

Outside the Gates.

WOMEN.

THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COUNCILS OF WOMEN.



THE part which the many play in the evolution of each idea is well illustrated in the history of the development of the National and International Councils of Women. Twelve years ago, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, visiting France and England, suggested holding in Washington, D.C., an International Convention of Women, interested in obtaining the franchise for their sex, recommending this as a peculiarly appropriate method for celebrating the then approaching fortieth anniversary of the famous first Women's Rights Convention, which was held in Seneca Falls, New York. Received into Susan B. Anthony's mind, the idea expanded into that of celebrating the fortieth anniversary by holding an international meeting of all kinds of associations of women, educational, religious and philanthropic, as well as political, as these undoubtedly owed their existence to the work done by the heroines of Seneca Falls forty years ago. Passed on to the brain of May Wright Sewall, the idea added to itself the thought of permanence and extension; and, when the time came for the Washington celebration, Mrs. Sewall unfolded to her associates a plan providing for triennial gatherings in Council of the delegates from women's organisations in the United States, and for a quinquennial Council to be composed of delegates from the national associations in every part of the world. Meeting with favourable receptions from the representatives of various organisations of women in seven European Countries, and of twenty-nine organisations of women in the United States, then convened at Washington, the enlarged idea was put into definite shape by a Committee chosen to prepare the formal constitutions for these permanent bodies; and, before the delegates separated, the constitutions were accepted, officers chosen, and a recommendation adopted that the general officers of the National Council should at once issue an address to the women of the United States, setting forth the object of the new organisation; and that those of the International Council should endeavour to secure the co-operation of women in various countries, irrespective of race or creed, in this movement for the promotion of sisterly understanding, sympathy and love.

Time has already verified the faith which led the Constitution Committee to report, "We are strongly in favour of such a Federation, believing it will incalculably increase the world's sum total of womanly courage, efficiency, and *esprit de corps*; that it will widen our horizon, correct the tendency to an exaggerated impression of one's own work as compared with that of others, and put the wisdom and experience of each at the service of all."

The National Council of Women of the United States is, in one sense, to the national societies of women of which it is formed what the United States Congress is to the various States of the Union—not at

all a superior body, or a governing body exacting tribute, but a body instituted to promote sympathy and co-operation between all these associations, to provide a mutual conference ground upon which representatives from every organization in the country may meet for interchange of thought and plans of work. Therefore, as stated in its constitution, no society in entering the Council is in any way interfered with as respects its own complete organic unity, nor is it committed to any principle or method of any other society, or to any act or utterance of the Council itself. This constitution was intentionally made both brief and elastic, to allow play for the action of many women of many minds in its future expansion.

What this is meant to be to the organizations in one country, the International Council is designed to be to the various countries of the world—a common ground for acquaintance, consultation and mutual improvement, an institution established purely for that promotion of peace and good-will upon earth which has steadily increased with each increase of acquaintanceship between nations. Although but a few short years have passed since the International Council idea was born in Washington, already the women of France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada have each completed their organization of a National Council by gathering together representatives from the hitherto isolated associations in their respective countries, and several other countries have begun the canvass for a similar purpose.

The convocation of the International Council in 1888 was like a great tidal wave dashing away at one sweep many of the outposts of obstruction, which have so long hindered woman's progress towards perfect freedom. The gathering in Council of women of the most radically diverse habits of mind, with opportunity for each to advocate her own views of life, worked greater good for the spread of truth than forty years of ordinary education. The woman, reared in a secluded province, regarding it only legitimate for a woman to work for religion, now met face to face and learned to know and respect the woman who regarded politics as a most sacred part of her religion. She who had come to consider woman's welfare solely dependent upon the possession of the ballot, heard how largely educational and industrial conditions influence social changes, which the ballot is powerless to control. The conservative woman who had hitherto shunned organizations formed solely for reformatory purposes, choosing for herself clubs in which the literary and social idea had chief prominence, was now enabled to compare notes with her radical opposite who had hitherto shunned, as a snare and a delusion, societies not linked to some sacred pledge for specific social reconstruction. And, as these widely different human factors listened to the numerous sides of human thought, more and more was strengthened the idea that, "Where no counsel is, the people fall (into narrowness); but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." Such was the feeling embodied in the preamble of the constitution of the permanent National and International Councils:—"Sincerely believing that the best good of humanity will be advanced by greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose, we hereby bind ourselves together in a confederation of workers committed to the overthrow of all forms of ignorance and injustice, and to the appli-

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