

WOMAN'S POLITICAL EDUCATIONAL LEAGUE.

AUGUST, 1904.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

DEAR FELLOW WOMEN,—

Our League has now been in existence two years, and we must review the work of the past year, which, although it has had its disappointments and trials, has also had its measure of comfort and progress.

The Council, composed of officers and delegates of branches, has met regularly once a month, and it is something to say, that although we may have differed now and then, there has never been any vexation or an angry word. It has been a real joy to work with such a Council. The work of Miss Wearne, the Honorary Corresponding Secretary, has as usual been beyond praise, and the amount of labor she has often undertaken cannot be too highly estimated. The work of our Treasurer, Mrs. Mainer, must also be spoken of, and the fact that we end our year without debt, and a favorable balance speaks for itself. Mrs. Mainer has also acted as Press Secretary, and also for a time represented Maitland.

An especial tribute must also be paid to Miss Bonney, who has had charge of all petitions, and has also conscientiously represented our branch at Armidale. Miss Bonney is one of those so earnest for a cause that she is always ready and willing to do anything to help.

The drudgery connected with any work must be done by someone, and happy is the organisation that finds its members willing to work for a cause, rather than any kudos which may be attached to that cause.

Our monthly meetings and lectures have been regularly held, except January, when we had our recess. In December we had a debate on the Reduction of Members, between Mr. Levy and Mr. Hall, and it certainly appears as if the words of Mr. Hall had been verified, and the wiser way would have been to get Local Government first and afterwards the reduction of members. The cart has been put before the horse, and the horse so far appears absolutely stationary.

In February, Canon Boyce gave us an eloquent address on the drink question, a question of vital importance to the community, and which was the more interesting as at the "At Home" given by us at the Alliance Rooms to all members in November, we had heard other speakers on the same subject. Personally, I should like to see the question of Local Option adopted by our League in all its branches.

At the end of February we had a lecture from Mr. Wise on "Preferential Trade." Opposed as I am personally to this measure, I feel that we cannot claim to be "Educational" unless we honestly listen to both sides of every great question. In March, Alderman Fitzgerald lectured for us upon the "Municipal future of Sydney," another subject of great importance which deserves far more attention than is at present given to it. Gladly in April did we welcome our grand old woman of Australia, Miss Spence, and we must hope that her lecture upon "Infant Protection" and Juvenile Courts will never cease to be an inspiration to us to gain in New South Wales the same conditions that prevail in South Australia.

On the following night we welcomed Miss Spence to a Conversazione, which was also honored by the members of all parties in Parliament.

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In May, Mr. A. J. Sampson lectured upon "Political Education." In June, Hon. Mr. Hughes upon "Political Finance." In July we had an evening to review the political situation and to condemn the odious system of Party Government. In August, I was grieved to miss, through illness, the lecture given by Sir James Graham on "Women in Politics." In September, Dr. Mercer, Bishop of Tasmania, lectured for us upon Woman's Influence in Politics, and we were glad to hear him condemn the system of party politics. The Tasmanian League of Women eschew party politics just as we do, and the Women of New Zealand do the same. In October, Mr. C. Von Hagen lectured for us upon the "Evils of Land Alienation." All these meetings have been open to the general public, and have been educational not only to ourselves but to the public. We might feel disheartened when we realise how many reforms need our help, but that in looking back over past years, we can see that to work steadfastly for a few things at a time has had good results, and that although reforms are slowly gained, yet if they are all gained and seeds of thought continually sown there is progress, and each new field of work and energy should inspire us to fresh effort and enthusiasm. At Miss Spence's lecture we passed a resolution urging the passing of the "State Children's Bill." At Dr. Mercer's lecture we passed a resolution in favor of this Bill, also the Infants' Protection Bill, the Criminal Amendment Act, and the raising of the age of consent for young girls. The Attorney-General has promised to pass the Criminal Amendment Act as a Government measure. We also circularised all the branches with regard to these four bills, sending petitions to them to sign; begging them to ask the support of their local member in the House. We also sent circulars to all candidates for State elections re these four Bills, and received from members of all parties in the House promising support. The branches did good work in getting up petitions and interviewing local members, with the result that so far a great number of petitions have been sent to the House in favor of the Infants' Protection Bill, which we hope will soon become law.* We also placed our petitions and literature re Bills in the hands of other leagues not belonging to us, with the result that some of these petitions were also sent into the House, notably Erskineville and Lawson. We must show equal energy with the other three Bills. I am glad to say, with regard to the Criminal Amendment Act and the State Children's Bill, the Discharged Prisoners' Association (of which I am a member) has now had a satisfactory deputation to Mr. Wade.

The long recess of the State Parliament, and then the elections, have greatly militated against any real work being done in Parliament this year, but we must hope that next year will see many of the measures passed that we now advocate.

At both Federal and State elections we issued manifestos urging women to keep away from sectarianism and party politics, and to work for the interests of women and children which have been so long neglected. Many who saw no reason in this warning have since assured me that they are now quite convinced through bitter experience, of the necessity for women (who desire to work for reform in a whole-hearted manner) to keep apart from the factions and fights of men, and many leading politicians have assured me that they are convinced we are right, and even some newspapers, notably the *Age*, in Melbourne, have openly spoken against the evils of Party Government, and the wretched state of affairs which it engenders. Let us always remember those words of John Morley: "The history of reform is the history of minorities," and even if we find ourselves in a minority let us stand by our ideals, for we may be sure that right will triumph in the end, and it is something to have been amongst the pioneers against existing evil, and to hold ones own against the clamour of an unthinking majority. Our place as women is not that of camp followers to a corrupt system of party politics, but as women to be man's inspiration to higher and nobler methods of governing a country. The blind worship of man and his methods never did any man good, although it may soothe his vanity, but to help man to realise his ideals is the work of every true woman. I have spoken of this in particular, as we have to mourn the loss of two branches, St. George and Katoomba, who went over to party politics. Attempts were made to get our other branches away, but they stood firm. The Glen Innes branch appears to have lapsed upon the departure of our energetic secretary, and Lithgow seems unable to get on without Miss Padley, who had to resign on account of ill-health. Penrith was formed in December. With regard to distant branches, many difficulties face your President, as the women often seem timid when left to themselves, and want re-visiting, which is not always possible. I would say to them, "Courage, dear women; think more of yourselves." If you cannot speak you can do what is far better—you can work. Have quiet home meetings, and let each one feel that they are of importance to the cause, and that it is always individual

* It passed in December, 1904, and is now law.

labour which accomplishes great things. Our year's record may not show one Bill passed yet, but it shows that we have been steady and continuous in our efforts, and all these efforts help to mould public opinion, and to do this well is the greatest of all reformations. Through the sympathy of Mr. Garvin, the new Inspector-General of Police, one more Police Matron was appointed to the Water Police Station. We had long been trying to get one there for the women prisoners, who wait there on their way from gaol to Biloela. The Inspector-General has also put a stop to women and men travelling in the same police van to gaol, a state of affairs which many years ago we complained of in vain. Your President took Mrs. Gough, of Melbourne, round to the cells one night, and that lady saw and heard much that would be of use to the work in Melbourne, things being so much better here. One great pleasure we had was to hear a sergeant of police, who had always been opposed to police matrons, say, "Well, Miss Scott, you were right and I was wrong; it is a great improvement having police matrons!" In the release of Ethel Herring, we were glad to have aided the people of Cowra and Grenfell. Your President has visited and spoken to the branches of North Sydney, Chatswood, Hurstville and Penrith, and in May took a long journey to visit the branch at Casino, and held two meetings, receiving a most kind welcome from the branch, and also lecturing at Lismore. Penrith, Windsor, St. Mary's, and Helensburgh had also been visited, and lectures given by request also to the Erskineville Woman's Franchise League, and St. Stephen's Girls' Friendly Society, and also to the University Woman's Association. Your President has lectured especially with regard to the Bills *re* women and children. Papers have been written for the National Council of Women both here and in Melbourne. Many requests were made to your President to speak for candidates at election time, but were all refused, although an invitation to speak on the four Bills we are all interested in was accepted for Mr. H. Hawthorne's meeting at Leichhardt, and in July lectures for the same purpose, and to stir women up to value the vote, were delivered at Carcoar (2), Cowra (2), Mandurama, Lyndhurst, Woodstock, Grenfell (2), Mr. Millen's selection and Bambaldry—eleven meetings in one week! Splendid audiences, kind-hearted people—a visit full of pleasant remembrances. Mrs. Hazleton, at Grenfell, was the moving spirit there, and Ethel Herring's letter was read at Grenfell before hundreds of people. The dear bush people not only thanked your President in the usual way for coming up, but gave three hearty cheers as well after the meeting. The visit could not be regretted, although the cold was intense and the work in so short a time too much, so that on her return your President found herself ill and sternly forbidden by the doctor to vote on August 6th,—our first vote for the State!

A vote of thanks was sent to Dr. Ross on the passing of the Juvenile Smoking Suppression Bill. We feel greatly interested in the Inebriate Act, and long to see the hospital up the Hawkesbury in good working order and ready to receive those who should not be herded with criminals. Another building which we long to see in working order is the prison for women at Long Bay, the prison at Biloela being a disgrace to New South Wales.

PEACE AND ARBITRATION.

I must say I should like to see our League bound to the grand principle of peace and arbitration. The present war is not only a disgrace to the twentieth century, but it is also a disgrace to all humanity, and shows that public opinion is almost in the gutter as far as war is concerned, and in this connection let us pay a tribute to our King, whose birthday it is to-day—we may well be proud of a King who with tact, sympathy and commonsense, is doing all he can to stem the tide of Jingoism and to unite nations by peaceful and wise treaties. Let us also pay a tribute to one who has passed away—Elice Hopkins—noble and heroic woman, who never ceased to raise her voice against the unequal moral standard which prevails in the world, and never ceased to strive in all countries to raise the age of protection for young girls, that question which above all other questions should be nearest our hearts. Let me urge upon all that we want more workers, more friends who would hold drawing-room and cottage meetings, more who would willingly give donations besides the little subscription of 1s. a year. The labourers are always few in the vineyard, and some stand outside and think they are not needed; but they are needed, for the work is quite beyond the few, and every fresh worker lightens the burden and refreshes the spirits of those who are only too glad to welcome a new comrade.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN.

I should like to say a word to you about the National Council of Women, with whom we are now affiliated. It is an organisation composed of organisations, and of international and world-wide influence. All races, religions, and classes meet as equals. It does not seek to exalt one nation at the expense of another, for all nations belong to it. Congresses are held every five years; the first was in America, where the Council originated; the next in England; the third, only this year, in Berlin, where three thousand women went to attend its meetings.

Canada hopes to be the meeting place of the next Congress, and there thirty-five nations will be represented. These are merely outside facts. The national result of facts such as these is that the International Council stands for "Peace and Arbitration" as opposed to War, also for Equal Political Rights for Men and Women; third, for the abolition of the "White Slave Traffic," and an "Equal Moral Standard for Both Sexes." There are committees to further these objects in every nation, committees also on the laws concerning Women, Education, Professions, etc. The information gathered is distinctly valuable.

The effect on public opinion is also valuable, and more valuable is the effect on the minds and hearts of women, who are bound together by ties of sympathy regardless of race or creed or class. They gain in knowledge and mental growth, have higher ideals and deeper personal responsibility, and become, in Lady Aberdeen's words, "More enthusiastic for the service of humanity." It is a great thing to belong to this Council, and a great thing to help to bring the Council in New South Wales into line with the Councils all over the world.

Your President represents the question of Peace and Arbitration, and Laws affecting Women and Children upon the Council of New South Wales, so I hope as a league you will feel we were right to affiliate with this great body of women, which appears to me to be the grandest organisation in all the world.

DECLINING BIRTHRATE.

There is also another subject it behoves me to speak of, and which has raised a whirlwind of talk and superficial comment, and that is "The declining birthrate," and its report. A Commission composed of men only, a report in which the only evidence printed was such as these men approved of, a commission which, like Adam of old, wound up very contentedly with assuring the public that everything was the fault "Of the woman thou gavest to be with me." My friends, so long as men keep up the demand for a supply of thousands and thousands of women in every city, who are to lead degraded lives, apart from the sphere of wife and mother, so long can they take the blame to themselves of a terrible evil which influences the birthrate not only directly but indirectly in three different ways—disease, selfishness, and immorality. Women, whether as wives or outcasts, being sacrificed physically and morally. An instinct has been given to secure and protect the race. Quality should be placed before quantity, for population as population can be of no benefit to a country. A population should be one of worth, physically, mentally, and morally. What do we see?—thousands of little children handicapped as illegitimates, sick weaklings—a population of drunkards, idiots, criminals, lunatics! Slums where neglected children swarm, half-castes, the vast and ever-increasing army of unemployed, and worse still the women and girls who walk the streets at night! What does it mean? It means that licensed or unlicensed vice can only mean evil, and that a really great nation can only be built by inculcating the virtues of self-control and purity. It is not a question of many people or few people, but a question of what sort of people, and what sort of environment? Let us not add to the wrongs of children by adding insult to injury and publicly declaring that the one question is that they should be born—never mind how. We think more of our plants, our flowers, our animals, than we do of our children.

And now in conclusion, friends and fellow workers, I can only say that we must still work on. Each individual unit is responsible for a certain share in the weaving of the fabric of our present history. Let each determine to do their part well and truly, and with enthusiasm, for, as Emerson tells us, "No cause was ever won without enthusiasm." The very spirit of our League is individual responsibility; think for yourselves, belong to no party, accept no dictation as to your vote. Develop your own intellect, and your own heart and soul, and think for yourselves. Let us remember always that:

"Not in the clamour of the crowded street;
Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng—
But in ourselves are triumph and defeat."

9th November, 1904.

ROSE SCOTT.