

Youth Organizations, and Household Life

IN EARLIER TIMES women did a good deal of the farm work besides their care of the household. In the north there are still places where the men consider dealing with the cattle beneath their dignity, and some farmers' wives do most of the milking, both by hand and machine. However, this is changing rather rapidly.

Off the Farm Movement

For a long time there has been a movement towards the towns, particularly among the young women. The reasons are that there are more entertainments, lighted streets, picture houses, dances, etc. There are also more regular and shorter working hours, higher wages, and more comfortable dwellings with up-to-date equipment of every kind. It must be pointed out here that the government has favored the townspeople in building schemes and subsidies. I do not say that nothing has been done for the countryside, for it really has, but much less than for the towns.

This tendency among the young people seems to me to be wrong, for there really are a lot of compensations in country life. It may be a question of spiritual as much as of material things, but very few seem to have realized that yet.

When claiming better conditions for the countryside, farmers' organizations may have gone too far. They have painted rural life in too dark colors, and are frightening many away from the land, which is much to be regretted. There must be a change in this respect, and it is more or less a question of education and propaganda, as suggested earlier.

Youth Organizations

These questions demand a lot of consideration. Quite a good deal has been done already, and the youth organizations particularly have proved to be of great value. They have their study circles, their competitions in ploughing, milking, sports, growing roots and other plants, etc. There are folk dances, amateur theatricals, entertainments of different kinds, and so on. In many places country club houses have been built. Here the social events take place, particularly during the cold and dark season. The club houses are mostly co-operatives, with private people and associations of the district as shareholders.

I often wonder if we really have the right sort of structure for club houses. The young people go there on certain occasions — when there is a meeting, a lecture, a dance or some other kind of entertainment — but otherwise everything is locked up. The major



FIG. 10. Products of the country.

part of such a club house is a meeting hall, with a small stage for performances, and usually a kitchenette for coffee making. There may be a flat on the second floor, rented out to someone who takes care of the house as a supplement to other work.

I have discussed the matter with people from other countries, and I believe that the club should be organized in a different way. It should be open all the time (except during working hours) with a nice sitting room, a library, rooms for playing bridge, etc., and some sports grounds attached to the club house. Young people need to have some nice place to spend their leisure hours with their fellows. Things should be arranged so that people feel bright and comfortable. This could be done in a number of ways.

RURAL HOUSEHOLD SCHOOLS

For training and education of future housewives there are the rural household schools, generally one in each county. They are supported by government and county councils like the farmers' schools and are often situated in the same place. The ideal would be that every future housewife should have the opportunity of passing through a household school, but unfortunately there is a long way to go before reaching that goal. The present figure is only 6-7 per cent. Girls from 18 to 23 come there for a five-months' course. They get practical as well as theoretical training in everything pertaining to the rural household, including poultry and hogs, account keeping and economics.

When visiting these schools I was surprised to see

the great number of looms for weaving carpets, curtains, cushions, etc. Of course, the girls are making nice things, but from a labor-saving point of view (so important in farming nowadays) it would be cheaper to buy these articles in the shops.

However, I have been told that weaving is most soothing and comforting for the mind. Our great writer, Selma Lagerlöf tells in her famous novel *Gösta Berlings Saga* about the young Countess Dohna who nearly went mad from all her love affairs. She took up weaving, and it cured her of her malady. I hope it is not like that with the girls of the household schools.

There must be something in the weaving, not to be realized at the first glance. I should like to put it like this: "Weaving is to the mind exactly the same as cooking to the body."

Some ladies do not agree with me about weaving. They consider it a most pleasant kind of work, which should not be taken away from the homes. They particularly point out that it is a question of quality as well as of the fine ancient culture of the countryside. The quality of hand-woven towels and sheets could not be compared with that of factory-made things. They do not require nearly so much mending and repairing, for example. These ladies may be right, and know these matters better than I.

The household and farming schools are not at all the same thing as the famous Scandinavian Folk High Schools. The former give training for future work, while the Folk High Schools give a general education to people who did not have the chance to pass col-

lege examinations. Most of the students attending Folk High Schools are more than twenty years old. Attendance at one of these schools is considered a good background for entering a farmers' or household school, but is not compulsory.

We Pick a Household Adviser

Education is not only for youth, it is for adults as well. New methods and improvements are constantly appearing. In farming, the county agricultural societies did a lot to spread knowledge. On the suggestion of the vice-president of the Halland Society the Executive took up the question of engaging a household adviser. We all agreed that it would be a good idea, and a number of applications for the position were received. Our secretary picked out three of the best, and the ladies were asked to come down to Halmstad for testing.

I shall always remember this episode. There they were, the Executive — stern, middle-aged men. Eleven of them looking most critical and earnest, without a smile or a movement in their faces. And the teachers coming in one at a time, to deliver a lecture. I could not help pitying them.

But they did it all right, these girls, and we picked out two of them — one spirited and vital, the other more commonplace but with nice manners, which certainly would attract the housewives. We couldn't agree within the Executive and had to vote. The first lady got five votes, the second six. Our president, a former university professor, was among the minority — and he didn't like the result. In a very angry way

he told the oldest executive member, a J. P. and a pioneer in the earlier stages of the peasant movement, "There you were wrong, Mr. X!"

Generally we liked our president very much. He often supplemented our "farmers' point of view" with the "human point of view" — but he sometimes lost his temper, and that was rather human. This time we could not agree with him. We had voted in a democratic way, and thought the question ought to be settled without any comments. There were never any reasons to regret the choice of Elsa Lindström.

Her competitor was all right too, and it wasn't long before she became Household Adviser in another county, and now is the head of a Household School.

Miss Lindström soon became popular among the housewives of Halland. She went around in her car, telling them about new methods of household work, and new labor-saving tools and machines. She often had her car packed with odd things, and sometimes had to attach a little trailer to her car.

During the war, when we had no petrol in this country, we had to run our cars on producer gas. The gas producers were very odd looking and no decoration to a car.

On one occasion, she went around with the complete equipment for canning fruits, berries and vegetables hanging behind her vehicle. A lot of people had met at the country club house, where the demonstration was going to take place. When they saw her unfastening her tinning machine they couldn't help saying: "What an extraordinarily ugly-looking gas producer you have this time."

It was evident that the majority of the country kitchens needed to be repaired and modernized. Elsa Lindström helped a lot in this work, and got designs and sketches which the local builders and carpenters had to follow.

With building problems Miss Lindström got help from an architect engaged by the County Agricultural Society. This man specialized in farm buildings and dwelling houses on the holdings.

Healthy Pigs

Often there was the problem of central heating and sanitary equipment. It may be worth while, in this connection, to tell a little anecdote showing how the point of view concerning these matters has changed in Sweden during half a century.

Somewhere in the south of Sweden it happened during the eighteen-nineties that a farmers' club had a meeting. They held a lengthy discussion on the questions of hygiene and health.

One big farmer got tired of the discussion, being more a man of practical farming. "I will give you some practical hints how to care for the laborers' household pigs. I have tried it myself with great success. I simply make a little box for the pig in one corner of their kitchens, very close to the stove. Then they can throw all the waste direct to the pig. You bet it saves a lot of labor!"

All the others were getting more and more surprised as he spoke, and some of them could not help saying, "But could that really be so healthy?"

He replied, "There is such a lot of talk about hygiene and health, nowadays. But I will tell you, gentlemen, that never in my life have I seen such healthy pigs!"

I could not guarantee that that story is true — but it is a good story.

In due time this building business was taken over by a co-operative started by the Federation with the national unions as shareholders. It was centralized in Stockholm with branches in different parts of the country. This new co-operative has been working very well, but the other plan with the architects attached to the (semi-state) county agricultural societies wasn't so bad either. I am not sure that centralizing is the only way of settling all questions.

Laundries

One of the best things was the introduction of the co-operative laundries in our district. Washing was among the hardest jobs for the rural housewife, and besides took a lot of time. The problem could have been solved with household washing machines. However, these were expensive, and to have the complete equipment with a drying plant was quite impossible for a separate household. Co-operation seemed the best way of solving the problem and Miss Lindström advocated it most eagerly. She soon ran into some resistance. Many a housewife put it like this: "I don't want to bring my dirty and worn-into-holes washing to a co-operative laundry and show these ragged things to everyone."

Our adviser had a terrible job to convince the ladies that washing always was supposed to be dirty, if not, there would be no reason for taking it to a laundry; and that all the holes ought to be mended after washing. By and by she was successful, and the farmers and their wives started a co-operative laundry in the southernmost part of the county of Halland. They got premises in the basement of a newly erected country club house. The society covers rather a large area, with 200-300 households as shareholders and members. The enterprise proved to be a success, and within a year they had to enlarge it to double the size.

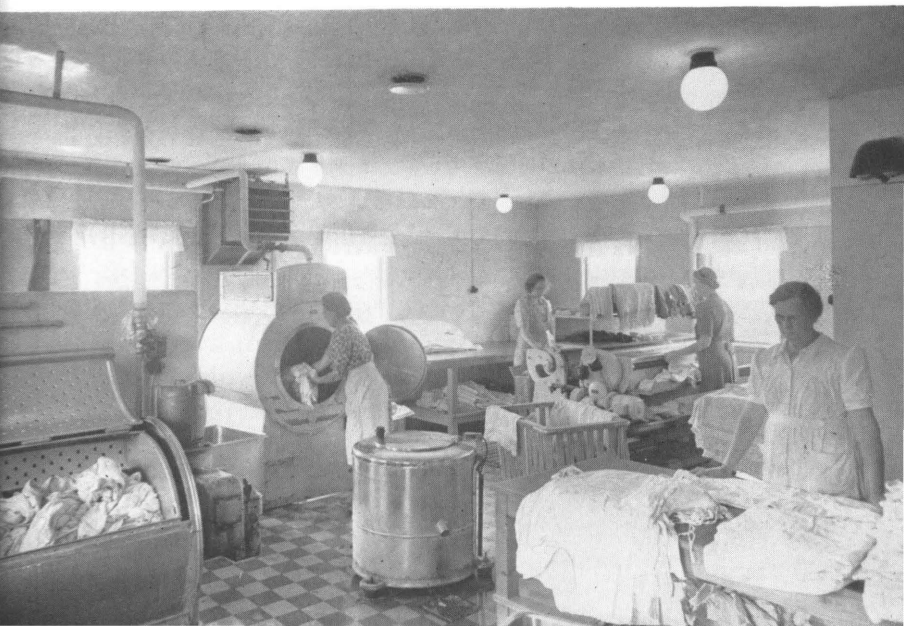
Soon afterwards they took up the same idea in the village of Getinge, near my place. Washing clothes is not exactly my line but my wife was most active in the work for the laundry, so I know quite a lot about it! The co-operative was formed, Executive elected, and they started planning a building and machinery.

The building was erected in connection with our co-operative dairy, the steam being delivered from the dairy at a reasonable price. The equipment included washing machines — centrifuges for getting the washing “half dry,” a steam mangle through which most of the washing passed when leaving the centrifuge, and ironing machines. After leaving the mangle, the sheets, towels, tablecloths, most of the underwear, etc., were ready to take home. Shirts and some other things, instead of being mangled, were brought to a hot-air drying room. A pressing and ironing machine completed the job.



FIG. 11. Lessons in the Household School.

FIG. 12. A co-operative laundry.



To start with, the wives came down themselves to do their own washing, supervised by the lady manager who had to take care of the machines. It was the old idea of not showing other people their dirty and ragged things. This way cost 35 öre per kilo. They soon realized that it was better to leave the work to the manager and her assistants and pay 45 öre. The washing is delivered in the afternoon for soaking until next morning. Then the washing is done and is ready to take home about noon the next day.

The Grand Washing

It ought to be pointed out that washing is most likely a much greater event in Swedish households than in American ones. At the turn of the century the "Grand Washing" took place only twice a year, in spring and autumn. That has changed, of course, and now it comes once a month or once every six weeks. Previously such a monthly washing cost my wife in cash for hired labor, soap powder, etc., about five dollars. Now the account from the laundry amounts to \$3.50. In reality there is much more difference than that. She had to give the woman who came to do the work board and lodging for three or four days (and that lady is impossible to engage any longer). The greatest difference of all is that the washing coming from the laundry is ready to be put into drawers and on shelves.

Previously the actual washing took two days. After that came hanging up the clothes for drying, which could be done in the open air during the summer.

In winter, however, the heavy baskets had to be hauled up to the attic, where drying took at least three or four days, and then be carried down again for stretching, mangling and ironing.

The whole house was turned upside down for about a week. At a certain period during the procedure there were sheets, towels and other things on every table and seat in the whole house. I had great trouble finding a place for my typewriter!

In the comparison of prices made above, the work done by my wife and the maid we had at that time is not counted. So conditions are much more in favor of the laundry than the figures show.

Even now some of the housewives, out of pure prejudice, do not admit the success of the co-operative laundry and do not join the society. Well, we don't mind; there are at present about 200 members and the laundry has recently doubled its capacity.

One lady, a friend of my wife, disliked the laundry very much. "We need a co-op bakery," she said, "that is very useful for us country women. But the laundry is no good, the washing we can do ourselves."

It had really become a question of prestige to her not to accept the value of the laundry, and to talk about that institution was forbidden when my wife met her friend.

On one occasion when this lady was overwhelmed with work after a big party, my wife suggested, "Can't I take down all your washing to the laundry? You will have it back the day after tomorrow." The lady gave way and after two days she got back her table-

cloths, napkins, etc., examined them very carefully, but didn't say a word. I have a feeling she will join within a short time.

Laholm was the first to have a laundry, Getinge the second, but then they came one after the other in this county and in other parts of the country. They all proved most useful and of great help to the housewives.

Food Preserving

Preservation of food is an important matter in the rural household. We do it in different ways: potting, canning, bottling, salting, smoking, etc. All of them require a lot of labor. This is much more important for us in the rural areas, as we sometimes butcher a hog, a lamb or a calf just for household use. There are also fruits, berries and vegetables growing on the farm or in the garden, which one wants to preserve and store for use during the winter.

Ordinary household refrigerators are extraordinarily good things, but their use is rather limited. They are for short-time storing, several days, or a week. They can hardly be used at all for vegetables.

In our co-operative packing plants we have big refrigerators for long-time storing of large quantities. In these establishments it is of course much colder, 5° instead of the 23° F. in the household refrigerators. Some of the farmers in this district have tried storing geese or ducks or moose for a couple of months, and it has been all right. However, these big places are not effective for individual storing. They are too far away from most of the farms.

Co-operation is necessary because equipment in the separate houses is far too expensive for ordinary people. The idea now is to attach a refrigerator to the village co-operative dairy, and have it equipped with boxes for individual households. You could hang a carcass of a hog in your box and take out once a week just what you need for that period. It would be the same for many other foods. All that preserving, salting and so on would not be needed, and a lot of labor would be saved. There may be a good deal to learn from America in this respect.

Help For Housewives

Women's institutes are doing a lot of information work in most parts of Sweden. In the county of

FIG. 13. Modernized farm kitchen.



Halland, however, they do not have any footing. Instead there is the Women's Branch, SLKF, of the Farmers' Political Party. These ladies are doing a lot of social work besides their political activities. In many instances they are working on the same lines as women's institutes.

The wives of the small farmers and agricultural laborers are frequently overworked, and have few leisure hours. SLKF has managed to buy and to run vacation homes for these women. For this purpose they receive grants from the government and county councils as well as from farmers' co-operatives. I could not think of anyone more worth a holiday than these wives. They ought to have a rest from their household and children, and most likely from their husbands too. The hardest problem is finding someone to replace them at home, but it has even been possible to arrange this.

Rural housewives expect more from a new government scheme concerning "Home Nurses," which has just been put into action. This plan is not for actual illnesses, for these nurses do not have anything to do with doctors or hospitals. Their job is to take care of the home when the housewife is away or for any reason is not able to work, herself. Even when the wife is going away to a vacation home, the nurse is supposed to replace her.

The aim of this chapter has been to show that united efforts and co-operation can do wonders in household affairs. I know that these pages should have been written by a woman and not a man, but

I could not find anyone willing to do it. I have therefore submitted the manuscript to my wife for consideration and am glad to state that we agree on essential points.