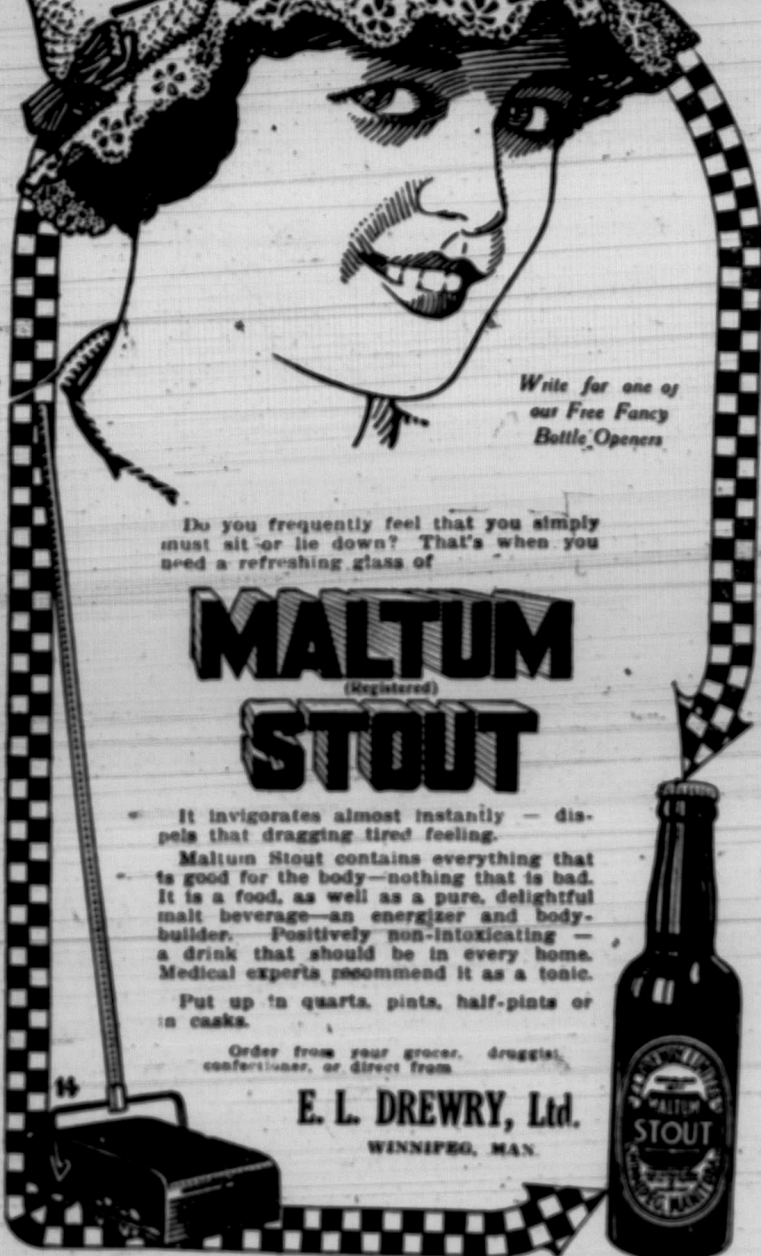


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Duck Feather Pillows

Desire to Serve is the Mother of Ingenuity—A True Incident

By Mary P. McCallum

They were all there that afternoon. It was the regular meeting of the Woman's Institute in a little rural hamlet in Alberta. The babies were too hot to play on the door-step in the sun. They whined on the laps of tired and despairing mothers. Women swept the skies with eyes that pled for Divine intercession. But there was no indication of the miracle, rain, nor was there a hint of promise. On all sides of them stretched miles of shrivelling grain. Even should the rain come within a few days it could not bring back to those yellowing fields the verdure, the fulfilment of which meant harvest. For the third year in succession it was borne in on hopeful, patient souls that there would be no harvest.

Silence settled down on the little group, a silence borne of despair. Intuitively minds turned far away. They could feel the darkness enshrouding muddy, chilly, war-scarred Flanders. Almost it seemed that the steady, dull tramp of tired soldiers' feet was making its impress on their souls. But above the thud of tramping feet they could just discern the even, muffled groaning of the Red Cross ambulances as they wended their way through shell holes, mud and water to the dressing stations. They could see the deft hands of Red Cross sisters of mercy manipulating bandages that were too few, and carefully apportioned antiseptics that plainly must do the work of double. They could realize the anxiety of the nurses when they recollected that not yet had No Man's Land yielded all of the day's toll. And they could almost sigh with the nurses in relief that death, that great, grim reality was in war a minister of mercy.

But the lengthening shadows across the floor hinted of cows to be brought from the pasture, of chickens to be fed, and of suppers to be prepared. Slowly, as from a dream, they became conscious of the present, with its responsibilities and disappointments. The little district had given its share of men on the altar of war. Why could those left at home, who had been proud to bear the sacrifice, and who longed with all the tenderness of women to do a woman's share, not be permitted the sacrifice of service too? When they saw in agonizing, undying vision, the need of supplies, why were they denied the honor of sending money and supplies? There had been no crops for three years. And a season without crops on the prairie means a year without money. There was no money to be sent to the Red Cross, nor was there money to purchase supplies. But surely the Father of all could not intend that mothers and sisters of soldiers must endure such barrenness. There must be something they could do if it could only be discovered.

And something was discovered. The very simplicity and feasibility of it nearly overwhelmed them. Perhaps they could not send bandages, but they could send little jars of cheer to the boys there from the little community. Just to one side of the district was a great swamp, which furnished homes to hundreds of wild ducks. They would shoot the ducks, can them and send them overseas. The men—their men—would understand the love and sacrifice and service that would be packed into the cans. For a little while at any rate they could forget the mud and slush and discomforts of trench life, and remember again "sunny Alberta."

So they shot the ducks and canned them, and despatched them on their mission of cheer. Such a happiness as those precious cans left in the hearts of the soldiers. There might be seasons without crops, but there couldn't be seasons when mother-love could not find an avenue of service.

The institute held another meeting. This time there was no repining or despair. There had been a way of service before. There must always be a way of service if one could but find it, and experience proved that if one persevered long enough a way could be found.

But what could they do now? Duck season was over; and anyway there were reasons why canned duck could not be sent overseas indefinitely.

"Did you keep the feathers from the ducks you plucked?" asked a member who had the light of purpose in her eyes.

They had all kept the feathers. No one could say they were not thrifty and careful folks. They always kept feathers. There was always someone glad of a few pillows.

"Pillows!" The very word opened up a vista of possibilities. But feathers are a refractory, incohesive mass of aways. They needed good, stout ticking to hold them together, and pillow ticking cost money.

"Now there must be someone somewhere who wants pillows and who would be willing to send us the ticking if we would give the feathers. How my own boy would like to lay his head to-night on a duck-feather pillow! Think of the thousands of boys who would give years of their lives if tonight they could go to sleep on a duck-feather pillow from home." It was the same little woman who had brought up the matter of feathers, and she hung tenaciously to her idea, knowing that it contained the only possibilities for service the neighborhood could produce.

"Maybe the military hospital in Calgary could use pillows."

"And perhaps Miss Pinkham, of the Red Cross at Calgary, could send us the ticking, or tell us how to get it," eagerly added another.

"I make a motion that we instruct our secretary to write Miss Pinkham, telling her the circumstances, and asking her if she can send us the ticking, or tell us who will."

That night the letter was written. Almost before they could believe it there was a reply from Miss Pinkham; and what was more, yards and yards of ticking. They were assured that there was a place for all the pillows they could make.

There never was such joy as that of making those pillows. Every house in the neighborhood looked like the morning after the pillow-fight of the night before. And those pillows were sent to the military convalescent hospitals, and tonight some of the boys who trod and fell on No Man's Land rest throbbing heads on duck feather pillows that must soothe with love and sacrifice and service.

STEADY GROWTH THE AIM

Finances are so concentrated that they cover a limited number of events sufficiently rather than being spread over a number of events insufficiently as to cause such to be failures. So with limited funds and a more or less irresponsible directorate there has to be a certainty that the policy is in line with the means and the feeling of the members. Anyone with an enlarged duty-of-agricultural-society turn of mind will be apt to court disaster and to fritter away the means of the society against the slowness and unresponsiveness of the farming community. To such minds agricultural societies are apt to be dead because not recognizing that an agricultural society should conform to the nature of farming and be conducted quietly and continuously, they are apt to aim at something new. Better rather that the management communicate with the real farmers, who are students of the things exhibited: livestock, seed grain, plowing, etc., and who are the reason of being of the society and its real support. To such the society means competitive exhibitions and the real advantage and success of an agricultural society is in the betterment from year to year of the quality of the exhibits. Agriculture is not dead because it moves quietly, nor dumb because it talks little in public, nor deaf because it is slow to respond, nor blind because it follows no flag.—T. L. Neish, Pres. Carlyle (Rash.) Agricultural Society.

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