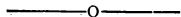


Practical Help Leaflet No. 1.



“The Battle of Womanhood is the Battle for the Race.”

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOMAN'S MEETING ORGANIZED
AND CONDUCTED IN THE TOWN OF
TUSKEGEE, ALA.,

—BY—

MRS. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON.

IN the spring of '92, the first Negro Conference for Farmers was held at Tuskegee, Ala. The purpose of this conference was to inspire the masses of colored people to secure homes of their own, to aim after better ways of living, to insist upon better educational advantages, an extension of their school term and so raise the standard of living morally, physically, intellectually and financially.

Sitting in that first meeting of Negro Farmers, hearing the resolutions which stood as the platform of the Conference, I felt that, as in the day of Lucretia Mott and the early struggle of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, women were not included in the word people and notwithstanding the fact that there were many women present at that first Conference, they had no actual part in it and they did not realize that they

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This was the thought which came up and would not be stilled. What can these poor farmers do with new hopes, the new aspirations, the new ideas for better things unless the women whom they have left behind at home and to whom they must return are equally inspired and educated, for these conferences are educative.

It was not many days before it was a settled purpose that somehow these women in the homes represented by the farmers must be reached. How to reach and help them was a more difficult question to be settled, but after many sleepless nights and weary days of longing and praying for some way to open, it finally came. As I lay thinking of it all the thought came, this village is a good one in which to begin the work. The country women, tired of the monotony of their lives came into the village every Saturday in crowds. As there was no place in the whole village where they too had a most prominent part to play in the life which their husbands, their sons, and their lovers were being urged to seek,

might be gathered for an hour or more each Saturday and instructed?—like a flash the idea was caught up and was not let go until such a place was secured.

Our first Conference was held in the upper story of a very dilapidated store which stands on the main street of the village—The stairs leading to the room were so rickety that we were often afraid to ascend them. The room was used by the Colored Fireman of the village and was a dark and dreary place with nothing even inviting to me. It answered our purpose for the time. We had no rent to pay and this was one less of its burdens to us.

How to get the women to the first meeting was not easily settled, for fear of opposition from friends no mention had been made of the plan except to the man who let me have the room. That first Saturday I walked up the stairs alone and sat down in that room in all of its dreariness, my heart almost failed me and not until I remembered these words, “No man having put his hands to

the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God," did I throw off the despondency. At this moment a small boy entering the room and I said to him go through the streets and say to each woman so that no one will hear you, There is a woman up those stairs who has something for you.

That first meeting I can never forget. There were six women who came and each one as she looked at me seemed to say; "Where is it?" We talked it all over, the needs of our women, the best way of helping each other and there was begun the First Women Conference which now numbers 229 women.

We now have a large roomy hall on the main street where we come together each Saturday and spend two hours talking of the things which go to make better and truer lives among women and children. Women come long distances on foot to these meetings. They brought along their little girls that they could not afford to leave at home, and here was another question—What to do with

their children—A plan was hit upon and another room was hired, and these girls now fifty in number are taught simple lessons and at the same time receive little practical talks on behavior at home, in the streets and elsewhere. We also have a little library for them and each one is allowed to draw the books she wants, to keep two weeks or longer. We also have picture books on the table for the younger children. We are now trying to get games for these children and pictures for the walls of their room. A friend gives us two hours of her time on Saturday for these children, and it delights one's heart to see the improvement in the children in all directions especially in the manner of talking and laughing aloud in the streets. *

It is often remarked by the villagers that there has been a marked improvement among the women in the manner of dress. They are doing away with the wrapping of the hair, and substituting for it, braiding or some other simple arrangement. The women no lon-

ger go bare-footed, nor do they sit around the streets in a listless way. There is less familiarity of the women and men in the streets and in many ways the women are being lead to better ways of action to say nothing of the home improvements and the closer union of family life.

We visit the homes of the women and thus see that the lessons are put into practice. We have given out thousands of papers and picture cards in order that the cracks might be closed against the wind and the rain, and so that the children of the homes might have something besides the dark cheerless logs to look at.

Very few of the women can tell how old they are. We have them tell some incident which occurred about the time they were born and in this way, together we determine their ages. They are always so delighted to be somewhat sure of how old they are. We have been visited by Mrs. Edna D. Cheney of Boston, a woman who has all along inspired me in this work for women, Sister Mary

Moore, a woman who has and is still giving her life to the Colored women of the plantations, Mrs. Victoria Earle Matthews, one of our own noble women, Mrs. Hobson the sister of Levi P. Morton, Mrs. Hopkins, the daughter-in-law of Mark Hopkins, Bishop Tanner and others, all of whom feel with us that in some such way as this the women have got to be instructed.

From the meetings here in this village others have sprung up in different parts of the States of the South. There should be such a Conference in every plantation community and until there is, we cannot expect a great deal from the masses of the people.

Wherever, in the country, by chance we are thrown, we organize such a Conference. We long for the time when there will be such Conferences, not made by chance but systematically organized and sustained.

The women are beginning to see the importance of these Conferences, and are doing all that is in their power to promote the in-

terest of them. Our talks for the year ending May '96 are on the following subjects:—

Morals among young girls.

The kinds of amusements for young girls.

A mother's example.

A mother's duty to her home.

Dress for women and children.

Poultry raising for women.

The part a woman should take in securing a home.

Fruit Canning etc.

Many of the subjects are suggested by the women themselves and are afterwards worded for them so that they read intelligently.

We are now preparing a little book which will have in a compact form their talks. Many women cannot reach these Conferences. They are so far away and the books may be of some help to them.

These books are to contain little receipts which any woman may need in her country home, especially when there is sickness in the family. Work for the masses is always more difficult than that for the individual but somehow I believe it must and will be done, for it is they who must rise. 90 per cent of our women have their homes in the country on the plantations. They live in the old time log cabins but they have hearts, they have aspirations for the future. Let us teach them along these simple lines of family life, of home getting, home making and thus instill the thought that upon them rests the future of the coming generations.

HINTS FOR ORGANIZING WOMEN'S CONFERENCES.

Civilization has made patent to all the vital influence and responsibility of motherhood. Past condition has hampered present circumstances attending the training of hundreds of our children. Thoughtlessness, helplessness and indifference on the one hand, and looks of pity and expressions of regret or of dull apathy on the other, must give way to action; for I believe the time has come when the mother and the teacher must be of greater mutual benefit to each other.

As the child's ideas of life are broadened through contact with the teacher, so must the mother's be. The mother, in her turn, listens, is impressed and responds to counsel and suggestions. She feels the importance and necessity of her duty to her family, and through this, aids the teacher in fixing the principles she would teach the child, and thus teaching is made easier, and all concerned better and happier.

In pursuance of these ideas, I send out these hints and plans, that I have found through experience, to be exceedingly helpful in organizing home union meetings for mothers.

I call upon every woman who teaches in the State of Alabama, to join me in thus uplifting and inspiring the mothers of our girls and boys. Such is my confidence in those on whom I call, that I am sure no woman will be slow to action in this cause of making womanhood truer and purer, and home better.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ORGANIZATION.

First, to avoid denominational feeling creeping in, select the school house or a central place. Decide upon a definite time for calling a meeting, and then send notice to the mothers by the school children.

Be there yourself promptly, open with singing and Scripture reading, and this will make it easier to do in all succeeding meetings.

Impress the women with the importance of an organization. Get them to express their ideas; refrain from severe comment; take note, and useful subject matter may be secured for future use.

Take names of those who attend and appoint each a committee of one to bring another. Have a roll-call at each meeting.

Have a stated time for future meetings. Sunday or Saturday afternoon is a good time, for the cares of the week are over, or nearly so.

If you haven't a permanent place for holding meetings, decide where you will hold the next before you close each.

Don't be easily discouraged over lack of interest or seeming indifference. Be patient, and you will succeed.

AFTER ORGANIZATION.

Once every three or six months have a general meeting, with simple refreshments, such as can be gotten in a country village.

Now and then an experience meeting may be held to an advantage to all. Encourage the women to talk freely of their own ways and plans.

Find out by judicious visiting if there is advancement made.

Systematize these visits, but let it be known to yourself alone, to avoid preparation on the part of those visited.

Don't expect too much in a short time, and above all, don't dictate this or that while visiting, nor be personal in meetings when you wish to deal with mistakes that you see in homes visited.

If possible, take some journal for women. Let it be their property. You and they will receive inspiration in this way.

If, in the course of time, you leave one neighborhood, put the work into the hands of the strongest woman, and keep up your interest and influence over the meetings by regular correspondence with the organization.

Leave your work among the women in such an orderly way that any other teacher coming in may take it up; for surely no teacher will fail to do her part in this direction.

Give out subject matter weekly for the meeting following. Have a motto for each, and let song and Scripture bear on same subject, as per formula.

FORMULA.

Motto.—Pray for us unto the Lord thy God, that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do. Jer. xlii, 2-3.

Song.—“Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us.”

Subject.—How to correct falsehood and theft among girls and boys.

SUBJECTS FOR TALKS.

THE RELATION OF WOMEN TO HOME.

- (a). How to keep home neat and tidy.
- (b). How to make home attractive to children and husband.
- (c). Amusements, music and reading in the home circle.
- (d). Is it necessary to teach the girls to do good by teaching them how to do house work, cooking and sewing.

THE RELATION OF MOTHERS TO THEIR CHILDREN.

- (a). How to gain the confidence of children.
- (b). How to correct falsehood and theft among boys and girls.
- (c). Is there not a share in the home for the boys?
- (d). To teach boys and men to respect women generally, by teaching them to respect mothers and sisters.
- (e). Mothers' authority in selecting company of her sons and daughters.
- (f). When a girl should be allowed to receive company? How can a mother help her to avoid mistakes as regards the young man she loves?
- (g). How can a spirit of usefulness to older persons be created in children?

RELATION OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO EACH OTHER.

- (a). The consequences of occupying the same room or bed.
- (b). A boy will exact modesty in other women, when he has seen it in his sister and mother.
- (c). Is it important to teach the brother to protect the sister? Will it not teach him to protect other women?

THE RELATION OF FATHER AND MOTHER TO THEIR CHILDREN.

- (a). Should there be a definite understanding between father and mother regarding the care and training of the children?
- (b). What part should a woman take with her husband in securing a home or a piece of land on which to build one?

DRESS.

- (a). Is it not time to supplant the slave, homespun dress, for the neat calico?

(b). What is the effect upon the face when the hair is wrapped with all colored strings? Why not plait it or arrange it in some other more becoming way?

Should women go barefooted?

(c). Love of gaudy dress for children. What will be the result when they are older and cannot afford to buy the same sort?

(d). Appearance and manner on the street.

DIET.

(a). Necessity of varying diet for the family.

(b). Economy in the house as regards food.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN RELATION TO THEIR CHURCH.

(a). The mother's relation to the minister.

(b). How the family should go to church. Isn't it better if all go together and sit together, too?

(c). How can boys and girls be taught the habit of giving to the church and charitable purposes?

GENERAL TOPICS.

Relation of mothers to teachers.

What lessons can be drawn from Thanksgiving Day, New Year's and Christmas?

How may mothers and their daughters best resist men who attempt to rob them of their honor and virtue for themselves and others?

The best way to inspire children to purity of thought, of speech and of action, at home and abroad.

The importance of ventilation, proper food and cleanliness of body on the moral atmosphere of the home.

The proper duty of mothers in having the family table set with care at the usual time.

How far is a mother responsible for the wrong-doing of her children?