hour's earnest conversation in which nearly every one took part, was the boy problem—how to save the boy for good citizenship, and some very good suggestions were made that did not bear much resemblance to what is heard in the average Sunday school convention."

This extract is taken from the published report of a new kind of "special meetings" which the writer was asked to conduct. One of these days "community revivals" will sweep across the country purging and enriching our neighborhood life and recreating our social institutions.

### The Souris Experiment

This particular experiment was tried a few months ago in the town of Souris, Manitoba. A few citizens, headed by the school principal and two of the local ministers, had become interested in the wider aspects of community welfare. They realized that any effort to improve conditions must be wider than any one church or any other one institution. It must represent all the sections of the community; it must, in some way, bind these various sections together in co-operative effort.

But how make a start? It was at this stage that the services of the secretary of the Canadian Welfare League were requisitioned. It was considered that "he had no sectional or denominational axe to grind." The next question arose, "Under whose auspices should the meetings be held?" It was decided that the school board was the most representative body in town. So the school board issued a call to the citizens to attend their special meetings.

And the citizens responded! The arrangements were in the hands of a committee presided over by the mayor. On this committee were lawyers, bankers, storekeepers, doctors, farmers—and ministers. It was a citizens' committee. The expenses, by the way, were paid by the school board. Union meetings were held on Sunday which were attended by members of nearly all denominations. Some members of the committee who rarely attended church were there three times on Sunday. "That was the kind of dope that was needed" was the verdict!

And what was the message? One of the ministers wrote, "It was Christ's message of the Kingdom, but expressed in such terms and re-enforced in such a way by means of charts that church people were made to understand what was the mission of the church, and other groups in the community life of the town recognized that the mission of the church was not different from their own."

### Getting Together

But it was not the message; it was not the man. It was the getting together for the purpose of disinterested service. That in itself constituted the success of the effort.

The church workers got together—and why should they not get together? Various plans for co-operative effort were discussed. For example, each Sunday school had a library and one or two other organizations had small libraries. Yet there was no library or reading room open

to the public. Why not pool the libraries and place them in a central room where they might be of service to all? With a little further co-operation volunteers could be found to act as librarians. Several individuals offered to loan or donate books and magazines. Here, then, a town library could be provided at a very small expense. Again, why not? This was only one of a score of suggestions made.

At another meeting the women got together. It was probably the first time the few Jewish ladies in town had met to discuss common problems with their gentile sisters. It was a splendid opportunity for the Christian women to show fellowship and good will. One of these days the women will be voting. They simply must get together and educate themselves in questions that concern the best interests of the country. After school one afternoon the parents and teachers and members of the school board got together. A natural combination and yet strange to say they had never met

in joint session before. Might not our schools become much more efficient if there were a few more joint meetings?

The boys and girls were not forgotten. They too had a meeting during school hours. With a little care and training the citizenship of tomorrow may be cleaner and nobler and more efficient than that of today.

### The Greatest Building

But the last meeting was perhaps the most significant of what might be—and one day will be. It was this meeting to which reference was made in the opening paragraphs. It was a business man's meeting held in the council chamber and presided over by the mayor. The speaker dwelt on the economic aspects of community welfare. These were discussed, but the chief interest centered in a discussion on the welfare of the boys and young men of the town. Was that not strange?

And yet why? Why should municipal business be confined to the building of roads and bridges and the getting rid of weeds? Is not the building of the character of the boys and girls of infinitely more importance? Weeds are bad; rank amusement features are worse.

The outcome of this meeting was that the mayor called to his assistance a representative group of citizens who were willing to put time and thought into a study of local needs and local resources and opportunities. This committee, which has called itself "The Community Welfare League," under the presidency of a bank manager, is undertaking as its first task to study the educational and recreational problems of the town.

What will be the outcome of this four days' meeting remains to be seen. Much now depends upon the committee. As in other revivals, the interest may be transient. A community cannot any more than an individual be galvanized into permanent activity. The dynamic must come from within.

But this little experiment conclusively demonstrated the possibility of community co-operation. Our Western communities undoubtedly will respond to the wider appeal.

Why not repeat the experiment in a hundred little towns right now at the beginning of the winter season? You have caught the idea? Then you have it. Tell us your success.

### TOWN vs. COUNTRY

But the true worth and virtue, in the mild And genial soil of cultivated life Thrive most, and may perhaps thrive only there,

Yet not in cities oft, in proud and gay And gain-devoted cities. Thither flow As to a common and most noisome sewer, The dregs and feculence of every land.—Cowper.



J. S. Woodsworth

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