

A Woman's Conference in St. John

Margaret Ellis Colhoun.

IN October of 1890, a congress of the Association for the Advancement of Women was held in Toronto, and those who attended that series of meetings will remember with pleasure the bright and notable women who spoke, and the clever, witty, yet earnest debates.

This Association which comprises both American and Canadian membership had not again assembled in Canada until the present autumn, when it held its annual gathering in St. John, N.B.

Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, one of the most notable and brilliant women of to-day, again presided. We are able to publish an interesting account of the conference—which indeed may be marked as the last held in Canada under the venerable Mrs. Howe's presidency—from the pen of Margaret Ellis Colhoun.—EDITOR.

The twenty-fourth congress of the Association for the Advancement of Women, was held in St. John, Sept. 16th, 17th and 18th. The meetings, which were under the auspices of the St. John Local Council of Women, through whose efforts the session was held in that city, took place in the Mechanics' Institute and were very largely attended.

The A.A.W. is an organization very well-known throughout the United States and Canada, a session a few years ago having been held in Toronto. Its members include the most prominent intellectual women of the time. Physicians, scientists and newspaper workers, lecturers, artists and novelists are among the professions represented by the women enlisted under the black and gold colors of the Association.

The Local Council had arranged for a reception to be tendered the A.A.W. on the evening of Sept 15th, and it was carried out with brilliant success. The large assembly rooms of the Institute were filled with an interesting and interested crowd of people all anxious to welcome Mrs. Howe and Mrs. Ednah D. Cheney specially, and the A.A.W. generally.

Mayor Robertson in his opening address paid a loyal tribute to the womanly virtues of Queen Victoria; spoke of the inspiration Lady Aberdeen, President of the Woman's Council of Canada, had been to Canadian women; referred to the noble work of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, and pointed with pride to St. John's own noble heroine, Madame de la Tour. Miss Francis Murray on behalf of the Council welcomed the visitors to St. John, regretting the sad circumstances that gave her the honor in place of the president, Lady Tilley.

Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, who was in remarkably good spirits and health during her entire visit to St. John, replied on behalf of the A.A.W. of which she is and has been president for twelve years. Among other kind things she said the society had long wished to come to St. John and were glad to meet with such a hearty reception; the name of St. John stood for peace, love and amity, and all that was best in the Christian religion. She spoke of the founding of the A.A.W. and its growth and advancement during the twenty-four years of its life; of the benefit these gatherings are, cementing as they do, different peoples into a closer bond of affection, with "one heart for humanity and one conscience for their sacred duty to it." The orchestra played as a fitting conclusion to Mrs. Howe's words, the music of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Mrs. Cheney, and Miss Eastman of the A.A.W., spoke during the evening of the pleasure it gave

them to be in St. John, and of the heartiness of the greetings extended them by their sister Association. A beautifully decorated refreshment room was open during the evening where ices and conversation rounded into the entertainment.

The actual work of the Congress began on the afternoon of the 16th, when the meetings were formally opened by Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, who after referring to the changes recent years have wrought in the condition of woman, and instancing Margaret Fuller, Florence Nightengale, Francis Power Cobbe, Maria Mitchell, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning as resolute and independent advocates of true freedom and the higher culture, continued; "Mr. Emerson somewhere speaks of hitching one's wagon to a star, a simile which at first sight provokes a smile. But it is good and happy for us to link our common life to the sublimity which draws it ever upward. We of this Association are but a little group of women, here to-day and gone to-morrow. Our meeting is a very modest affair. But we come here in the name of freedom and of progress, and desire to represent the great lessons which the age has taught us, and which I will sum up in these words: Soundness of purpose, liberty of pursuit, unanimity of spirit. Hoping that our three days' conference, so kindly seconded by the ladies of your Council, may do something to advance these objects, I declare that the twenty-fourth Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Women is open."

The papers read and discussed during the Session were "Housekeeping a Profession," by Mrs. Caroline A. Kennard; "The Bicycle as a Factor in Modern Life," by Miss Eva Channing; "Literature as a Precursor to Reform," by Mrs. Ednah D. Cheney, a most scholarly exposition of the subject; "Rudimentary Art in Relation to High Art," by Miss Alice Fletcher. Miss Fletcher's womanly magnetism made her a favorite at once. She is the possessor of a remarkably sweet voice and holds her listener's attention as much by her "way of speech" as by what she is saying. "Her singing of an Indian love song," to quote Miss Eva Channing "was one of the most charming things ever heard. It was like the warble of a bird."

"The Significance of Organization among Women" was the title of Miss Eastman's paper and was a vigorous review of women's clubs from the days of the village sewing circle to the associated charities of the present. "The use of Aesthetics" by Dr. Mary Moody; "Women as Guardians of Social Morals" by Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, "Waifs" by Mrs. Wolcott; and "Value of early habits of Observation of Nature to Women" by Mrs. Bray, whose life at the Light on Thatcher's Island gives her unusual opportunities for observation, completed the list of papers.

In addition to this it is to be remembered that a discussion by two or three of the ladies followed each paper, in which many unexpected points were made, and the benefit of different points of view given to the large audiences that characterized all the meetings. One afternoon was devoted to a symposium "International Amity; how may it be promoted," in which nearly all the ladies took part, and this was perhaps the most brilliant of the meetings.

Among the reports of the various societies, and from the different vice-presidents, that from Mrs. S. Drury O'Connor, vice-president for Canada was heard with interest.

The last session held on Friday evening, the 18th, was a noteworthy one. The hall was filled to overflowing with an enthusiastic assembly of men and women. At the conclusion of the discussion Mrs. Howe, in her happy cordial manner, told of the circumstances that led to the writing of the Battle Hymn of the Republic, and then recited that famous hymn with a vigor and ardor

that stirred every heart. Earlier in the Congress, when moved by a discussion, she had sprung to her feet and recited "Our Flag" with a depth of patriotic feeling unimagined possible by her listeners; and now again, after the reading of a lengthy paper and the close of three days of arduous presiding, her voice rang clear and silvery to the words of her poem.

Miss Fletcher graciously responded to a request that she again sing her Indian song, preceding it by a charming little account of how and when she heard it first.

Miss Channing moved the following resolutions: "Resolved, That we, members of the A.A.W., desire to express to the ladies of the local council of St. John our heartiest thanks and warmest appreciation for the cordiality with which they have welcomed us to their picturesque city and their hospitable homes, and to the uniform kindness and courtesy which we have everywhere received. Those ladies stopping at the Aberdeen wish especially to thank the Alumnae of the Girls' High School for the fragrant flowers which greeted them upon their arrival at the hotel and have been daily renewed. We would also express our gratitude to the representatives of the press for the uniform courtesy with which they have treated us. It is with genuine delight that we shall look back upon our visit among these sisters who, although they live across the border line, are yet bound to us by the ties of a common race and a common country. It is our hope that this visit may be another strong link in the chain which shall bind together the hearts of all women of whatever nation, color, and religion in the common interests of educational progress," which were seconded by Mrs. Lily Lord Tift, secretary of the A.A.W., and carried. Dr. Stockton, M.M.P., expressed in well-chosen words the thanks of the people of St. John for the visit of the A.A.W., and the intellectual treat they had furnished. He was followed by Chief Justice Tuck who, after speaking in highest terms of the abilities of the ladies, moved a vote of thanks to the distinguished visitors. This was seconded by Mr. Ritchie, and carried by a standing vote. A return of thanks from Mrs. Howe, and the singing of the National Anthem led by Miss Fletcher closed the Twenty-fourth Congress of the Association for the Advancement of Women.

So much for the actual work of the Congress, of the social side it is scarcely possible to say enough. The twenty ladies who represented the visiting Congress, while the guests of the Council, made many warm friends. They were so deeply interested in the city and its history, so anxious to visit its points of interest, and so grateful for the attentions it was a pleasure to bestow, that their visit must long remain a pleasant memory in St. John.

Through the kindness of the Natural History Association it was made possible for many of the ladies to attend a "field day" at Red Head, the home of Dr. Addy. The Fredericton delegates invited the A.A.W. to visit their city, which was accepted, the party making the trip by train and by boat. Those who came more closely in contact with the visitors were impressed by the charm and graciousness of their manner; by their utter unconsciousness of self, and the great desire to please, that animated one and all. Of Mrs. Ednah D. Cheney who has passed her seventieth birthday a four-year-old child said, "She is a beautiful young lady;" while an enthusiastic young woman in response to a question from Mrs. Howe as to what she was going to be, said in tones of affection, "seventy and a grandmother."

The St. John Local Council of Women deserve warm praise for the part they played in ensuring the success of the Congress. Their arrangements were all quietly and perfectly carried out and spoke eloquently of the domestic, social and intellectual development of St. John women.

—MARGARET ELLIS COLHOUN.