

Northern Programme (from Leeds)

ONE DAY THIS WEEK

The Dales Conference

Jeannie Mee

Friday, June 16th, 1939

7.20 - 7.30 p.m.

ANNOUNCER:

This is the Northern Programme - For several days this week the small stoney hamlet of Keld in upper Swaledale has been the centre of an unusual conference. Here is Jeannie Mee to tell listeners about it. Mrs. Mee

MEE:

On Monday to Wednesday of this week, what is known as the Yorkshire Dales Conference was held in Keld-in-Swaledale. This is an annual gathering of ministers and delegates from Congregational Churches, and the area represented extends from Skipton and Bowland to Kirkby Stephen and Ravenstonedale. It was first inaugurated in June, 1907, as a means of strengthening the links between the rural churches. Apart from three of the War years, it has been held regularly ever since at one or other of the Dales Churches. This week at Keld from 50 - 60 people have been provided with hospitality, most of them for 3 days, - rather a big undertaking for such a small village whose inhabitants number only 40! Keld however is renowned for hospitality, and the people have risen to the occasion splendidly. Some of the delegates had to be housed at moorland farms 2 or 3 miles away. Preparing for such a conference in these conditions has difficulties of its own; for the past 2 or 3 weeks my husband has been scouting throughout the district for beds and promises of food. If we could have counted on delegates sharing beds, the matter would have been much easier, but every bed required has been provided. The hosts of course provided supper and breakfast, and the church provided

2 teas, and 2 lunches - 1 hot and 1 cold. The teas were what are known locally as faith teas, where we simply leave it to everyone to bring what they think. Whenever we do this, we get far more quantity and variety than when the catering is arranged beforehand.

The welcome to the delegates was at 5.15 on Monday, this was held in the village schoolroom, so there was a great bustling about amongst the ladies as they prepared the tea when the school-children left at 3.30. Desks had to be converted into tables, in fact there was a general furniture removal!

Over the week-end all the women-folk have been busy making pies, cakes, bread, potted meat, and churning extra butter. Two of the local women were responsible for the lunches, and on Tuesday there was a four course hot meal, - and what a lot of arranging and preparing it took! The local butcher - from Meeth, 13 miles away - had a bumping order this week when 32 pounds of beef was ordered. This was roasted in Park Lodge farmhouse kitchen. 2 stones of new potatoes had to be scraped, much to the dismay of the young ladies, whose hands still bear the marks of such a task. The same good ladies were also responsible for the making of the gravy, trifles and jellies. The postmaster's wife cooked the green vegetables, and made the sponge puddings, tarts, cheese biscuits and coffee.

The village hall was hired for the lunches, and all the food items and crockery had to be carried

piping-hot from the houses, in some cases for almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile.

All who possibly could lent their best crockery and cutlery and the tables made a fine show when all was ready. The visitors did full justice to the tempting meal, as our keen moorland air gave zest to their appetites.

Another problem to be faced after the public meeting on Monday, when a fine address was given by the Rev. H. Bulcock of Hest Bank, was the introduction of guests to their hosts, and what fun and laughter there was during the process of sorting out, especially so when several discovered they had a few miles to go before they could rest their weary heads. Wherever possible they were taken by car, and one of the drivers - a visitor himself - got lost on the way back, and when eventually he did arrive back at the Church, he had to be guided to his own destination!

We had quite a business getting the delegates here as most of them came by train to Hawes, so a special bus was chartered to bring them over the Butter Tubs Pass. Rather a nerve racking experience to those not used to travelling on such precipitous roads. On their way over the Pass they came across the Conference Secretary ruefully contemplating a punctured tyre and a jack that failed to work! This by the way was his first puncture for 15,000 miles and then it happened on the Butter Tubs of all places. However, fortune favours the good, and the bus made a halt, whilst 4 or 5 passengers lifted the car until

the new tyre was fixed. If he had been behind the bus instead of in front of it, he would probably have been there yet!

To add a little more gaiety to the first day's adventures, the village water supply failed, enhancing the difficulties of making tea and washing up, etc. We had been agitating for a new supply for a long time, and after much controversy amongst the district council we get a supply which fails on the first important occasion. Nor must we overlook the plight of one poor soul who broke his dental plate as he was leaving home, so he had to sit and watch others enjoy the good things whilst he looked on!

On Tuesday morning the Conference assembled at 9.30 a.m. for a short devotional service followed by a stimulating talk and discussion, and at 1 p.m. lunch was served. After lunch all who were capable (and not too full of food!) were taken rambling by the young men of the Church through some of our wild and most beautiful scenery to Swinnergill Kirk. This is a lonely ravine where Dissenters used to meet for worship after the ejections of 1662; when warning was given of the approach of soldiery the congregation disappeared into a cave hidden by a waterfall.

Those of the party who were not quite so energetic, spent the afternoon by the river, or playing darts or billiards in the Institute. Tea was again provided, and followed by a public meeting which was attended by people from all over the Dale and the little Church was crowded. The speakers were the Rev. W.H. Pace of Dewsbury and the Rev. J.A. Quail of

Oldham. This was a most uplifting service, and the musical voices of the Dales folk singing some of the "grand old hymns" was something never to be forgotten.

The Conference again met on Wednesday morning at 9.30 for another session, followed by Holy Communion at 12.15 p.m.

A cold luncheon was served at 1 o'clock, and the Conference wound up with amusing speeches and votes of thanks to the hosts and hostesses and minister and officers of the Church.

The Dales Conference is a great occasion. To all who love country folks and country ways and the lilt of the various dialects such a gathering is unique. Next year the Conference is to be held at Settle, and we are all looking forward to meeting new friends and renewing old acquaintances.

ANNOUNCER:

You've been listening to Jeannie Mee talking about the Dales Conference at Keld.