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Women of  
To-day and  
To-morrow



*Marjory MacMurchy, 1919*

By Marjory MacMurchy  
Women's Department  
Canadian  
Reconstruction  
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The Canadian Magazine, June, 1919

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# WOMEN OF TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

BY MARJORY MacMURCHY

**N**O one can expect to deal adequately with thoughts brought into being by such a title. But there may be something which ought to be written to-day about a development which is too recent to be recorded as yet in its entirety. And there is a certain attraction in a daring attempt, even for a timid person. If the reader, therefore, will be good enough to put up for the present with a few notes from the field-book of an observer, some abler student and keener analyst to-morrow or the day after may take warning and avoid the errors committed by the analyst of to-day.

First, let us consider the organization of women, beginning, as it seems to us, in the late nineteenth century. What is more difficult than attempting to describe a movement which is wholly natural and gradual in its development, but in which our own activities are involved? When the tide of the sea flows, some indistinguishable part of it, some atom of an atom, might almost as well try to lift itself up to get a look at the wave. We have been often assured that Abraham's pilgrimage was part of the Western movement, that trend of population which no one can stay to explain. But it would be difficult to believe Abraham knew that he belonged to the Western movement. Women organizing to-day appear to be somewhat in the position

of Abraham, and we will include Abraham's wife, that remarkable woman, Sarah, not a wholly attractive soul perhaps, but a real person, yet untouched by organization, as far as we know. It is only by trying to understand these movements, and by seeking to adjust ourselves to them in the right way, that men and women have justified themselves as members of a race which is moving on an upward course. We do know that such movements occur because of strong beliefs and adequate causes.

About forty years ago, the women of Canada began to organize themselves with a definite plan to include women in all parts of the country in their bonds of organization. Nothing less in extent was ever their expressed purpose. There are written accounts of these origins. Those who began the work of organizing Canadian women did so for the sake of the women and children of heathen lands. Already their passionate words sound out of date. Who now speaks of "heathen lands"? But what has been the result of these little meetings? To-day in Canada there are a number of Women's Missionary Societies, each belonging to a separate church, and all of them national in extent, with hundreds of thousands of members and with incomes aggregating some hundreds of thousands of dollars. The intensity and earnestness of these organizations are as remarkable as their

growth. Their memberships have learned so much of concerted and concentrated action, and of the conduct of meetings and business, that the knowledge has had a considerable influence on the trend of character in the second generation.

At the same time, or in the years following, were organized the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Young Women's Christian Association, the National Council of Women, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, and others. Twenty years ago, the first Women's Institute of the country women of Canada was formed in Stoney Creek, Ontario, with its watchword, "For Home and Country". There are now Women's Institutes or Home Makers' Clubs in every Province of Canada. A few weeks ago the National Federation of Women's Institutes was consummated, with a membership of 100,000 rural Canadian women, possessed by a desire for unity and action. The Women's Institute movement has spread from Canada into the United States, and notably in the last three years to England, Scotland, and Wales, where organization is being carried on with rapidity and effectiveness. There is also the remarkable movement of United Farm Women in every Canadian Province. The Central Council of Agriculture of the Grain Growers and United Farmers has its counterpart in an Interprovincial Council of Farm Women, formed either as a section of the Council of Agriculture, or in close connection with it.

We are too accustomed to the organization movement after forty years to recognize its extraordinary character. Let us try to recapture its true meaning. If women had been preparing to take their part in such a day as this, to meet the war which those of us alive now will never try to describe in a phrase, and to seize these moments of promise which are with us still, what else would they have done forty years ago

but knit themselves together in a living unity on which the shock of an undreamed-of conflict must fall in vain? The pain and loss of that shock no one can express, but the unity for effort and service remains unbroken. "Unbroken" is not the word; the movement for organization has been greatly strengthened. In recent years, no one can turn round in Canada without witnessing the evolution of some woman into the perfect president or secretary. It is the same with Canadian girls at school. In every part of the country executive committees are as frequent as leaves on trees, and there are few rooms left of any size in which has not been held the successful meeting.

It would be useless to try to exhaust the meaning of the organization movement. Why has it come? What will be its consequences? No one can safely do more than make a few remarks, joined possibly with fewer predictions. The movement is beneficent. Its consequences will last a long, long time. It has had already, and it will have, a great influence in the development of the political, social and economic life of women. No one who attempts to understand women of to-day, or to co-operate with them, should fail to study their power to associate themselves with other women. But the study is not possibly as simple as it may seem. All these great national associations came into existence for the sake of ideals. The ideals must also be studied before the organization will reveal its meaning. Generally speaking, the movement belongs to the well-to-do, but it cannot rightly be described as fashionable. It belongs indeed to the world, and to the times.

I do not know whether the attitude of girls and women to-day towards employment is more characteristic of this age or more permanent than their power to organize, but I am certain that the feeling on the part of young women towards

ployment is also a world movement, beneficent and important. When we are talking of our present attitude to employment, it is well to remind ourselves of the fact that women of undisturbed leisure, who do not earn their living by some form of work, have always been at every age in the world's history in an extreme minority. It is a myth and superstition to speak of any considerable body of women as not being workers. But, to refer by inference to the women of to-morrow for a moment here, let it be said that the recognition of home-making and the care of children as highly skilled and exacting employments is extremely necessary. The occupations of women in their value to the State, and to men and women, will not assume their right order and proportion in the eyes of everyone until some method by which the home employments are recognized is devised by the nation. As things are now, speaking as a student of paid employments of women especially, conditions are misleading to the paid worker and unfair to the home maker. Unfair, I mean, in this way: the home maker is often left without proper means to do her work or proper training for it, and she is given the impression, unintentionally possibly, that her work has little or no economic value. On the other hand, the girl in paid employment is led to believe that home making is not work, that it does not need skilled training, and that she is contributing more to the country as a paid worker than she will when she is a home maker. We cannot build up a safe and noble state, or men and women of the highest development, on these suppositions.

There is one fact connected with the employment of girls which students of such conditions should repeat at frequent intervals, as we would expect, to rectify misapprehensions and to guide us into right ways of thinking and acting. Between eighty and ninety per cent. of the girls of this country leave school at

fourteen. I understand that the percentage in the case of boys is even higher. This fact modifies our ideas in many ways. Dwell on it, for a consideration of what is involved in the statement will teach us a great deal. I find difficulty here in refraining from placing emphasis on another fact; the majority of young women have turned naturally to paid employment for a number of years. But this is not the point that you want me to discuss. The formula which I must postulate without delay is that there is a change of attitude towards paid employment on the part of young women belonging to the class that a few years ago would have fainted at the idea. Do you suppose that wenches did not work in Shakespeare's day? Perhaps ladies did not. But there always have been so many, many fewer in the class where there was a choice, than in the class where paid employment, or rather working for someone else than your own family, was taken for granted. Having said so much, I shall try to leave this part of the subject alone.

It is undoubted that choice and necessity together are whispering to the girls of to-day that it is better to be up and doing somewhere in the world of work. Partly the great service idea of the war, partly an economic progression, in some part the ideas of a new age, have changed the attitude of women to employment. As far as one can see, this movement will strengthen steadily, and it will be good. It will not injure the home, but will serve it; and one may repeat the same statement word for word, for the race. I should like to ask doubters one question. Does anyone suppose that these young things, so attractive, so full of life and vitality, so guided by natural wisdom without being aware of it, do not know what they are doing? The flower of the race does not turn itself to destruction, but to the thing that is best for it. The circumstances of the average girl are such that she

has more opportunity to meet those who will be her friends by going to work than by doing nothing.

Now, as to the supposed dangers of this women's movement towards employment. Does it make the girl think less of having a home of her own and of marriage? How little anyone knows of womanhood, who would suppose this! Women are profoundly, if inarticulately, loyal to the race and to the home. The only dangerous person, one sometimes thinks, is the person with nothing to do. But this statement is neither here nor there. It would not be possible for the majority of women in paid employments to think more highly of home life than they do. Another danger sometimes spoken of may be put in the form of a question. Will the increase in the numbers of women in paid employment tend to lower the wages paid to men? Economically, an increase in production and in money earned should benefit everyone. Any question about wages is extremely difficult to answer. But I will venture to say this. Wages below a decent living standard paid either to men or to women are a national danger. There is evidence to show that one way to combat the tendency to pay low wages to women is to be found in this change of attitude towards work on the part of young women of well-to-do families. A woman who has placed thousands of girls in paid employment, when discussing this question the other day, said: "The girl who is accustomed to living well at home won't take low wages. She insists on getting the best that are paid. But the poor, little girl, whose necessities are great, and whose training is inadequate, will take anything." There is at least, it seems to me, great promise in the entry of all kinds of young women into skilled work. I believe that this tendency towards paid employment on the part of well-to-do women will eventually help to improve wages and working conditions for both men and

women. I think our experience in the war has shown this in some degree. I do not mean to give the impression that there are not problems to be solved: problems of wages, problems connected with opening higher positions to competent women, and problems which involve standards of right living, for which I believe the general body of women at home are more directly responsible than they are for wages or opportunities of employment. Why should not women investigate and make known the standards of living in our communities? They are the real experts on this subject.

Before we leave employment, I should like to give you two pictures. The first is a representation of a woman scrubbing out an office building after hours. She is not a new development in work. Get her picture in your minds. In time it will make something happen. The other is a group of young women discussing a subject in which they are interested. One of the group is a member of a Telegraphers' Union; the next is a teacher of better methods of salesmanship; the next a member of a Shop Clerks' Union; the next an employment expert. The subject under discussion was the form of organization most helpful to women workers. I ask you who will help the charwoman first: the young woman who is neither a home maker nor a paid worker, or the young woman who is a trained worker, either in the home or outside of it? If you are interested in the discussion referred to above, you may care to know that for the average girl, the form of organization favoured was the Club rather than the Union. The Union was warmly commended, and it was unanimously agreed that some form of organization is necessary.

After some investigation of relative wages for girls in Canada and the United States, I believe that there is evidence to show a better recognition in Canada of the righteous

of living wages for young girls. It has seemed to me that, although our wages may not go as high for special workers, they also do not fall as low for the girl beginning work. Minimum wage legislation has made considerable progress in Canada. I think that compared with other countries, higher positions in employment are more easily won by women in Canada. We have still much to achieve, but recognition, good feeling, and comradeship are often shown by men workers in Canada to women in the same employment.

With some sense of wonder we realize that there seems to be little need to speak of the franchise to-day. Women are now responsible citizens, responsible in every way, and perhaps while the roots of the franchise are being dug down in our lives, and the branches of the tree are spreading, the less we say the better. The franchise in Canada belongs to the women, and perhaps in the future to no other. We have a woman's franchise in Canada. I think it has been in the Canadian mind for always the wish to do something well for both sides of the fence for the whole. The subject of the political enfranchisement of women is interesting, but may be safely left for the abler analyst of to-morrow. Yet there is one note that the observer cannot refrain from jotting down in her field-book. The women who most keenly enjoyed casting their first votes in the Dominion election were not the young, nor even the middle-aged, but the old. There was something touching and most significant in the evident satisfaction of seventy or seventy-five when she cast her first ballot, and there was no sign that she had ever lifted a finger or spoken a word to get it for herself. Having jotted down the note, it may be added, however, in a spirit of frankness, that women are prepared to accept some responsibility for future legislation, not merely by voting, but by helping to draw up the legislation itself. But

the immediate power to be exercised by women politically is through the vote. If a woman feels that she owes her country much, in the degree that she has been well educated, by the inheritance she has from good parents, she can judge of the importance of her franchise. The better citizen she may be the more necessary it is that she should vote.

Now, not bravely, but as a trembling Child Roland, the writer has come to the Dark Tower. What of the women of to-morrow? Like three spans in a bridge, organization, employment, and the franchise seem to lead us safely over into the unknown country. There is no need to speculate about the eternal qualities in women, because they remain the same. All that the woman wants from organization, employment and the franchise is an opportunity to be more perfectly a woman, to develop to her full stature, whatever that may be, and not mainly for her own sake. Generally speaking, the work which the average woman most enjoys and that for which she has the most genius is helping other people to do their best work. This genius will not change. One of the wisest and best arguments regarding the finer relations between men and women in the future and their work together may be found in Professor McIver's book, "Community," and there I advise you to read it.

Possibly one of the consequences of this genius for helping others to do their best work is the characteristic failure at times by women to think of their own individual work as important. I cannot believe that in the To-morrow about which I have been given the task to write women will not consider their work more seriously, and bring to its advancement their powers of organization, the methods they have learned in employment, and the responsibilities of their citizenship. What could not women do if they organized to better child life? We hear about bureaus of scientific research, and

they are essential. But what about a bureau to study children, to utilize all the knowledge of mothercraft and to teach mothercraft? We could if we would save the lives of thousands of children in Canada every year. Is there not to be an organization to promote the training of girls for home-making and the care of children? The Home and School Council may develop in this way. Who was the controlling factor in food saving? Why not then one of the controlling factors in the production and consumption of food and in the controlling of food prices? No one but the consumer can carry out the duties of the consumer. If we understood, practised and taught the laws of health, what effect would this have on the community? One of the most colossal businesses in the world, if one can call anything a business which is unorganized, is buying carried on by women. Do any of us know what national or communal effect our buying has? We teach ourselves gradually to select what seems good to us and what we think we can afford to buy, but there ought to be some fundamental knowledge of this business which it is possible to acquire from instruction. What effect has the nature of our expenditure on the well-being of others? Housing is at least half a woman's problem. These are not questions which we can leave altogether for the woman of to-morrow; because the war has helped to teach us to think about them, and the women of to-morrow may never think of them at all. How do we know that they will? Over the bridge of organization, employment, and the franchise something that we do about better living will have to go.

These social advances cannot be made successfully unless women contribute their full share of expert study, thought, and effort. There is no substitute for a woman in child welfare, in the use of food, or in many other things. I do not know of any employment in the world

with wider horizons or greater possibilities than may be found in the study, investigation, the laboratory work and practice of the home employment. It is a question of retarding or advancing the well-being of the race. I do not suppose that praise was meant to have any part in this brief survey. But for my part, I am not afraid to trust the future, judging by what we have learned of the men and women of our own day. We are eager for the people of to-morrow to do better; but if the future is to excel the finest men and women, the boys and their sweethearts we have known, it will have to do its best.

Is there a reward that women as women may hope for through organization, employment, the franchise, and in taking up their work in a way which will make the world better? There should be an increase in individuality. There should be also a greater number of individuals of remarkable quality, of whom already we have a few examples in this country—comparatively brief history—Becker, Laura Secord, de Vérehères, Sarah Maxwell, and others whose names you will remember, who by being themselves did so much for all of us. How much we need this increase in individuality and these remarkable individuals, who can put into words! But by making a steadfast attempt at the greater work of the race, by trying to fill the need for the existence of these benefactors, we do make their coming more possible. It is not the people who talk about what may be done, but those who take an active part in the affairs of life, working out idealism—what we may call the better life—in practical concrete plans who merit our support and allegiance. Meanwhile, in preparation for the coming of these great people, what we have to do is to refrain from merely talking about the future, so that we may devote ourselves to concrete and practical