

CHAT

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The League of Nations Union.

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WOMEN AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

BY

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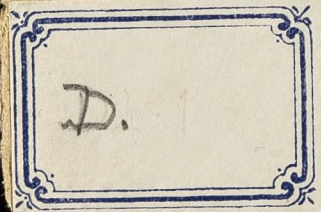
[Mrs. McArthur holds the position of Secretary of the Women's Liberal Association and is widely known for her Social and Political work. She is the daughter of the late James Ashcroft Noble, and began her work in life as a Mistress in the Liverpool Preparatory School for Boys, but gave up teaching for Journalism under Mr. A. E. Fletcher, Editor of the "New Age." Secretarial work, however, attracted her, and she became associated in this capacity with the Froebel Society, then with the Childrens' Country Holiday Fund, and finally, of the Women's Liberal Association. She is an enthusiast for the League of Free Nations, and is on the Committee of the Association.]

THERE are many subjects on which we women disagree, but there is one which unites us all, whatever our politics, religion, or social standing; we all alike cherish the hope that neither we nor our children shall ever again experience war.

During the last four years women have worked together on committees, and in offices and munition works, and on the land, and we have suffered and mourned together, but in the strain of work and the loneliness of grief we have been sustained by the thought that we were working, not only to help our country win this particular war, but to bring nearer the ideal of peace between nations; "to make the world safe for democracy," as President Wilson finely expresses it.

The League of Nations cannot be postponed.

The very existence of the League of Free Nations Association, with its various activities, is a proof that



that ideal has not only been brought nearer, but is within the range of practical politics. The idea of such a League is being talked about everywhere; our ablest writers and statesmen are pressing for it; meetings are being held on it—especially women's meetings, and women are discussing it among themselves and in their families. To some it is still a question for the future—some "far-off divine event," too difficult to be tackled in war-time. Others, impressed with the need for urgency, hope vaguely that someone will see that something is done soon, but feel that they themselves are too busy with war-work to help at present.

How to prevent the next War.

There are not many, perhaps, who realise even dimly that the next war, when it comes, will far exceed in diabolical cruelty and horror anything experienced in our time, and that that cruelty and horror may fall upon the little ones who are growing up around us to-day. When it is a question of life and death not one of us can afford to stand aside; over-worked, war-weary as we are, we must put our backs into this movement for the sake of our children even more than for our own. "Yes," you may say, "that's all very well, but anything that I could do would be a mere drop in the bucket." You will remember what we were taught when we were children: "Little drops of water, little grains of sand, make a mighty ocean and a pleasant land." In other words, if it wasn't for the "drops" there would be no "ocean"; for let us make no mistake about it, this League of Nations will come into existence when, and not until, the inhabitants of our country (which means you and me) and other countries have worked to bring it about.

The need for Study.

In spite of all that has been written and said in support of it, there are still many people who are not convinced that it has to be. And even those of us who are convinced have much to learn of the difficulties which surround the whole question. It will not be a simple matter to form a League of Nations even when we are all agreed as to the sort of League we want. So one useful piece of work which every woman can do, however busy she may be, is to get literature about it, study it herself, and get others to do so too when the opportunity occurs. Plenty can be had from the League of Free Nations' Association.

Meetings should be held on it.

Most women nowadays belong to some society or other. Let us see to it that, without any delay, a meeting of our own society is arranged on this question. Conservative, Liberal and Labour Associations, Women's Citizen Associations, Women's Co-operative Guilds, Mothers' Unions, Temperance Societies, Pleasant Monday Evenings, Workers' Education Associations, Christian Endeavours, Debating Societies,—all should have this, the most urgent question of our time, brought before them. There will be no difficulty about speakers, for help can be obtained, if necessary, from the League of Free Nations Association. And if, in addition, you are able to join the Association yourself, and get others to do so too, you will be promoting the League of Nations in a very direct and practical way.

Our duty at the General Election.

Those of us who are voters can do still more. Although more men than women are on the Register of Voters, it is possible that, owing to the absence of our men at the Front, as many women as men, if not more, may record their votes. Our responsibility, therefore, at the next General Election, will be very great, when every constituency will probably have a number of candidates seeking to represent it. In deciding which candidate to support, let us all bear in mind the urgency and vital importance of the League of Nations, and refrain from voting for anyone who is not convinced of its necessity. "But," you may say, "would it not be more practical to help men to get into Parliament who will devote their energies mainly to securing better housing, cheaper food and clothing, fairer wages, and all the other reforms which affect women so vitally?" Well, the answer to that is, that we must get our League of Nations started first, and all the rest shall be added unto us.

The Alternative to the League.

Suppose, for instance, that the war ends with nothing done to form the League, no plans made to that end, and militarism still the creed of the rulers of Germany. All our efforts would then have to be concentrated in sheer self-defence on preparations to meet the next blow, and our hopes and plans for better housing and the like would stand small chance of fulfilment. To those women who have worked for their enfranchisement it will be easy to give supremacy to one

idea, and if we are discouraged by the very magnitude of the task let us ask ourselves what is the alternative? Surely nothing less than the continuance of many of the worst conditions under which we are living now, ever becoming heavier and more cruel in their pressure. "Man was born free," said Rousseau, "but is everywhere in chains." Let us not submit willingly to fresh fetters, but help our country to strike off some of those which are strangling freedom all over the world.

Not a Party question.

In giving the first place to this question we need have no fear that we shall be voting against our party. All parties must adopt it or cease to exist for lack of support. It is not a party question nor even merely a national question, for our Empire must join with other nations to promote it, or be menaced with extinction. It is a question which unites the civilised peoples of the world, who must bring it about or perish. Surely this is a cause which we women will find it supremely worth while to work for, into which we can throw all our energies with enthusiasm, even if we have to sacrifice other interests for a time until the goal is reached.

Our dead are relying on us.

And another thought will inspire and encourage us—the memory of our dead, who gave their lives to stem the tide of barbarism which still threatens to engulf us, unless we all do our part. Do they not cry to us from their resting places, "We are trusting to you to finish the work which we began, and we believe you will not fail us"?