

CHAPTER V.—TRADES UNIONS AND WOMEN'S SOCIETIES.

1. *Trades Unions.*

Trades unions of women in Ontario have not been numerous nor remarkably successful; but still they have been formed at various times. In a number of cases, also, women have joined the men's unions. In Hamilton, Kingston and Toronto, Assemblies of the Knights of Labour have at various times been formed of women alone; but at present none seem to be active.

In Toronto as far back as 1883 a union was formed among telegraphers; and women were asked to join as well as men. A strike organized by them having failed, the union was for the time dissolved.

About 1885 an Assembly of the Knights of Labour was organized of women in various occupations. It was called "Hope Assembly," and lasted for some time, but finally succumbed.

About 1888-9 the "Silver Fleece" Assembly was formed, composed of women in the tailoring business. It is not now active.

In 1889 the corset-makers organized an Assembly to carry on a strike to resist a reduction of wages. A compromise is said to have been effected; and the assembly has ceased to exist. Women belong at present to the cigar-makers and typographical unions, but their numbers are so few that practically women are not a factor in trades unions or Knights of Labour assemblies at present in Toronto at all.

The non-success of trades unions among women is partly attributable to the same causes as the but limited success of such movements among men in Canada and America generally. Both men and women in various trades in Canada are always looking forward to bettering their condition in some way, and do not expect their connection with a trade to be permanent. This is particularly the case among those who are apt to be the leading spirits in the movements. Women, moreover, have in the past lacked the training necessary to carry on such unions, and were often altogether ignorant of the nature of labour combinations. And again, since women on the whole do not remain long in employment, benefit and superannuation schemes in connection with the unions were not much appreciated. Moreover there does not exist that "class spirit" among women in employments that is necessary to organized progress; and men with reason complain that it is difficult to operate plans of any sort which require unselfish action among large bodies of women.

There is no doubt that in unions among men and women employed at the same trade, where equal wages are demanded, the women gradually become fewer and finally drop out, if they are physically unfit for as severe labour as the men; and they know in such cases that it is not to their individual advantage to belong to the unions. Where equal pay is demanded for equal labour, the "survival of the fittest" is alone possible.

2. *Working Women's Societies.*

Although trades unions among women have not been successful so far in Ontario, it is not to be assumed that women are unsuccessful in uniting themselves together in clubs and societies of other kinds. In fact the formation of women's clubs for various objects seems to be one of the most noticeable movements of the present day.

About seven years ago a movement was set on foot in New York to establish a working girls' society governed by the working girls themselves, for social, intellectual and moral purposes. A working girl's society as defined by its members is, "an organization formed among busy women and girls, to secure by co-operation means of self-improvement, opportunities for social intercourse, and the development of higher noble aims. It is governed by the members for the members, and strives to be self-supporting." In Toronto some years ago it became evident to those who had at heart the welfare of girls, particularly those in business positions, that associations, however good, formed on a charitable basis, were not far-reaching enough in their