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NATIONAL FEDERATION OF WOMEN'S INSTITUTES.

(Established in conjunction with the Women's Branch
Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, London, S.W.1.)

“For Home and Country.”

The first Women's Institute was started in Canada about 22 years ago. A little group of countrywomen met in order to discuss how best they could lighten the loneliness of their lot, and help to make life better and brighter for the children that were growing up in the farmsteads.

This group of women formed themselves into a Women's Institute, and met at each other's houses at fixed intervals to enjoy social intercourse, and to determine how they could secure the various improvements their homes and the district required.

Very soon the homes and the farms showed what changes could be accomplished through the efforts of an organised band of intelligent women. This example inspired other women, and before long numbers of Women's Institutes were started in Canada and the States. Now Old England is taking a lesson from her Daughter of the Snows.

Mrs. Watt, from British Columbia, started the first Institute in this country at Llanfairpwll in September, 1915, under the direction of the Agricultural Organisation Society, after which the movement spread rapidly through England and Wales.

On the 18th of October, 1917, the Board of Agriculture took over the propaganda of the movement, and placed it under the Women's Branch of the Food Production Department. Food Production, Food Conservation and Food Economy were the chief activities of the Institutes during the war, and while they must be continued other developments will naturally take place as local requirements demand.

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An Institute is a democratic body. The Committee is elected by the members, and should be representative of all the women in a village. Each member must do her best to make the Institute a success, for on the efforts of all success depends.

Englishwomen must demonstrate that the quiet village has attractions that need fear no comparison with those of the town. Every man or woman has an individual duty to the community, and a Women's Institute helps each woman to realise how much she can do to make her village life good and pleasant. The monthly meeting is devoted to subjects of interest and of recreation; pleasure and profit are mingled, and any schemes which commend themselves to the members can be discussed. Local Authorities recognise that the Institutes are important factors in rural development. In more than one instance the Institute has been consulted as to the class of house required in the district.

Every member must give of her best. The successful jam maker tells her secret recipe, the best bread maker demonstrates the reason for the lightness of her loaves, the bee-keeper gives a practical talk on the wonders of the hive, the shoe-mender shows how boots and shoes can be mended, the student of the parish reveals the treasures of local history; in fact, any subject that appeals to the members can be dealt with, and classes can be arranged, if the wish to have them is strong enough to overcome initial difficulties.

It is impossible to enumerate all the activities undertaken by the Institutes, but increased cultivation of field and garden, pig-keeping, goat-keeping, rabbit-keeping, bee-keeping, cheese-making, jam and fruit bottling, Communal Kitchens, toy, hat or basket-making, co-operative marketing and egg-collecting are some of the efforts engaging attention.

The Institute Committee is guided by the will and determination of the Institute members, and a body of women animated by the desire to develop all their resources cannot fail to succeed.

September, 1919.

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