All of us know women who are mothers to a whole district, to a town or to a nation. Saidie Patterson, Ireland's veteran peacemaker, has been placed in this category of rare women. To the whole Irish peace movement she has become 'Our Saidie' — a uniquely unifying symbol for peacemakers in every part of Ireland.

But Saidie Patterson's contribution to peacemaking has been much more than a reaction to the Ulster political crisis. From the 1920s when she entered the textile industry she has been identifying the causes of conflict in society and has been searching for ways to encourage peaceful solutions. In the process, she has become a pioneer of peacemaking activities in the divided communities of Belfast from Protestant Shankill to nearby Catholic Falls Road. More recently Saidie has added to her fame as a leader of 'Women Together' and as a recipient of many national and international peace awards.

The story of Saidie Patterson is also a tribute to the great unsung army of peace women in Ireland who go about their peace work at practical but largely unreported levels of service. These are the people who one day will ultimately overcome.

As Saidie has put it, 'Peace can never come through violence. You need a superior idea in your head and love in your heart.'

This book is about a life dedicated to the realities of that ideal.

David Bleakley has known Saidie Patterson from his apprenticeship days when she recruited him into the local Labour movement.

A graduate of Ruskin College, Oxford, he worked for some years in adult education in Tanzania and is an active member of the Irish Peace Movement. He was a Labour Member of Parliament in Northern Ireland and a Minister of Community Relations in the Government of the Province.

David Bleakley is a member of the Anglican Consultative Council and Chief Executive of the Irish Council of Churches.

SAIDIE PATTERSON

IRISH PEACEMAKER

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DAVID BLEAKLEY

Blackstaff Press

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and
all other Peacemakers.

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Foreword

'Our Saidie' — in the Irish peace movement that can mean only one person: Saidie Patterson. It is an affectionate reminder of the regard in which a great peacemaker is held by those she has inspired during her work of over fifty years for the cause of peace both at home and abroad.

Saidie Patterson's work has always been very practical. She has recognised the full range of unpeaceful relationships in society and has insisted that violence must be challenged wherever and in whatever form it makes itself manifest. So, since she started her working life as a weaver in the Belfast textile industry in the 1920s Saidie has been making peace at a variety of levels — home and family, factory and trade union branch room, church and politics, international relations. The Ulster crisis may have increased her responsibilities, but her commitment to pacifism springs from concerns much wider than those of her locality. In fact, where peace is concerned Saidie Patterson speaks from Ireland with a message for reconcilers everywhere.

For the biographer, even one who has known her from boyhood days, it has been hard to 'keep track' of Saidie. She has never retired (she believes in 're-deployment') and her present crusades are considerable. However, as a former trade union secretary she has been methodical in keeping records and has been able to produce a good supply of personal letters and documents.

In addition, she has an excellent memory — total recall of speeches as far back as fifty years ago. Because of this it has been possible to let Saidie speak for herself in much of her story (all quotations are hers, unless otherwise indicated). Those who know

her well will welcome this approach; she has a remarkable turn of phrase and an ability to put into simple but memorable words the profoundest of thoughts.

Saidie has also been anxious that her biography should be more than an account of her own life. For example, she remembers her beloved Shankill and, close by, her friends on the Falls. The people of these two famous Belfast districts have meant much to her and she has stayed with them through thick and thin, inspired and sometimes exasperated by their activities.

Then, too, there are Saidie's close links with the trade union and Labour movement in Ireland and further afield. She is proud of these links and of the campaigns for social advancement in which she has joined. She has also been involved in the work of Methodism, Moral Re-Armament and the Christian Socialist Fellowship; and like many of the founders of the Labour movement she sees her political contribution as the working out in society of spiritual obligations. More recently, her work for Women Together and the whole Irish peace movement has won her international recognition.

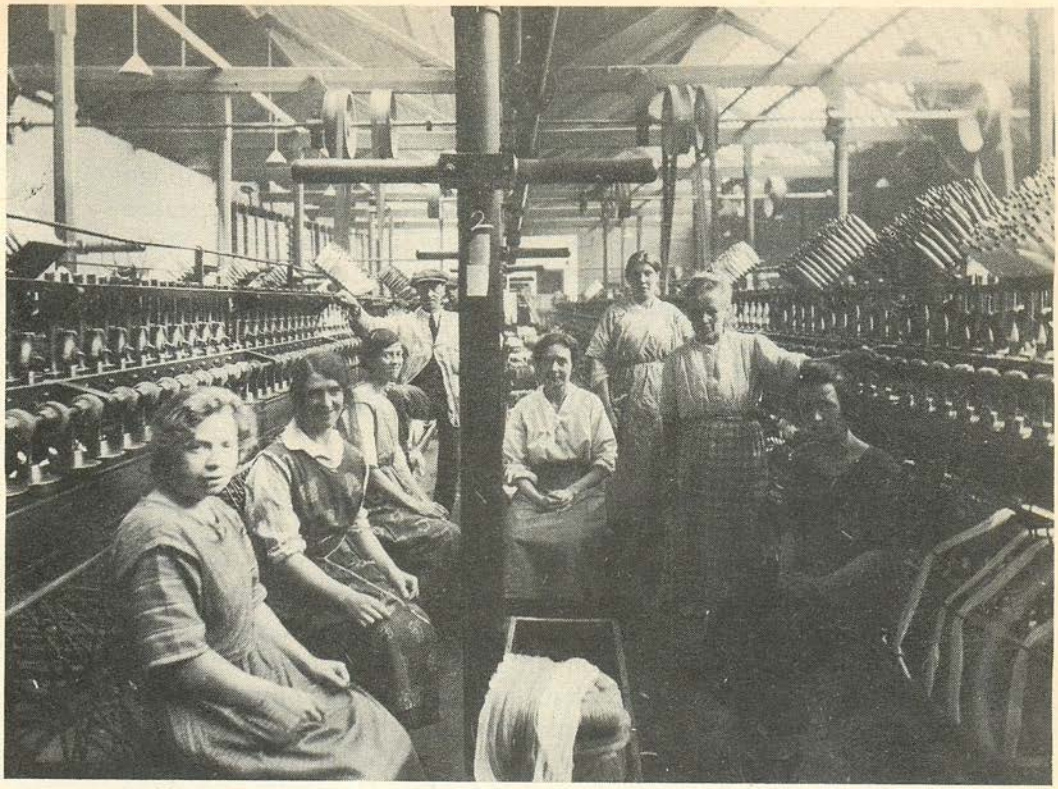
By any standard it has been a distinguished career.

It has also been a consistent career — consistent in the belief that Ireland's problems can only be solved by peaceful means. This conclusion has not been lightly arrived at; it is based on years of hard experience at the 'coal-face' of community work and effort. In one of her down-to-earth comments Saidie sums up the conclusions of a lifetime:

'Peace can never come through violence; you need a superior idea in your head and love in your heart.'

Saidie Patterson has an abundance of these special gifts. This book is about how she has used them on behalf of others.

David Bleakley
Bangor, Co Down
1980



Belfast linen workers, 1914.

Saidie's Shankill

Saidie Patterson was born on 25 November 1906 into a Belfast working class family. The home, 32 Woodvale Street, was typical of the Shankill Road of the time: one of a street of red-brick terraced houses, two rooms downstairs and two or three above; no bathroom, a tiny scullery at the back, with its single cold water tap. Cooking was done on the open fire or on the gas ring. As Saidie puts it:

'There was nothing fancy about how we or our neighbours lived. But we were proud of our homes and kept them spic and span. We hadn't a lot of money for furniture and the like, but we got the best we could and never ran into debt. And they were happy homes —

not a lot in the way of this world's goods, but we shared what we had and everyone felt they belonged.'

Such homes of the skilled artisans were the backbone of Victorian Belfast, contributing much to the growth of Ireland's greatest industrial city. The house in Woodvale Street has been Saidie Patterson's base throughout her life and is still her home.

Saidie's father, William Patterson, was a blacksmith in the local shipyard, and when he died in 1912 at the age of twenty-seven he left behind him a wife and three young children. Saidie remembers him as 'a good Christian who loved his Methodist Church and who read the Bible from cover to cover'.

William Patterson and his wife, Sarah, had met in Belfast's famous Methodist missionary centre, the Grosvenor Hall, where they helped in the local social welfare work. Sarah continued to attend the Hall after her husband's death and a few years later married another fellow-Methodist, Thomas Gracey, a widower, who brought with him to the Woodvale Street home five young children from his first marriage. So from an early age Saidie experienced the problem of living in overcrowded conditions and of coping with life on a limited income. The strains increased when, a few years after his marriage, Thomas Gracey developed a nervous disease which left him physically helpless for the rest of his life. On Saidie, the eldest girl in the family, fell new responsibilities and from then on home duties competed with opportunities for school and recreation.

Of course, for Saidie's generation such problems were nothing new. Most Belfast families of the time faced the continual problem of making ends meet. Unemployment was widespread and state assistance meagre. Even for those who had steady jobs the rewards were small and working conditions were often deplorable. In Belfast, building and general labourers were paid about £1 a week, while the rate in outlying towns was as low as 12 shillings. In 1914 the carters went on strike to protest against a wage of 18 shillings for a fifty-eight hour week, but even they were not at the bottom of the industrial league.

The textile industry was the most depressed of all. Inevitably it was the children who suffered most, as they divided their day between work and school. These half-timers, some no more than eight years old, started work at six in the morning and, after half a day in temperatures of over eighty degrees F., were sent off to school covered in dust and moisture.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

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1.—Business to commence each morning at Nine o'clock, at which time Assistants will require to report themselves at the Desk. The following Fines will be imposed upon any party later than aforesaid time :—

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3.—Assistants, Apprentices, or others in our employment, wishing to make purchases in any of our Departments, should do so from the Buyers or young man in charge of sales. Apprentices, on no account, will be permitted to make purchases one from another.

4.—All goods sold on credit, had on approval, or to pay on delivery, the Assistant must make out a check, with full particulars of each sale, legibly written, with name and address of party the goods are for, and also by whom such have been purchased, whether per self or otherwise. Fine for neglect in each instance, 6d.

5.—All Lines must be dressed, and Stocks brought forward for the different Departments before 11 o'clock. No Books or Papers to be read, or Letters written, during business hours.

6.—All parcels must be properly made up, addressed in full, with Assistant's Sales Number affixed, and left in Parcel Office for delivery. Illegibly written, or wrong addresses proved to have been taken by any Assistant will be subject to a fine : for first default, 6d ; repetition of same, 1/-

7.—All Assistants must have each Check Dated and Examined before being sent into Cash Desk : if any errors be afterwards discovered, the Examiner and writer of such check will be fined each 1/- and the amount of such error, if a deficiency, charged to their account.

8.—Assistants will require to have their Sales Book correctly made up and added each night, with all Checks and Books which have been in use during the day left on their respective counters for collection.

9.—All Errors in Check-Books, if not properly made up, will be subject to the following fines :—

Books Not Added	1s. 0d.	Checks Wrong Entered in Index	3d.
Books Wrong Added	3d.	Book Lost	1s. 0d.
Checks Not Entered in Index	6d.	Block of Book Lost	3d.
CHECK LOST	6d.		

10.—The foregoing Fines and Rules will be rigidly enforced, with censure; and the Buyer, or Young Man in Charge of each Department, will require to have these Rules hung up, in a conspicuous place, for the benefit of the Assistants : any parties destroying or defacing same will be reported.

BY ORDER,

J. ROBB & CO.

MARCH, 1874.

Rules and Regulations of Shop Workers, 1874.

'Many of my classmates in those days went to work in their bare feet, poorly clad and poorly fed. Sometimes the women on their way to work would pick up the children and carry them under their shawls into the mills before the power went on, to turn the reels by hand, so that they could earn a few extra pence.'

The half-time system, which was not abolished until after the First World War, had a disastrous effect on the health of the children of Belfast. The mortality rate was twice that of Manchester, which itself had a bad record.

For the mothers of the Shankill things were equally bad. Saidie's mother was an out-worker, one of many in the making-up trade. They were poorly paid. A Board of Trade inquiry in 1911 showed that over fifty per cent of Belfast out-workers could not earn more than a penny an hour, and out of this reductions were made for the cost of thread. It was a hard way to make money. Saidie remembers helping her mother.

'It was my job to go to the warehouse to collect the bundles of work and then the following day to return the finished goods. Mother was paid a pittance. I have her last pay packet: ''Wages 16s.3d. for 50 dozen sheets and overalls, less 1 sh. for thread''. On her last day on earth she worked to 6 p.m. and died four hours later.'

For out-workers this was a hard regime, but even for those who worked in more 'select' employment conditions were strict. Shop regulations and Indentures of the time testify to the difficulties. Discipline was harsh and the system of fines cut into the weekly wage.

But Saidie also remembers the way in which the community spirit of the Shankill did much to soften the social deprivation of her childhood.

'The present generation have a great deal to be thankful for, but for many today purses are full and hearts are empty. In our early days on the Shankill we had little enough, but we knew the Pauline doctrine that we are one of another. For example, when you made your pot of soup on a Saturday night for Sunday, you were always taught to put something extra in the pot if there was a needy neighbour or where there was sickness.'

In this way the poor helped the poor and long before state services intervened the working-class devised its own internal welfare service to reduce the grosser indignities of poverty. This self-help

system was operated with great sensitivity so as not to give offence to those who might be shamed by the suggestion of charity.

'You were always taught to be gracious in your giving. You pretended that you had made too much soup and wondered whether they would oblige by taking some of the surplus. You were also careful never to embarrass them by going to the front door — it was always the back entry you used. And when you were baking a griddle or two of bread you always put on extra farls to give to someone more in need than yourself. In that way we helped one another to get by.'

Like most of her generation, Saidie welcomes the disappearance of such hardships, but she also regrets the passing of some of the intimate human relationships which were developed. She even wonders whether today's generation is 'up to it' where self-help cooking is concerned!

'Heavens, it couldn't happen today, anyway. Our girls don't know how to bake soda or potato bread. They live out of expensive cake shops, and panic every time there is a strike. In those days we didn't depend on shops or even the breadman.'

Often, of course, there just wasn't enough food to go around. When that happened, it was the mother who went without.

'It was always father, the breadwinner, who was fed first, then the children, and then mother.'

In such circumstances working-class families were adept at making the household income stretch. Make-things-go-farther rules were many and well known: never two 'kitchen' (bacon *or* egg, not both); soup made from the bone of the Sunday meat and served over the week; a sweet only at week-ends; fruit rarely and generally shared in half or quarter portions, according to age. The darning basket was an essential piece of household equipment, ready for repairs to socks and other pieces of clothing. And every house had its steel 'last' for boot mending and the hammering home of 'protectors' on new boots and shoes.

There were other domestic stratagems on the Shankill and similar working-class districts. Saidie has startled many a sedate audience listening to one of her 'Early Belfast' lectures by asking the question, 'Well, girls, have you ever slept on sheets or worn a "shift" or petticoat made out of flour bags?'

For the poorest the use of flour bag cloth was not unusual and Saidie has expert knowledge. The great trick was to bleach out the

colourful 'Kilted Officer' or 'Red Cockerel' trade marks which decorated the cloth. Pride demanded this; to be dressed in flour bag undergarments was bad enough, but to carry the trade mark as well was mortification!

And for clothes in general it was a case of passing them down from one child to another. It was also the practice to buy the garments a size or so too big, with each year a ceremonial letting-down. Much the same applied to the purchase of children's shoes. 'Buy them big and stuff the toes with cotton wool till the feet grow a bit', was the popular advice. It was not the best way to produce well-formed feet, but it was an important aid to making money go further.

Tales abound, too, of the use made of the local pawnshops. For some, the pawnshop, with its easily available loan on a personal or household possession, was an easy way of tiding-over between one pay-day and the next. The housewives took charge of these transactions and children of the time have many memories of 'going a message' to the shop with the three brass balls - 'two to one you don't get it back'. The man of the house was often unaware of what was going on and, in particular, that his 'Sunday best' was pledged during the days of the week when he was out at work. Woe betide the wife who didn't get the garment back in time after the Saturday pay arrived.

On one occasion one of Saidie's union members got into a pickle over a matter of this kind. For the lady in question the dreadful possibility had arisen — her husband needed his suit for a mid-week funeral. There was no pay until Saturday so, in desperation, she called in the shop-steward:

'My God, Saidie, what am I going to do? He will kill me if he finds out.' Saidie, ever resourceful, remembers:

'I had to have a ''whip round'' in the factory to collect the five shillings needed. Then, taking no chances, I went myself up the Falls to the pawnshop (Shankill people for reasons of privacy often used the Falls pawn and the Falls pledged on the Shankill) to redeem the suit. Imagine my horror when the clerk demanded five shillings and an extra sixpence for interest. I pleaded with him, ''This is a matter of life and death. Let me have the suit for five shillings or he will wreck the house tonight.'' The good fellow obliged and my member's husband was none the wiser.'

Years later Saidie was lecturing to the local Historical Society. At

the end an elderly gentleman rose to congratulate her on her Address. 'You don't know me, Miss Patterson, but I am the manager of the Falls pawnshop you managed to persuade to let you have a suit out without paying interest. Even in those days you knew how to negotiate!'

Of course, for many working-class families the pawnshop was an unacceptable way of balancing the budget. Often the more feckless were the best customers of the shop; but at another level the pawn was to the poor what the short-term banking facility was to the rich. Along with the Penny Bank, the Co-op quarterly club, the Christmas Savings Card and the less popular private money lender with punishing rates of interest, Saidie's Shankill learned to cope with the harsh economic realities which were faced by its people at the turn of the century.

But for the children of the Shankill life wasn't all economic struggle. Saidie was active as a play-leader and recalls the richness of street and home based activities.

'It's true there were disappointments and there were tears, but there was plenty of enjoyment as well. We had our Coronation Street long before television was heard of. Take house plants, which are all the rage nowadays. It's a return to an earlier tradition. Our Victorian parents cultivated the aspidistras with as much care as Sam McGredy or Dicksons of Hawlmark do their roses today.'

But apparently much less money was spent on fertilisers!

'I can still remember the women of Woodvale Street waiting for the bread or coal cart to pass by. After feeding time the horses often left a reminder on the street. It was our job to run out with the yard brush and shovel and collect the hot manure for the aspidistras and the Orange Lilies. Many a time we followed the horse from street to street, fearing to come home with empty buckets.'

School also ranked high in childhood's formative experience. Saidie was fortunate in her choice of schools — Woodvale National School in nearby Cambrai Street (still in existence and daily use). Often, however, she was absent on family duties. Looking back, she regrets the loss of schooling with the chance to read more widely — more often than not, school for her was a case of 'meeting the scholars coming out'.

She also remembers with affection the dedication of the teachers of her time.

'The world will never know how much we are in debt to our

teachers. They filled many a gap in our lives, and brought into the school glimpses of a life far beyond our experience. Little did they know how much we got from their daily company.'

And she wonders how they managed to cope with the appalling conditions under which they had to work.

'Class sizes are bad enough nowadays, but in my time fifty and sixty wasn't unusual, often sitting in one big room, separated from one another by only a few feet of floor or maybe a flimsy partition. They used to let us out into the playground so that they could air the room between classes.'

'As kids, I don't suppose we noticed the defects all that much. Just getting out of overcrowded houses and escaping into books and pictures and maps and bead boards, all in the company of men and women who opened up a new world, was a treat in itself. At times you couldn't beat us out of school, we enjoyed it so much. And how those men and women tried at Christmas and the other seasons to brighten our lives with gifts bought out of modest salaries. Indeed, at times I cried, because I had to stay at home.'

But there were bad moments, too. In particular, the weekly penny contribution for school expenses, 'the school fee', was a sore point with the Patterson family.

'When the money was being collected on Monday morning you stood in the "Pauper's Queue" if you had no penny; and that meant you didn't get near the fire or hot pipes. Young as I was, I revolted against this practice.'

School meals, too, were unheard of.

'You brought your "piece" to school wrapped in yesterday's newspaper. Usually it was a soda or wheaten farl, still warm after being baked that morning by mother. Often the heat transferred the black print of the news on to the baked bread.'

So the soda farls were imprinted with the latest news or the racing results. In those days you could read your bread before eating it!

School materials were a major concern for parents and children, and especially before the era of free books. June was the 'passing' month and with it came the problem of finding the money to meet the book list which the new teacher had circulated. For those who could not provide their own books there was a supply of 'Authority' books, stamped conspicuously with the formidable imprint, 'This copy is the property of the Belfast Education Committee'. The mark gave the books the taint of charity and most parents were reluctant

to accept this form of out-door relief — and usually a very tatty one — offered to their children.

So, poor or not, a special effort was made to provide personal books, largely through an exchange system and an informal local market. The copies were well looked after by the children in order to enhance the exchange value at the end of the year.

'And there was great excitement in the home at the beginning of the term when the family got round the table to cover the new books with wall paper squares or smooth brown paper got from the draper's shop. Parents vied with one another in providing the most attractive covers. I still remember how we envied the local decorator's daughter, who always turned up on the first day at school with embossed paper covers.'

In fact, inventiveness of all kinds was practised by most working-class children in the first decade of the twentieth century. This do-it-yourself tradition was particularly evident at play-time; and there was a pattern to the play, regulated by rules passed on from one generation of children to another according to internal rules of behaviour instinctively practised within the group.

'Looking back, childhood seems to have been filled by a series of games, each appointed to its own particular season. Somehow or other, everyone knew when it was time to get out or put away the bits and pieces of the game in question. And you felt out of place if you played the wrong game at the wrong time.'

Most of the games material was home-made, backed up occasionally with a few marbles or a bit of chalk. Bar-the-Door, Leap Frog, Blind Man's Bluff and singing ring games were the old favourites. Often the children divided — girls concentrating on special skills displayed with skipping ropes and multiple bouncing balls; boys dominated in top spinning and the trundling of hoops made by dad in the shipyard or foundry. Saidie, with young brothers and a sister to entertain, became a skilled kite maker, and the sky above Woodvale Park, which she was later to fill with her oratory, was often decorated with one of the many models she had bound together with flour paste and thin string.

Imagination played a large part in much of the entertainment devised by the children. Long before the modern Adventure Playground was developed, the generation of Saidie's childhood were creating their own make-believe world.

'Wee shops were played, mostly by the girls in summer time at

the back entry door. A large raw potato served for prime bacon and ham. How we enjoyed receiving an order from a ''customer'' for a quarter pound of bacon, and usually accompanied with a request that only the best lean cuts should be offered. A few soft boiled potatoes from mother were mashed and rolled into various cake shapes. For all these, payment was in the form of ''Babby-dish'' of various values.'

The 'Babby-dish' was simply a piece of china or delph from a broken plate or cup. But the pieces had an accepted value within the trading circle, depending on the decorative degree. Highly valued were those pieces with a touch of gold line, known as 'sovereign' pieces; silver-edged china served as 'half-sovereign'.

One other happy event among the Shankill children was the Queen of the May.

'For us it was the highlight of the year, in which in a strange kind of way we all felt impelled to participate. Children, I'm sure, have a special world of their own, in which signals are sent out from time to time to which they and they alone are sensitive.'

The climax of the May festival was the crowning of the Queen and this always developed into an informal Parent's Day for the working-class during which pride of parentage could be demonstrated.

The child chosen was dressed up in silks and satins, with sometimes the hall door curtain being borrowed for a smart head-dress. Each district competed with the other in producing a good show. And when the Queens met they would bow gravely to one another, then proceed along different paths singing:

'Our Queen won,
the other had to run;
ee—oo, bravio,
our Queen won.'

It was all good fun in which everyone joined and through which the children learned useful social lessons. And, as Saidie notes, it cost practically nothing, yet met a deep need.

'Sometimes the old days are despised, but we can learn a lot from those times if only we take the trouble to study them. There was a rhythm to life, which was reassuring in the midst of other uncertainties. Every day of the year had something for us children. You

never heard the modern lament, "I'm bored". There just wasn't time for such an attitude.

'And as well as the games we played there were things to be done in the home, which we accepted as our share; going the messages, washing the yard, whitening the door step, brass cleaning or mat shaking. Then at weekends there was the special pattern to Sunday. It was always a very different day, revolving around Church and with a real awareness that it was the "Lord's Day". There were a good many "Don't do that, it's Sunday" rules, largely to do with household chores and outside behaviour. Games were frowned on. For instance, in our area no one kicked football on Sunday and, even if you owned a pack, "Devil's cards" were never seen on the Sabbath. In our house — as traditional Methodists we were pretty strict — even the Sunday papers were set aside for reading on the Monday.'

But Saidie remembers a positive side to Sunday Observance as well.

'I don't think we were unduly worried about the restrictions, for Sunday always felt somehow special. It was a day of well-earned rest when people were glad to refresh mind and body. Out came the black and navy-blue suits of the menfolk and the Sunday-going-to-church hats and dresses of the girls to produce a weekly local fashion parade, modest but meaningful, especially in the marriage stakes.

'Above all, there was church attendance, Sunday morning and evening for the adults, with at least Sunday School for the children. And, after church, the long walks on a Sunday evening along traditional routes where companionship and match-making continued.

'All this may seem a bit old-fashioned to the jet-age, and certainly we may have missed out on a lot of material advantages. But family love and friendship were there in abundance and we were a lot less security conscious than we are nowadays.'

Like most modern urban communities the close comradeship produced by the shared struggles of earlier periods has been eroded, but in the first decade of twentieth century Belfast the bond between neighbour and neighbour was strong — it had to be for survival.

That bond was tested tragically for the Patterson-Gracey family on 13 December 1918, when the twelve-year-old Saidie was called to her mother's bedside. She had last seen her mother a few hours earlier as they had worked together on the latest batch of materials

for the making-up factory. Saidie has never forgotten that bedside call and has often thought about its full meaning.

'I remember that night as though it were yesterday. They brought me to my mother's room, just before she died in childbirth. She told me she was going to be with the Master we had often talked about, and that I was to look after my new-born sister, Jean. "You'll get help, Saidie, you'll get help."

'As I stood in my dear mother's blood, I didn't shed a tear, but I felt a Cross being put on my back and, at the same time, I felt a strange warmth coming into the room. Looking back now, I'm convinced it was the Holy Spirit.

'From that day on I put my hand to doing what I could for what was right and the good Lord has honoured the bargain that was made at my mother's bedside. That night I became an adult.'

Saidie also became a socialist that night, determined to see that such things did not happen to other children. She was young at the time, but she was haunted by the question, 'Why was it that my mother had to be cared for by a kindly but untrained local "handywoman", who was herself expecting a baby? And why was it that we weren't able to afford the 3s. 6d. for a doctor?'

Remembering her mother's oft-repeated words at the family prayer circle that 'if you see something wrong in this world and do nothing about it you are committing a crime against the whole of humanity', the quiet pledge to do something to reform society was also made. She was also impressed by the suffragette views her mother had held and was equally determined to put them into practice.

But in the years immediately after 1918 the problem in the Woodvale Street home was one of sheer survival, caring for a family of eight on next to nothing. During that time Saidie's own natural abilities, together with the lessons she had learned from her mother, added up to a formidable capacity to survive. It is little wonder that she is able to claim that no one can teach her anything about poverty; even today, and despite the concern of relatives and friends, she insists on living a pensioner's life of absolute simplicity. Her savings have been given away to the causes she supports and, alone in the house she was born in, she practises a discipline in material things as strict as any followed in a religious order.

But over sixty years ago, for a child of twelve, such a life was a hard discipline to learn.

Saidie with a sample of her work as a weaver.

Only a Pair of Hands

When Saidie Patterson was presented with the MBE by the Queen in 1953 Her Majesty asked about changes in the lives of the workers in the textile industry since the early days. The reply was typical and revealing.

'Well, it's just like this, Your Majesty. My people are not a pair of hands any more. Like yourself, Ma'am, they are all royal souls.'

The textile industry which Saidie entered soon after her mother's death was anything but a place for royal souls.

'Poverty was the order of the day, with women working from six in the morning to six at night. We were just a pair of hands,

making profit for the industry. What happened to us really didn't matter. We produced the finest linen in the world, yet some of our women had to go home at night and eat from a table covered with yesterday's newspaper or a bit of cheap lino cloth.'

Saidie was only a youngster at the time, but, young as she was, the whole system struck her as completely immoral and utterly stupid.

'What a way to run an industry. Our women worked all the hours that God sent — never less than twelve hours a day, having their babies at night after a full day's work. I just couldn't understand why things were as they were; but, remembering what had happened to my own mother, from the first day in the factory I swore that sooner or later I would do something about it. No one else seemed to care — women were expendable.'

Saidie did not know it at the time but there were a good many people who were beginning to question the existing social order. Help, too, was coming from Britain. Two of England's leading Fabians, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, had already visited Belfast and had been appalled by local factory conditions. They had drawn special attention to the 'miserable wages' being paid to the women workers, and had called for a programme of reform. But, of more interest to Saidie, William Walker, Ulster's leading trade union organiser, was conducting a campaign for the formation of a 'Woman's Organisation' and was appealing to the male workers to look after the interests of their industrial sisters.

Walker pointed out that the women of Belfast were worse off than their sisters in any other part of the British Isles and were being physically demoralised by the system. His description of Saidie's generation reads like a passage out of Dickens:

'Visit any of the large warehouses, mills or factories when the living stream of humanity is pouring from its doors, and witness the pinched, pale faces. Such girls are broken in constitution and energy long before they enter matrimony and are victims to an extraordinarily high mortality rate.'

In fact, the death rate in Belfast at the turn of the century in the fifteen to twenty age group was twice that of comparable English areas. Linked to the problem of disease was the danger from factory machinery. Every worker feared an accident, for in those days one serious injury could turn a skilled worker into a disabled beggar for the rest of his life. The chief danger was injury to hands and arms,

and in the scutching mills many operatives were maimed. One Ulster factory doctor reported that fatal and serious accidents occurred every season, especially among those who fed the rollers and were exposed to the danger of being dragged in. As well as facing such mechanical hazards the women were exposed to a variety of industrial diseases created by an insidious alliance of dust, heat, moisture and noise. Linen workers were well recognised as they made their way home at the day's end.

'We came out of the factory soaked to the skin and covered with a layer of white fluff — sure candidates for "pucey chest" and other lung complaints.'

Saidie's firm — William Ewart and Sons, Ltd., in North Belfast was full of such problems, but it was generally agreed to be no worse than its rivals. Indeed, in some ways it was regarded by the unions as a better employer than most. However, as one of the world's major textile units it was as traditional as any other in its opposition to trade union demands for industrial democracy.

As an apprentice weaver Saidie had little time to read about the new industrial theories which were being preached by William Walker and others of the time; in any case, she did not need to study economics to realise that something was wrong in her industry. The evidence was all around.

'The contradictions struck me as plain crazy. For instance, we were all afraid of "bad health" in those days — in fact, we were terrified when one of the family went down with a persistent cough. Yet there we were, adding to the danger. "The beautiful cruel linen", as we often called it, needed steam and dampness in its production, but this, combined with the dust was a perfect recipe for TB, and especially for workers who were ill-fed and ill-clad. We were scared out of our wits about the "coughing sickness". We whispered about it, rather as we do now about cancer or mental illness — there was no cure then. Mostly, if you went down with your chest, you ended up sitting in the corner or lying in bed coughing out your lungs into a tin cup or basin of disinfectant.'

But the unorganised textile women could do little to improve their conditions. Jobs were scarce and women were often the mainstay of the family income. There was also the fear of losing the factory house, which went with the job. Like the agricultural 'tied cottage' the factory house could be used as a means of imposing discipline.

Saidie, however, was independently housed and felt freer than most of her colleagues to speak out. On one famous occasion she nearly got the sack for her courage.

'This particular girl had had a baby a day or so before, but she had to come into work early to get enough money to feed the family. She really wasn't nearly well enough to come in, but a prolonged absence would have meant a lost job, so her friends almost carried her in just two days after the birth. She was so weak she couldn't stand at the looms, so we made a little stool for her.

'When the foreman came round and saw her sitting down he nearly exploded and started to give her a severe shaking. The poor girl collapsed with weakness, with her hair-bun unravelling, sending the tresses trailing all over the place. For one minute I thought it had caught on the machine — if it had, she would have been scalped.'

This was more than Saidie could stand.

'At that moment I forgot my pacifist and Methodist upbringing. I flew at the foreman and slapped him right, left and centre. I had my scissors in my hand and by the time I had finished his face looked like the Stars and Stripes of America!'

Nothing like this had ever happened at Ewart's before and the management took it as a clear challenge to their authority. Saidie was summoned to the Director's office and given a warning that unless she made an immediate apology and guaranteed future good behaviour she would be instantly dismissed with the certainty of blacklisting throughout the industry.

This was a serious threat, but as Saidie walked out of the office to think the matter over she noticed that she was not on her own — the weavers were hammering their scissors on the looms as she was escorted to the door. It was an encouraging message and it helped her to come to the far-reaching personal decision to take on the firm.

But whatever Saidie did, the family had first to be consulted — if she lost her job the whole household would suffer. There was no hesitation from her invalided step-father.

'Daughter, your mother would not want you to apologise for something you were right to do. Go back and take your stand and the Lord will look after you.'

Saidie, who has always believed that the Lord can do with a bit of assistance at such moments, returned to the factory, but before

seeing the Director she asked the women to stop their machines until the interview was over.

'We will let the bosses hear your support in a silent factory.'

In the second interview the pressure was increased.

'Well, young woman, are you going to apologise; if not, you are sacked, and you can take your cards and wages and go.'

But this time Saidie was well prepared.

'Well, Sir, what you have just done will make a good story for the *Belfast Telegraph* tonight. My girls and I are going to march down now to give the facts to them. I wonder how it will look in print to your customers when they see, "Ewart's sack weaver for defending young mother from assault"?'

It was a shrewd blow and it landed all the more effectively in the unaccustomed silence of the factory. It had its effect. After a few minutes of further discussion, a ceremonial dressing-down was given and Saidie was told to get back to her loom. She did so and asked her women to restart the work. The balance of power had shifted in the firm — or, as Saidie put it, 'The worm had turned'.

It was the first of many famous victories, but this is the one that is best remembered. At that moment Saidie acquired a new authority and the women had learned the value of demonstrating together.

But it was still to be many years before effective trade unions for women could be organised in Northern Ireland textiles. In the economic uncertainties of the 1920s, spinners and weavers were 'two a penny' and it was impossible for them to persuade the employers to spend money on factory improvements; issues like 100 per cent trade unionism or holidays with pay looked equally long-distance targets in the midst of a world slump. 'Batten down the hatches and wait' became the strategy of many reformers.

In these circumstances Saidie's opportunity to advance the conditions of her members had to await another decade, until the economic revival of the late 1930s. But in the waiting period she grew in influence among her women, becoming for them a focal point around which they learned to improve their lives within and beyond the factory. Her own skill as a weaver ('one of the best in Ireland', as a leading merchant noted) guaranteed her a place inside the industry; and her sincerity and integrity gave her a leadership role far beyond the gate of Ewart's.

'The little mother of Woodvale Street', as many called her, was quietly gathering a wider family.

The Belfast Girls' Club Union

Saidie's period of waiting for trade to improve so that her industrial bargaining position could be strengthened was put to good use on behalf of the women of Belfast. During this time she turned her attention to the affairs of the Belfast Girls' Club Union. Even today, when she is asked about factors influencing her life, she surprises listeners by talking in great detail and affection about Club activities which seem to many to be part of a distant past.

Yet it is not unusual that she should pay this tribute. Before the creation of the welfare state the Girls' Club movement and others like it offered community services which nowadays are taken for granted in a more affluent society. How many trade union and Labour leaders, for example, can forget the stimulation and encouragement which they received in the Workers' Educational Association or the National Council of Labour Colleges? Such organisations had a strong following before and after the First World War and were the training ground for many who became distinguished public servants.

The Belfast Girls' Club Union is in the great tradition of late Victorian social service activity, with its provision of educational, recreational and holiday facilities for working girls. Recognising that changes in working conditions must be accompanied by improvements in the out-of-work environment, Saidie saw Club activities as an essential back-up to the improvements which she sought in the factories. Housing conditions were appalling and the vital rest and recreation could not be enjoyed in the average working-class home. The Girls' Club Union, by offering a wide range of further educational activities, provided the answer.

And, of course, in the Belfast setting the Club did more than provide basic social training — it became one of the first reconciliation organisations in the Province, bringing together the Shankill and the Falls and other divided areas that hitherto had had little contact with each other.

Saidie first joined the Club Union in 1922 and was soon deeply involved in its affairs. For over fifty years she has been one of its foremost members and has contributed to every department of its work. The Union owes its origin to the late Hon. Ethel Macnaghten and Miss Mary Workman, each members of wealthy industrial families, who along with two other remarkable women, Miss Frances Heron and Miss Anastasia McCready, were distressed by the lack of

social facilities for the girls of the Shankill and Falls districts at the end of a day's work.

Saidie remembers the problem as one of having nothing to do and nowhere to go after a day spent in miserable working surroundings.

'As soon as you got something to eat you went out with your friends and marched up and down the Shankill or the Falls or the connecting streets singing at the top of your voice. And with the streets dove-tailing into one another there was often trouble when the two sides met. In those days sectarian songs like "Kevin Barry" and "The Sash" didn't mix any better than they do now and there was many a row.'

In 1904 Ethel Macnaghten decided to bring the girls together for an informal tea party in a room above a local shop which they hired for the occasion. The evening was an immediate success. As a result, the first Club, 'Time and Talents', was formed, leading to a powerful Union of Girls' Clubs which influenced club work throughout the British Isles and much further afield.

In late Victorian and early Edwardian Belfast the Club Union movement became a most significant social institution, making up for the limitations of home life and providing outlets for evening and week-end activity which did much to relieve the drabness of factory existence. The thrust of much of this activity was practical: reading, writing, singing, painting, physical education and above all, cooking and needlework. It was part of a great do-it-yourself programme to which, as Saidie observes, we might do well to return as we approach the year 2000.

Favourite on the list of subjects was needlework, as members learned to replace coarse home-made garments.

'Bales of fine material were purchased and girls from the Shankill and Falls flocked in to learn the new self-taught techniques based on hand-sewing. Later on, Singer's revolutionised our lives by letting us have machines on hire purchase arrangements...'

But for Saidie these sewing circles were more than garment-making sessions.

'Certainly, I've yet to meet a girl who doesn't like beautiful underwear, but far more important we were teaching them, Protestant and Catholic together, what we could do on the basis of self-help and co-operation. And we gave them self-respect, too, by asking them to pay their way. When we got the material for a garment we paid for it at a penny a week, and when this was paid off the ma-

terial for a second garment was made available. We didn't ask or take any charity.'

From the first Club on the Shankill forty other Clubs were formed in the Province and eventually the movement was strong enough to move into the provision of residential holiday centres. For many working-class families these centres provided the only opportunity of a holiday by the sea or in the countryside up to the Second World War. All this was long before the appearance of Billy Butlin and the popular holiday package — before Butlin, the Sunday School outing or Scout or B.B. 'camp' offered the only holiday outlet for most working-class families.

Summing up on Club Union work, Saidie notes:

'The Girls' Club Union made a remarkable impact as a social pioneer. It helped its members to serve the present age, not only in our beloved country but in many other parts of the world. On the domestic scene it did for our women what the trade unions were aiming for in their industrial lives. Personally I will never be able to repay the Girls' Club for the training I received there.'

Saidie also notes the wider impact which the Clubs have made on their members. By being inter-denominational the movement has provided a structure through which reconciliation has been promoted — in the best way possible, by helping working people to get to know one another across the denominational divide.

Lecturing on industrial history to visiting students.

'Hearing those girls from the Falls and the Shankill walking along the Antrim coast, linked arm in arm, singing songs together, which made them forget their sectarian origins, was a reward in itself.'

Today as Northern Ireland looks desperately for signs of such natural unity the pioneering significance of the Girls' Club Union is underlined. And as we note Saidie Patterson's words we are reminded of how acute was the vision of this girl from the Shankill who recognised the potential of the Club Union over fifty years ago.

But deeply involved as the young weaver from Ewart's was in Club Union work, she was not content to stop at social first-aid; she was anxious to bring about deeper changes in society. She had begun to study the conditions of her time and to share her knowledge in small classes which she organised in her Woodvale Street home. In the Twenties and Thirties she also began to take an active part in the campaigns of the unemployed in Belfast and other Ulster centres.

The general economic distress of the time concerned her, but beyond the general deprivation she recognised that women were a depressed group within an already depressed class. Analysing the situation she came to the conclusion that the special plight of women workers arose because they were without effective trade union organisation. She recognised, too, the contradiction in the situation — women were the key operatives in the linen industry, central to the whole productive process; men, in the main, were repairers and builders of machines. Men, however, had the backing of powerful trade unions.

For Saidie the conclusion was obvious — women must take steps to organise a union which could harness the negotiating potential of women workers in textiles. So in the 1930s in North Belfast the scene was set for a crusade in which Saidie Patterson became a national trade union leader and ultimately an internationally known defender of women's rights. In the process she helped to reshape the industrial relations of her time and created a new status for textile workers in general and for women workers in particular.

Bob Getgood speaking at May Day Rally, 1940.

Making a Union

From the moment Saidie Patterson entered the linen industry in 1920 she was never in any doubt about her mission — it was to carry out her mother's command to combat injustice wherever she saw it. Her dedication was as simple as that and to this day it remains her approach.

'I vowed that one day, somehow, they'd stop treating women as a pair of hands and recognise them for something more.'

The task took twenty years, but in the process a revolution in labour-management relations took place and women were at last

given the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of trade union membership and to play a full part in the industry they served.

When Saidie started work as a weaver after the First World War the linen industry was at the beginning of a period of prolonged uncertainty which extended into the 1930s. After a short boom, linen sales from Northern Ireland were affected by the international decline and eventually the Province became one of the most depressed areas of the United Kingdom. In 1922 nearly twenty-five per cent of the insured population were unemployed and ten years later the figure stood even higher, at twenty-seven per cent. In the same year forty per cent of the building trade workers and sixty per cent of the ship building and engineering industries were idle. On the eve of World War II nearly 102,000, or thirty per cent of the insured population, were jobless.

The indignities of unemployment were severe. Recipients of benefits were often humiliated as their home conditions were investigated and as they joined lengthy queues for the regular 'signing-on' exercise. From time to time benefits were reduced in order to 'encourage' the workless married men to seek work; single men were often denied benefit altogether. Eventually the weekly dole was so low that out-door-relief riots were sparked off in Belfast, uniting Protestant and Catholic workers in a rare united cause and reminding them of their common vulnerability when 'bread and butter' issues arose. At one time during this period benefit for a man and wife, with one child, was reduced to twelve shillings a week and even this amount was not guaranteed. Many single men (like Saidie's brother) emigrated to Australia to relieve the strain on the family purse, after having received the feared decision from the Ministry: 'Disallowed benefit for not genuinely seeking work'. This, at a time when over 100,000 were without jobs.

Belfast was well recognised as a social and industrial black spot. A survey carried out in the winter of 1938 reported that thirty-six per cent of the families interviewed were living in conditions classified as 'absolute poverty'. These years, in which memories of 'the hungry Thirties' were born, have become part of the folk memory of a whole generation.

In such circumstances any kind of trade unionism was difficult, but a union for women workers in textiles seemed impossible. For most of the women merely retaining their job had become a condition of family survival and they realised that trade unionism would bring

about a dangerous confrontation with the firm. 'Half a loaf is better than no bread' had become the philosophy of most.

Saidie, herself the breadwinner for a large family, realised the difficulties, yet she was convinced that it was in the interests of both sides of industry that immediate reforms should take place. She stressed the interdependence and mutual responsibility of management and labour and in doing so revealed an aspect of her approach to industrial relations which was not generally appreciated by either side of industry in the atmosphere of class warfare during the 1930s. Even senior colleagues were at times surprised by her approach.

In organising her women Saidie faced two problems: how to gain recognition from management and how to win support from male trade unionists.

With management she faced stone-wall resistance: their inflexible view was that there would be no guaranteed wage structure and no abolition of waiting time. Nor would there be moves on the other defects of industrial relations which made women a class apart in the textile industry. As Saidie put it angrily at the time:

'In other words, no wage is too low for a woman worker. We have been told to be patient until better times arrive. Wait, old horse, and you'll get hay!'

But Saidie was not prepared to wait. At that time in Northern Ireland every defect in management, every failing in departmental organisation, every delay, every breakdown was reflected in the wage packet of the woman worker, especially weavers and winders. A considerable proportion of every forty-eight hours in the factory was spent in waiting time for which no money was paid, and it was not uncommon to find a woman worker, after standing about for half a week, leaving the factory with hardly any wage at all.

A wage list of 276 weavers compiled by Saidie in the late 1930s reads:

36 had less than 10 shillings a week
184 had a maximum of 25 shillings a week
44 had a maximum of 40 shillings a week
12 had exceeded 40 shillings a week.

In fact, when eventually the women textile workers went on strike, many were better-off on strike pay than they had been on normal wages.

The men in the textile industry were in a world apart from the women — indeed, there was a tendency for the employers to pursue a 'divide and conquer' policy by keeping the men content at the expense of the women. And always behind the men was the power of strong local trade unions, well financed, and pressing continually for improved conditions and offering resistance to any lowering of standards. Women workers were reminded daily of the benefits of trade unionism.

But for women who believed in trade unionism there were difficulties. The trade union solidarity displayed by Belfast trade unionists was traditionally for men only. In general, the benefits of trade unionism were not extended to women workers and the branch room was regarded as a male preserve. Beatrice Webb, on one of her visits to Belfast, noticed this attitude and described the craftsmen of the Province as being 'contemptuous and indifferent to the women earning miserable wages in the linen factories.'

But notwithstanding the indifference to the plight of women workers, Belfast and the North of Ireland was fertile ground for union organisation. In the nineteenth century Ulster had been the birthplace of many noted Labour leaders, among them John Doherty of Larne, described by the Labour historian G. D. H. Cole as 'the most influential trade unionist of his time'; William Allen of Carrickfergus, first General Secretary of the Engineers; and Bob Smillie, of Belfast's Sandy Row, the noted miner's leader. In fact, so strong is the tradition of trade unionism in the North of Ireland that we learn from a still preserved Minute Book that the Belfast Wood-workers' Club held its first meeting in the town on 1 September 1788, a year before the French Revolution. This account, the earliest extant record of such a Club in the British Isles, gives plenty of evidence of the vigorous activity of local trade unionists in the eighteenth century. During the following century these beginnings were built upon and trade unionism flourished in and around the Lagan Valley.

Saidie's great contribution was to recognise the strength of this tradition and to build upon it. Instead of condemning the isolationist tendencies of the male trade unionists she encouraged them to widen the definition of their unionism, so that in a spirit of enlightened self-interest it would embrace their industrial sisters as well. Here too, she was ahead of her time in appreciating the contribution that women might make to the movement; even today

she argues that the balance of influence in trade union affairs between 'Brothers and Sisters' is far from satisfactory, especially at the highest levels of decision taking.

In the late 1930s, Saidie (now supported by sister Jean, who had also entered the textile industry) sensed that the time was ripe for an initiative by women linen workers. The trading climate was still uncertain and unemployment remained a problem, but new factors were working in favour of women operatives. In particular, the drive for re-armament and the setting-up of an aircraft industry in Belfast were stimulating employment in engineering and shipbuilding and encouraging developments in industrial relations which the older industries could not ignore if they were to retain their labour force. In response, the Ministry of Labour was extending its Wages Board protection schemes, paving the way for a general improvement in standards among the lowest paid. As the War progressed a labour shortage affected the market and the once high wage differential between skilled and unskilled was considerably reduced.

Ernest Bevin addressing the Labour Party Conference, Blackpool, June 1945.

For the first time in decades the workers generally began to feel confident about the future. A revolution of rising expectations took place and Saidie knew that it was at last possible to think of organising the textile women, openly and thoroughly.

'We knew in our bones that the time had come. No half measures; it was now or never.'

In this ambition the young shop steward was powerfully assisted and encouraged by two remarkable men who — along with a third, whom she was to meet later — became the greatest source of inspiration for her life's work. These two, Ernest Bevin and Bob Getgood (from the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union) were themselves anxious to extend the textile section of their Union and, like Saidie, they recognised that no real progress was possible without the organised support of the women workers.

With the support of these well-known leaders all things seemed possible. Bevin (then famous as 'The Docker's K.C.') was at the height of his trade union power and a few years later added to his national reputation by his membership of the War Cabinet and afterwards as one of Attlee's leading Ministers in the post-War Labour government. Down the years he had been a frequent visitor to Belfast and on his first meeting with Saidie marked her out for promotion within his Union. With the support of such a national leader local recruits to the Union could be enrolled with confidence.

If Ernest Bevin was to Saidie 'the greatest Englishman who ever lived', Robert Getgood was undoubtedly her greatest Irishman. Bob — the 'mighty atom', as he was known — started his working life at the age of eleven as a barefooted half-timer in the spinning mill at Gilford, Co Down. Born in 1884, by his early teens he had been converted to the Christian Socialism of Keir Hardie and by the end of his apprenticeship was active in local radical movements and in the sponsorship of the Socialist Sunday School movement. He was soon a marked man in industry and like his Scottish hero, Keir Hardie, suffered a good deal of hardship through industrial blacklisting, before becoming a full-time trade union official in the 1920s.

When Bob Getgood first met Saidie in 1938 he recognised her outstanding potential and, as he recorded in this autobiography, they formed 'a close working relationship on behalf of the Cause, which was destined to last until the end of the Chapter'. His tribute

continued:

'Looking back over the years, I don't see how we could have advanced so far in the time and in the conditions without the selfless sacrificial work of Saidie Patterson. Saidie had a way with women that won their confidence and secured the co-operation of hundreds, inspiring them to become shop stewards, to canvass for new union members and to collect weekly dues — all of which carried the risk and often the threat of dismissal.'

Bob also noted the special reconciling gifts of the young trade unionist:

'Here the real girl shone through. She saw far beyond the factory floor, with a vision that was rare in one so young. For her, the workers were far more than recruiting material for the Union — they were people, with problems that deserved special attention. He goes on to describe her homely but most effective approach:

'When things got difficult she would invite a crowd of girls to her home for a cup of tea. This was always a happy event. Old quarrels were patched up and the all-important human dimension was attended to. My job when I turned up at these gatherings was to say a word to encourage or explain. But Saidie always insisted on going further. She never tired of telling the girls about the bridge building mission of unions and about the deeper meaning of trade union brotherhood and sisterhood. With all my experience, this was a new way of going about trade unionism, but I soon realised that this message was the keynote of Saidie's contribution; something very special was being introduced to our movement.'

Bevin recognised these same qualities in Saidie and along with Bob Getgood became a frequent visitor to her Shankill Road home. On one of these visits he planned with her a strategy designed to organise women throughout the industy. He surprised her — but she soon saw the point — by suggesting that they should start by organising Ewart's, the most powerful unit in the whole of the textile world, and the one in which Saidie was employed. The full backing of the Transport Union was promised, with additional trade union support at home and abroad.

This was the opportunity for which Saidie had been waiting. She readily accepted Bevin's proposal, but on one condition — that they would strike if necessary, in support of their demands, and that she would have the full backing of the men in the factory. Bevin recognised the wisdom of the conditions and endorsed them with words

which Saidie has never forgotten:

'The job I am offering you will be as big as a mountain, and I can only promise you a spoon to dig it.'

She also remembers her confident reply — 'It's amazing what a woman can do with a spoon.'

Saidie's first attempt at organising the Ewart empire was far from successful. Most women were afraid to give open support because of the fear of dismissal or eviction from their factory-owned house. Sometimes the pressures used were more subtle.

'Many a spirit was broken by petty tyranny — a loom left idle for a variety of reasons, which meant half the pay gone if the victim was a two-loom weaver; or the worker might get a bad beam of yarn from which she was expected to weave a perfect cloth, and then fined heavily if the cloth-passer could discover any fault or flaw. It was hard to fight such tactics.'

Others were persuaded by the propaganda of the time that unions were unnecessary, undesirable or even un-Christian. And always there was the special Ulster factor of sectarianism which threatened the trade union ideal of working-class unity. In fact, the possibility of sectarian strife among workers was the nightmare of trade union organisers and they encountered it in a bewildering number of forms.

On one occasion Bob Getgood attended the funeral of a well-known Nationalist M.P., Joseph Devlin, who had helped the Transport Union on a number of occasions. His presence at the funeral was duly reported by a local Unionist newspaper and he was elevated to the position of 'chief mourner'. It was enough to cause an uproar among hundreds of Protestant members and to persuade them to withdraw from membership. A few weeks later it was the turn of the Roman Catholics. The Union had held a members' concert in the Ulster Hall and at the end of the proceedings the National Anthem was played. Out stalked the Catholics in protest and on Saturday refused to pay their branch dues.

Bob and Saidie sighed once again. These were problems for which even the mighty Bevin had no answer.

Saidie, however, got to work on the mountain with her spoon and in the late Thirties worked out plans for a membership drive in Ewart's and the plan was endorsed by the Union headquarters. In preparation of her plans Saidie had kept in mind Bevin's vision which, like her own, stretched beyond the confines of wages and conditions.

'It was an inspiration to work with Ernest Bevin. He gave all of us a new vision of what was possible when working people got together. Listening to him was like listening to a missionary pointing to the Promised Land. But he always made it clear that the New Jerusalem would only come when we taught our members to lay aside their fears and to realise that they counted as they really do.'

This was the 'royal souls' view of life in another form.

Saidie set about sharing Bevin's vision of the future with the natural leaders of the women in her factory. She had chosen and prepared these women down the years and during 1938 and 1939 she arranged a series of meetings at her home to brief them fully about what was going to happen. Again the wisdom of the 'common touch' was in evidence. There were no great theories about industrial economics; just an exchange of ideas about what was wrong in the industry and how life might be improved for all the family.

'I found in those days that the fireside was a sure place to recruit supporters. At that level we were more than workers — we were women who understood one another's problems. I often brought a dozen or so to the home two or three times a week and we talked our troubles through over a cup of tea.'

Nor did Saidie worry over-much about rule book procedures and formal training sessions.

'Bevin and Bob were always anxious to get the girls introduced to details about the Union and to train them in branch rules. But I knew differently. I knew that most of the girls around me when they started work were hoping to get a husband and get out of the industry as quickly as possible to get a home of their own and to start a family. So I always brought the subject back to, "Well, what sort of a world do you want for your children?" I've never found a woman yet who would not respond to such an appeal.'

It was a recipe based on an instinctive understanding of human nature which has never deserted Saidie and it was more effective than a thousand well-written theses. Her male colleagues soon appreciated the wisdom of her approach.

Sometimes the persuasion went beyond words. On one occasion Ernest Bevin arrived to find that he had interrupted a fortune-telling session for new members. 'He was learning,' says Saidie, 'that things were done differently in Ireland!'

'For the sake of the Cause I got quite a reputation as a reader of the tea leaves. I read the cups for the girls and many a husband appeared out of a cup of tea, brewed and read in 32 Woodvale Street.'

All this was language quite new to the Transport Union (though it was in line with the earliest club traditions of unions in Belfast and elsewhere), but the message proved effective and the union grew in strength and in secret until by 1939 it was strong enough to 'go public'. At that stage it presented Ewart's with a formal demand for 100 per cent trade union membership in the firm.

No one was in any doubt about the significance of what had taken place. The biggest union in textiles had decided to confront the biggest firm in the industry. The confrontation was recognised by the whole country as a symbolic test of strength betwen Capital and Labour and each of the parties involved knew what was at stake.

For the firm, the demand by the Transport Union was an attack on the textile stronghold, which Ewart's were determined to resist with every means in their power. They responded to the union demand with what Saidie described as a mixture of 'old world charm and paternalism':

'The joining of a trade union is a matter entirely for each worker to decide, but the question of whether or not our works are to be what is termed a ''closed shop'' is a matter for us to decide. We will not agree to the principle that we are only to engage such workers as a single or any trade union may decide.'

In this statement Ewart's indicated on behalf of the whole industry that the employers regarded the issue at stake as one of fundamental principle.

But for the Transport Union, as well, the issue was one of principle: the Union, and through the Union the women workers, had to be given full recognition within the industry. And this recognition went further than the firm was prepared to go. In this situation compromise proved impossible.

However, Bevin had given his word that an all-out strike would be supported; Saidie had built up a unique alliance of male and female workers within the linen industry; and outside the factory allies ranged up behind their champions. Whatever the outcome, industrial relations in textiles would never be the same again.

At the age of thirty-four, Saidie's first public test had come.

Saidie at her Trade Union desk.

The Big Strike

'One day the linen workers of Belfast were aroused and they made up their minds that they would not be exploited any more.'

Saidie's terse summing-up of one of the most significant events in the history of the Irish linen industry catches exactly the mood of 1940. The workers all knew that the time for decisive action had arrived; it was a dramatic illustration of the power of an idea whose time had come.

The decision to demand full trade union membership among linen workers had been taken with care and skilful preparation. In theory the decision applied to men and women equally, but in

practice it was the women, forming as they did the majority in the industry, who were chiefly involved. In these circumstances, Saidie's role as commander in the field was crucial. It was also fortunate that being employed at Ewart's she was on the spot and knew conditions from the inside.

The decision to choose the firm of William Ewart and Son, Ltd, Crumlin Road, Belfast, as the target was both courageous and shrewd. At that time the firm was the foremost in Europe, covering every aspect of the product: the flax which they treated and grew for themselves, spinning mills, weaving factories, bleaching, dyeing and finishing works. In their stitching factories they handled all they produced. And backing up this massive operation was a large team of travellers selling the goods to an international market.

Ewart's, in fact, was the most formidable opponent imaginable — an acknowledged leader in the world of textiles; proud and wealthy enough to 'go it alone', refusing all offers of financial help from their trade association and discouraging government intervention in their industrial relations.

Yet by selecting Ewart's for their new policy drive the Transport Union had chosen wisely. If this firm could be brought into line it would have the widest possible repercussions inside the entire industry. What Ewart's did today, others followed tomorrow.

It was also evident from early discussions that the strike leaders were interested in something more than membership recruitment. For Bob Getgood, in particular, the real issue was how to bring about a revolution in attitudes which would embrace both management and labour and result in a more efficient indsutry. As he put it:

'What we had to do was to inform and inspire the workers and, at the same time, educate the employers to a new sense of responsibility and opportunity.'

Bob Getgood had been carrying out an investigation into the linen industry for some years and had concluded that though industrial relations in Ewart's were good compared to those of many smaller undertakings, there were serious defects which created inefficiency, leading to worker-management tension. He believed that it was in the interest of both sides to eradicate these tensions.

Getgood was also convinced that Ewart's had leadership potential so he decided that the firm 'should have the honour of leading the industry on to a new and happier state of affairs'. For Getgood this

meant 100 per cent union membership, so that management and labour could commence a reform programme based on agreements negotiated between equals, each recognising the right and the ability of the other to speak with authority for its members. He believed that anything less than a fully organised membership would weaken the negotiating process.

Ewart's were not impressed with Getgood's desire to 'honour' them and made their views known in a firm and public rejection of union demands. They conceded the right of employees to join a union, but they refused to be party to any arrangement which might pressurise their employees:

'We wish our employees to know that we have repeatedly informed Mr. Getgood that we have not the slightest objection to our employees joining his or any other union. Our relationship with the various unions has always been of the most friendly nature and will, we trust, continue to be so. We have also informed him that we do not propose to take any action to coerce any of our workers to join his or any other union. We are aware that many individual workers either for reasons of conscience or for other personal reasons are unwilling to join any union, and we look upon it as the inalienable right of such individuals as free British subjects to make their own decisions in such matters.'

To this attack, and also to meet public fears on the issue of the closed shop Saidie prepared a special address, which was delivered to a group of Belfast citizens (business, clergy, university and other non-union interests) brought together to hear the young leader put the case for her women. The short address was recorded and, though delivered early in her career, it indicates her skill as a natural communicator.

'Ladies and Gentlemen,

'As Secretary of the Textile Branch which is on strike, I would like to say a few words to you.

'Workers do not make up their minds to go on strike unless something of very great importance is at stake. And the great importance of this strike is the right to have 100 per cent trade unionism.

'Why do we want this? Because without this organisation we cannot hope to remedy the conditions under which we labour.

'We, the women workers — the weavers and the winders — are probably the hardest worked and lowest paid section of industry in-

side the British Isles.

'We have no machinery to regulate wages; no Trades' Boards to regulate or improve the conditions under which we work. Nothing exists in the way of protection, except our trade union — and that is why we want a strong 100 per cent trade union organisation, capable of demanding better conditions for the thousands of textile workers, instead of merely pleading for them.

'We don't want anything we are not entitled to. We give the best years of our lives, month after month, year after year, to the production of linen. We think we are entitled to a little more than the bare necessities of life.

'Neither are we fighting solely for ourselves — we are fighting for *all* the linen workers. For our success is their success; our defeat would be their defeat. But we are not going to be defeated, because we come of good fighting stock. We are Ulster workers and we say ''No Surrender'', but this time we are saying it with one voice and a united meaning.

'It is rather strange that in all the appeals which have been made in the name of loyalty nobody has appealed to the loyalty of the employers. I wonder why.

'To the men workers who have come out in sympathy with us, at a heavy financial loss, we want publicly to thank them for their support. To all the others I say, stand firm. Together, shoulder to shoulder, we will see this thing through.

'And when we win — and we shall win — we will have laid the foundation upon which will be built a happier and a brighter life for all linen workers.

'Thank you.'

After some weeks of such arguments and counter-arguments deadlock was reached and the strike began.

Technically the origin of the dispute was the presence in the firm of 136 non-union employees, which by February 1940 had been reduced to twenty-six. Eventually the Transport Union delivered an ultimatum that unless the non-union members became organised by Friday, 23 February 1940, the workers would strike from the following Monday.

There was no response from the firm, and on Monday the union moved into action. The women, in particular, had decided to make their stand and Saidie was able to promise them an initial strike pay of twelve shillings a week. But this time the women were not alone.

AMALGAMATED

Transport and General Workers' Union

General Secretary ... ... E. BEVIN.
Affiliated to the Trades Union Congress and Labour Party.

DISTRICT OFFICE—66 VICTORIA STREET, BELFAST.

Unity is Strength.

Each for All and All for Each

EWART'S STRIKE

W. W. W. STATION CALLING!

WEAVERS, WINDERS, WARPERS, CALLING.

We are on Strike against Non-Unionism.
We are on Strike against Bad Working Conditions.
We are on Strike against Low Wages.

Workers in Aircraft Factories,
Workers in Shipyard and Engineering Works,
Workers in all Industries—
THANKS, THANKS, FOR SILVER BULLETS.

Belfast Linen Textile Workers are the lowest paid Textile Workers in the British Isles.

We Will Win! WE WILL WIN! WE ARE WINNING!!

Confucius, he say:
PLENTY SILVER BULLETS
WOMEN WILL WIN

ISSUED BY THE STRIKE COMMITTEE

T. H. JORDAN, PRINTER, BELFAST.

Historic strike leaflets of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union.

Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union

We Accuse the Linen Lords

1,600 Workers, men and women, are on strike. Certain Newspapers and a small section of the public, who apparently know nothing of the conditions in the Linen Industry, have joined in an attack on the Strikers and their demands. Charges of disloyalty and coercion have been levelled at us, but one thing must be stated, THIS IS NOT A STRIKE MERELY TO MAKE WOMEN JOIN A UNION, IT IS A STRIKE TO ENSURE A VITAL PRINCIPLE OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATION—100% TRADE UNIONISM. This principle has been fought for, and won, by all skilled workers throughout the world—until forcibly suppressed in Italy and Germany. IS IT ALSO TO BE DENIED TO US?

THE IMPORTANCE OF LINEN.

Along with Agriculture and Shipbuilding, the Linen Industry has made Ulster. As Ulster Ships are known and their value recognised throughout the world, so in "Ulster Linen" is summed up all that is best in Textile Manufactures. The ... e smoothness of our Damask, the coloured beauties of our Art Silk, the cool sheen of our Sheets, are produced under conditions which leave a blemish upon their perfection. One thing must be remembered, those black-coated workers in our Administrative Services, those employees of our Municipalities and Local Governing Bodies enjoy a higher standard of living—which is never for one moment begrudged to them—which solely rests upon our three great exporting Industries: Linen, Agriculture and Shipbuilding. It is the products of these Industries, sold abroad, within and without the Empire, which provide the necessary money to run our whole Distributive and Social Service Machine.

And what of the Linen Workers who have thus, and for so many years, been the corner-stone of such prosperity as the province enjoys? Here are the facts:—

WHAT WE ARE WORTH TO THEM.

After about two years of negotiations with the Power Loom Manufacturers' Association (protracted because of the organisational weakness of the Linen Workers) a minimum wage was agreed upon and accepted. The Employers' Association agreed on the amount of the minimum—WE HAD TO ACCEPT IT Here is the Minimum Scale for MALE Workers, outside of the craft sections:—

From 16 to 18 years of age ...	16/- per week.	From 21 to 25 years of a[illegible]	25/- per week.
From 18 to 20 years of age ...	20/- per week.	From 25 and over ...	30/- per week.

Plus 7½% increase which came into operation in December, 1939.

Incredible as it may seem, this meant a substantial increase to many Male Workers throughout the Industry. They refused to even consider a minimum rate for Women. IN OTHER WORDS, NO WAGE WAS TOO LOW FOR A WOMAN.

The case of the Women Workers demands special consideration. Their whole existence is a fight against a small wage-packet at the end of the week. Every defect in the Management, every flaw in the Departmental Organisation, every hold-up, every break-down, is reflected in the wage packet of the Woman worker—especially the Weaver and the Winder. A large proportion of every forty-eight hours spent in the Factory is wasted in waiting. It is not an uncommon thing to see a Woman Worker, after standing about half the week, leave the Factory with HARDLY ANY WAGE AT ALL.

Here is Wage List of 276 Damask Weavers, represesentative of a typical week in the Industry in a period of prosperity:—

36 women had less than	10/- per week.	12 women had from	30/- to 35/- per week.
66 women had from	10/- to 15/- per week.	9 ,, ,, ,,	35/- to 40/- per week.
45 ,, ,, ,,	15/- to 20/- per week.	4 ,, ,, ,,	40/- to 45/- per week.
73 ,, ,, ,,	20/- to 25/- per week.	1 woman ,, ,,	45/- to 50/- per week.
23 ,, ,, ,,	25/- to 30/- per week.	7 women ,, ,,	50/- and over per week.

Many women are receiving more in STRIKE PAY than they receive in WAGES. THIS IS THE BACKGROUND TO THE STRIKE.

THE LINEN WORKERS ARE AROUSED.

From all over the Industry enquiries are pouring into Union Headquarters asking for Meetings, for Entrance Forms, and demanding to meet representatives of the Union, to bring about organisation in the Mills and Factories. Messages of sympathy, hopes for our success, are received daily, and, most important, MONEY IS COMING IN AT A STEADY RATE TO AUGMENT THE WORKERS' STRIKE PAY.

From the Aircraft Factory, from the Docks, from the 'Island', from the Foundries, from *everywhere* Collections and Donations to assist in the fight are coming in *each week*.

EVERY TRADE UNIONIST IS BEHIND THE FIGHT TO ORGANISE THE LINEN WORKERS.

R. GETGOOD, Organiser.

T. H. JORDAN, PRINTER, BELFAST.

AMALGAMATED

Transport and General Workers' Union.

66 VICTORIA STREET, BELFAST.

To all Workers in the Spinning Trade

What the Union has done for the Workers in the Spinning Mills

We are often asked, "What has the Union done?" Well, here is the answer. Your wages have been increased since December, 1939, as follows:—

	Belfast District.	Country Districts.
Spinners	**From 24/– to 40/6.**	**From 23/– to 38/9.**
Piecers	**From 22/– to 37/6.**	**From 20/3 to 35/–.**
Layers	**From 19/9 to 33/6.**	**From 19/3 to 31/–.**
Doffers (Spinning)	**From 18/– to 30/9.**	**From 16/3 to 28/6.**
Reelers	**From 21/3 to 40/6.**	**From 20/3 to 38/9.**
Spreaders and Carders	**From 22/– to 37/6.**	**From 20/3 to 35/–.**
Rovers and Drawers	**From 21/3 to 35/9.**	**From 19/6 to 33/6.**
Doffers (Preparing)	**From 16/3 to 28/3.**	**From 14/6 to 25/9.**

Note.—The above increases **include** Time-keeping of 2/6 per week.

Reelers' Wages. For all Reelers of average ability we secured a guaranteed minimum wage of 40/6 for Belfast and district, and of 38/9 for Country districts, for a full week's work.

If you are an average Reeler and paid less, you should ask your Reeling Master for your pay to be made up. **If it is refused, tell us about it.**

Thread-Making. Negotiating machinery has been set up to deal with all matters that arise in this work in future.

Piecing-out and Jobbing. Improved rates have been secured in many firms.

Machine-room Workers. Increased rates have been obtained for all these workers.

Good Time-keeping Bonus of 2/6 per week to all workers.

Overtime. This is now paid at the rate of time and quarter; but if full time is worked, the rate is increased to time and half; and each day stands for itself.

Holidays with Pay. One week's holiday with pay.

All these substantial improvements have been secured through the efforts of the Union since December, 1939. With truth we can claim that greater benefits have been won within this period than in the previous twenty years.

Do you think these valuable improvements are worth holding? We think they are. Besides, there is still much to be done. It is hardly fair to leave it to someone else to do.

We therefore invite you to join up with the thousands of other Textile workers already in our ranks, and help to lift up the Spinning Trade workers to the level of other industries.

SAIDIE PATTERSON, Secretary.
R. GETGOOD, Organiser.
ERNEST BURNS, Secretary.

December, 1943.

The nearly 2,000 strikers included the male workers in the firm, with, in addition, the moral and financial support of outside trade unions representing a cross-section of industry in Northern Ireland and Britain and, eventually, many areas of the Commonwealth.

Ewart's, too, had powerful supporters. Many of its Directors were members of the political Establishment and were able to rally influential contacts in Belfast and London. The firm also waged psychological warfare against the strikers by suggesting that they were forgetting the interests of their friends and relations serving in the armed forces One document addressed to the strikers read:

'Many of our employees have voluntarily joined the fighting forces. Many of you are engaged in producing cloth which is essential to the successful prosecution of the war. Are you prepared to stab our fighting men in the back by interrupting the flow of necessary equipment?'

For this Saidie had a swift reply.

'The employers have challenged our loyalty. We know your loyalty too well to question it. Our fellow trade unionists have joined the fighting forces to give battle to those who destroyed trade unionism in Germany. We know them better than your Directors. The lads in the forces are our friends and brothers, but to the Directors they are only employees. Don't permit anyone to destroy their unions, while they are away at the front.'

This was uncompromising language from both sides and it was the prelude to an unprecedented stoppage bringing to a standstill the proudest textile unit in Europe. That the stoppage should have happened at all was a stunning blow to the firm and the whole industry; that it should have been led by women was beyond belief. The contest was to last for seven weeks and was to prove a turning-point for union organisation in textiles and, in particular, for the position of women in the industry.

Saidie was superbly confident from the beginning — 'The Lord is on our side and we cannot fail'. She was confident, too, of the solidarity of her women and was convinced that this was an opportunity to win the respect of their trade union brothers by showing that women could successfully wage a major industrial dispute.

Her first opportunity to test the strength of her following came at the rally called by Ernest Bevin to launch the strike campaign. The meeting, held in a packed Ulster Hall, gave Saidie her initiation to a mass indoor audience. Union officials, all men, were invited to

give their various reports to the meeting. Eventually Bevin intervened:

'Well, now that the men have well and truly made their point, I think it's time we heard a word from "Our Saidie".'

It was an introduction which touched exactly on the personal links between Saidie and her members, but for the young shop steward it was a new experience and one for which she was unprepared. She recalls:

'I'd never addressed thousands of people before and there was no amplifier. But I didn't need one. I just said, "Lord, over to you, for I don't know what to say. You'd better speak through me tonight, because you know what I've been praying about."'

The short appeal which followed was a model of simplicity and persuasiveness.

'Girls, many of you are already struggling to live on a pittance of less than a pound a week, and here I am asking you to come out on strike for twelve shillings a week strike pay. Well, it's like this — if we only manage to exist and no more on our present wage, have we the backbone to show the men that for a matter of principle we can do on even less for as long as it takes to see this thing through?'

It was a moment she has never forgotten; if support for the strike had faltered because of the financial strain it would have been impossible to hold the campaign together. So she put it to them.

'Well, girls, what is it to be — do we go ahead even if it means starving for the sake of our cause?'

The answer was swift and reassuring.

'Suddenly when I looked down the whole vast crowd of women were on their feet and shouting, "Don't worry, Saidie, we will tighten our belts and make ends meet somehow." I'd tears of pride in my eyes that night. There they were — many of them half-starved, with neither in them or on them. But they were ready to storm the barricades for something they believed in. The men in the hall had never seen anything like it.

'Those were the days, long before the singing of "We shall overcome", but that's what they were saying. At the moment I got a message of inspiration from those women that I've never forgotten. They and their mothers before them had been pushed around for generations. Now the pushing was going to be stopped, once and for all.'

During the seven weeks that followed, Saidie made certain that

the base for her support was strengthened and broadened. Having secured the backing of her members she set out to address herself to a wider audience. First came the local and national public. In a series of meetings she revealed the conditions of work in the mills and factories in a way that had never been done before. Over a million leaflets were distributed explaining the case in detail. Saidie's considerable literary powers developed rapidly in this period: some examples of her skill are presented in the Appendices. As a result of this campaign the unknown shop-steward became one of Ireland's best known speakers and a recognised authority at home and abroad on conditions in the linen industry.

Saidie's public relations campaign was also directed at the general public. The city of Belfast, in particular, was greatly impressed by the appearance of the 'linen lassies' as she marched them in neat ranks to the daily briefing sessions in the central halls of the city. The sight of nearly 2,000 female marchers, all dressed in their Sunday best, was a novel event, even in march-prone Belfast. The display projected an image of the women trade unionists which attracted new support for their cause.

The response greatly encouraged the women. Saidie's appeal to the community brought offers of help and contributions from every area of the British Isles and from a social cross-section that cut across many traditional class divisions. General trade union support was particularly impressive and large collections were raised at home and abroad, especially among the wartime shipbuilding and engineering and aircraft workers. Very soon a substantial strike fund was available — indeed, so generous was the help that the strike benefit was increased from twelve shillings a week to sixteen shillings.

Another daily activity which caught the public imagination was the concert of songs and entertainment provided by local artistes. Hundreds of strikers attended these gatherings, at which tea and refreshment were offered in a near carnival atmosphere.

'Free food and sixteen shillings a week strike pay — Ewart's was never like that,' comments Saidie. 'At that rate of going the strike could have gone on for ever.'

But after seven weeks of such activities (most of it enjoyed in good weather) the National Executive of the Transport Union decided to review the position. The pressure of bad news about the war was having its effect in London and the Union was being urged

by government Ministers to look for a settlement. The Belfast leaders were summoned to Transport House to discuss the position.

Bevin's first question to Bob Getgood was, 'Well, Bob, do you see any prospect of securing 100 per cent membership in the immediate future?'

The 'mighty atom' was confident of victory, but he could not promise it in the time-scale demanded by Bevin. Nor could Saidie. After an explanation of the gravity of the national emergency facing the country, Bevin instructed the Belfast leaders to wind down the strike as soon as possible. Guarantees were given that there would be no victimisation and additional funds were made available to deal with cases of hardship.

For Saidie it was a difficult decision to explain to her women, most of whom were determined to carry on. But she managed to achieve a return to work by reminding them that in the very act of striking and sticking together they had forged a weapon which would in future defend them and also make possible the winning of better conditions.

And so it turned out to be. The women went back to the firm as one body and the Directors, no doubt influenced by the national emergency, wisely decided that change was now inevitable in the pattern of industrial relations.

But the first day back at work was not without its excitement for Saidie.

'I told the girls to take it easy, but for once they paid no attention to me. Hardly had they entered the factory when all bedlam broke loose. The sight of the few who had refused to join the union was too much for the returning strikers.

' "Get out of the way, Saidie," they yelled, as they pushed me aside chasing the strike breakers all over the place. Little work was done that day. One Director, foolish enough to come into the factory, had his bowler hat knocked off and kicked around for good measure!'

All in all, it was a rough beginning to a new era, and Saidie's powers as a peacemaker was well tested for the first few days.

What was the outcome of the 1940 strike — success or failure?

For Saidie there has never been any doubt — a battle had been lost, but the war had been won. From 1940 the linen industry improved within a new framework of industrial relationships. Women were now organised and were fully aware that the factories

could not work without them, and they were also determined to pursue their cause whatever the cost. The fact that a handful of workers refused at that stage to join the union could not diminish the victory for women's rights in industry that had taken place.

Within a few weeks serious negotiations were begun with management and it soon became evident that the strike had touched off a revolution in working conditions and earning and welfare, not only in Ewart's, but in every linen firm in the North of Ireland. By the end of 1940 Saidie was able to report increases of fifteen per cent in wages and an agreement for holidays with pay. The long-sought minimum rates for women on time work was also granted and regular reviews were promised. Sickness benefit funds were introduced and accident and legal aid schemes had also been agreed. The scale and speed of the advance was unprecedented.

In wishing her members a Happy New Year in the Union Bulletin for 1940, Saidie was able to claim that the year had been 'a memorable one in the life of the weaving trade, during which for the first time in the history of Belfast the women and girls of the trade had made a determined and successful effort to establish trade unionism on the same lines as their male colleagues.'

For Saidie personally the strike had brought a dramatic change in her life. Bevin, whose admiration for her qualities of leadership had grown throughout the dispute, appointed her as a full-time official of the textile branch of the Transport Union in Belfast, with special responsibility for the women workers. For the next twenty years she built creatively on the basis laid by the strike of 1940. In the process she became known as a national trade union figure in Ireland and Britain.

But beyond the immediate aim of the strike there was the other goal of bringing in the linen industry into line with the improvements in industrial relations taking place in other sectors of industry. Saidie and Bob Getgood used the post-strike situation to pursue this aim, and the need to increase productivity for the war effort assisted their efforts. For Saidie this 'new look' within the industry was a vital element in her victory.

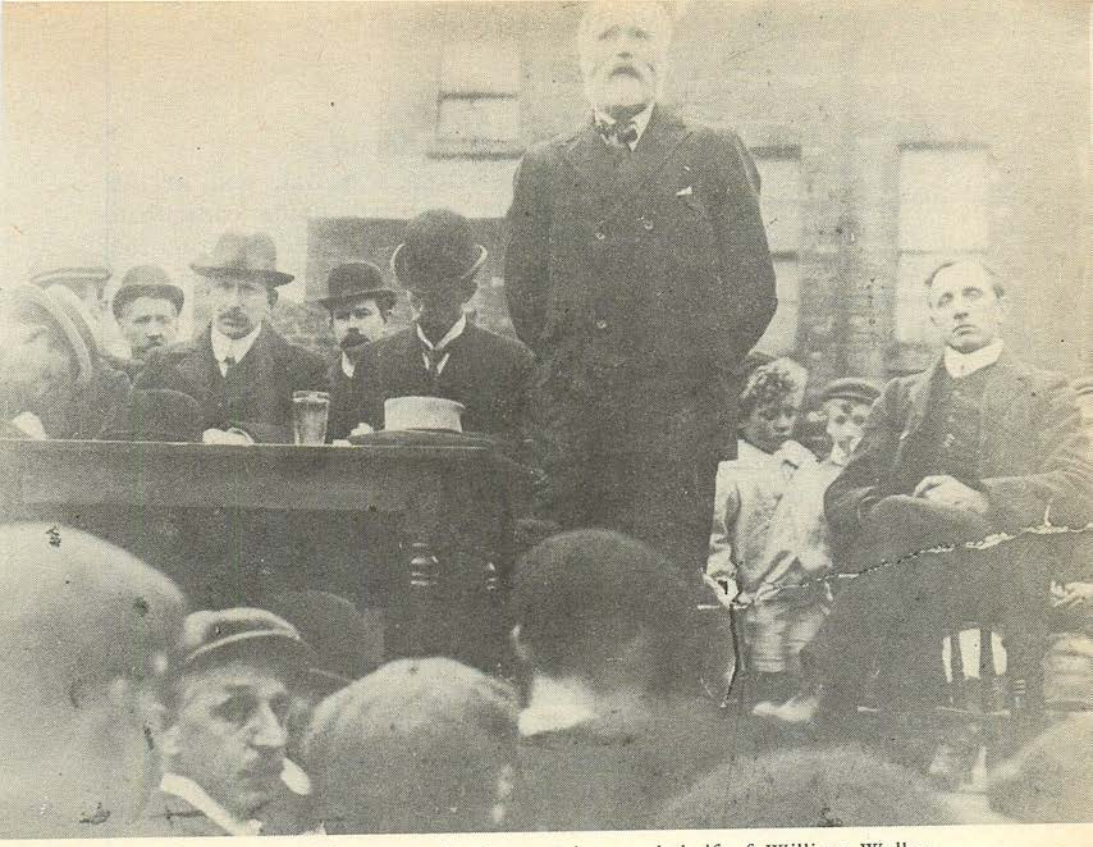
'During the war years we managed to shift the argument about how industry should be run on to a higher level. We still had disputes about traditional subjects, but more and more subjects of mutual interest began to appear on the agenda. Joint consultation became for many employers and unions a reality — and we began to

Transport Union Jobs Rally, 1950.

discuss the real problems that concerned our industry, not just the trimmings. Slowly but surely the more enlightened employers were awakened to a new sense of duty and responsibility, and began to welcome this new challenge to their managerial talents. Profits were no longer to be obtained by the wasteful and inhuman use of cheap labour, and unions began to insist on 100 per cent efficiency as a price for their co-operation.

'Workers also demanded and got payment for time lost through no fault of their own. It was a long haul, but in the process we all gained. Joint consultation became a powerful stimulant to higher efficiency and in the end the increasing returns proved a benefit to both sides of industry and to our international competitiveness.'

Not everyone in either unions or management went along with this line of argument, but most did; and though the linen industry later went into a decline, workers in other areas of textiles benefited as a result. For women textile workers, in particular, 1940 had proved a decisive turning-point.



Keir Hardie speaking at an election meeting on behalf of William Walker (North Belfast, 1906). Walker is sitting on Hardie's left.

Public Service and Political Action

1906 — the year that Saidie Patterson was born — was a good year for social reformers. In the General Election of that year the Liberals had won a historic victory; and the infant Labour Representation Committee had made spectacular advances, gaining thirty seats at Westminster, and now describing themselves with confidence as the 'Labour Party'.

Even in Belfast, long regarded as a political wilderness by radicals, there were signs of political change in the air. Support for the Liberals had grown and there were widespread demands for political

changes in line with those taking place in Britain.

Among Socialists, too, there had been a revival, and in the General Election William Walker, the local trade union leader, had nearly achieved the miracle of winning North Belfast from the Unionists. His minority of 474 votes seemed to many to be heralding a new political dawn and crowds flocked to the Custom House Steps (Belfast's equivalent of Hyde Park Corner) at the weekend to listen to the political debate and to discuss the policies of the Parliamentary socialists. As the widely read *Belfast Labour Chronicle* optimistically predicted:

'Walker's near victory is a fact brimful of hope for the future of direct Labour representation in the City. Next time we will win.'

In such a climate of public opinion there were great hopes among Belfast Trade unionists for the local branch of Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party. The branch had been active in the North of Ireland since 1893 when it had been formed a few months after the formation of the first I. L. P. group in Bradford. Since then it had recruited members right across the Province and, most important in the Irish situation, across the sectarian divide which had been the despair of progressive politicians. In 1906 it began to seem possible that Protestant and Catholic workers would put aside their sectarian differences and unite on social and economic aspirations.

These hopes were shared by Saidie's parents and she remembers being brought up in a home where Keir Hardie and his I. L. P. colleagues were highly respected and often quoted. Family outings to the local Labour meetings were regular events, and as good Methodists the children were encouraged to learn the Christian Socialist hymns and poems of the period. Indeed, Hardie, with his strong emphasis on the social gospel, was Saidie's childhood hero. She still regards his homely definition of Socialism as the best to be had and often quotes it:

'Socialism is the return to that kindly phase of life in which there shall be no selfish lust for gold, with every man trampling down his neighbour in his mad rush to get most. What is now known as Socialism is woven from the same web as was the vision of Isaiah, and is also, without question, of the same texture as that Kingdom of God which the early Christians believed to be at hand.'

This was a view of politics which was to remain with Saidie for the rest of her life.

In the early years of the twentieth century North Belfast, with its

heavy industrial concentration, was a natural recruiting ground for Labour, and the local I. L. P. was well organised and strong enough to own its own local hall. Saidie had plenty of opportunity to follow the Labour 'greats' of the time. As has been noted already, one of the local speakers who influenced a good deal of her early political development was William Walker, leader of the Belfast Woodworkers' Society and a prominent member of the wider Labour Movement.

By any standard, Walker was a remarkable leader. Born in Belfast in 1871, he started work at the age of thirteen, following his father into the local shipyard. Working as an apprentice joiner he learnt the facts of industrial life in what was one of Europe's greatest shipyards and like many of his trade union colleagues spent much of his spare time reading and debating about the industrial conditions of his time. He was one of the considerable group of 'self-taught' Victorian working men who formed the backbone of the adult education and residential college movement at the turn of the century. He was also a talented writer, producing some of the best pamphlets and articles in Irish Labour literature. To this day 'Willie Walker' is a household name in Irish trade union circles and each year a banner commemorating his life heads the Belfast May Day parade.

Saidie's father, who also worked in the shipyard, became one of Walker's chief supporters and through this friendship she got to know the Labour leader. She was particularly influenced by his belief (considered revolutionary at the time) that there should be a close link between active trade unionism and independent working-class political action. Along with Hardie, Walker rejected the traditional view that the Liberal Party could represent the unions in Parliament (Lib-Labs, as they were called), and he was anxious to develop in Belfast a Labour political organisation through which the unions could obtain representation in Parliament, pledged to introduce the social and economic reforms sought by the movement.

Walker was also a champion of women's rights and was one of the first politicians in Ireland to establish an organisation for their protection and to encourage his fellow trade unionists to pay attention to the special hardships endured by women factory workers. He got little support from his colleagues, but this aspect of his social concern and his support for the suffragette views of Saidie's mother made him an honoured guest in the Patterson home.

So the socialist seeds were sown early, and they took root as Saidie learned the economic facts of life on the Shankill of her childhood. The early death of her father and mother and the hardship which followed confirmed her childhood impression that something was fundamentally wrong with the society around her; and her thorough grounding in Methodism gave her the moral drive to do something practical to rectify the social evils which surrounded her. This drive, linked to the programme of action offered by Hardie and his followers, formed into a Christian Socialist creed which was to direct her politically for the rest of her life.

But for the first twenty years of her full-time community service Saidie was content to concentrate on industrial affairs, believing that in this context she could make an immediate impact on the pressing problems of bad wages, unemployment and social deprivation. She was aware that there was a wider task of social reform waiting to be done — but first things first.

'Storming the barricades at Ewart's was more than enough to keep me busy in those days. I was content to do my trade union job and to see the steady improvement in the lives of my members,' she comments on the period.

But after her success in the 1940 strike and her emergence as the only full-time woman officer of the Transport Union in Ireland and one of the few in the British Isles, she could no longer confine her service to the women of North Belfast. Bevin, in particular, was anxious to secure new outlets for her talents and saw to it that she was appointed to local and national committees as a union representative. During the Second World War this gave her a unique opportunity to get to know the leaders of the day — Attlee, Churchill, Cripps, Bevan, Morrison and Gaitskell were among the many with whom she came in contact.

Her comments on some of these notables are revealing:

Attlee: 'One day he will be recognised as our greatest Prime Minister.'

Churchill: 'A truly great all-rounder, but not nearly as close to the heart of England as Ernest Bevin.'

Aneurin Bevan: 'I could listen to him for hours. He was a walking university who carried his learning lightly. He and Gaitskell — what a team they would have made.'

Hugh Gaitskell (whom she remembers fondly): 'Hugh never got a chance to prove how great he really was. We lost him, just when he was most needed.'

Through regular contact with such personalities Saidie's range of interest grew and during the war years she became one of the most active trade union representatives in Britain and Ireland, speaking for her union on many public bodies. She was particularly active in the campaigns for social welfare before and after the publication of the Beveridge Report and played a leading part in the formation of pressure groups for legislation covering the welfare of women and young people.

The most important of these bodies was the Standing Conference of Women's Organisations of Northern Ireland. Formed in 1943, this federal body brought together thirty-five women's groups to further public interest in social and civic questions and to press for action at government level.

The Conference was particularly anxious to spotlight the way in which Northern Ireland lagged behind the rest of the United Kingdom in health and welfare amenities. A series of investigations were commissioned and the findings, when published, shocked the entire community. The statistics on infantile mortality caused greatest concern. It was revealed that the Northern Ireland rate was the highest in the United Kingdom — in 1941 in Belfast one baby out of every ten died under the age of one year. The Standing Conference concluded that this situation was almost inevitable since Belfast spent only half as much as, for example, Bristol and one quarter as much as Leeds on its maternity and child welfare schemes.

The Conference also focused attention on the scourge of tuberculosis. In the 1940s TB was still a frightening disease among workers and, as in other social problems, Northern Ireland was a poor relation of the rest of the Kingdom where chest disease statistics were concerned. Figures published at the time showed that in 1938 the death rate for TB in Northern Ireland in comparison with England was 92 as against 64. As Saidie said in a public comment:

'Not for the first time the people of Northern Ireland are getting a raw deal. In simple language these awful figures mean that in Northern Ireland every year 350 people die of TB who would not die were they living in England or subject to the same health

conditions as the people there. The figures are an indictment of past and present government policies.'

The pressure on this and other social issues was maintained and eventually the Northern Ireland government, benefiting from the social welfare state legislation in Britain, was persuaded to organise a comprehensive TB scheme, with central co-ordination of the dispensary system and a unified administration. The Authority for the Province which was developed won world-wide recognition as a pioneer in the treatment and eradication of chest diseases. Eventually the near epidemic figures were brought under control and one of the most persistent and feared ancient foes of the working-class was defeated.

Saidie's comment, 'Mothers no longer feared to hear their child cough in the night', summed up what this meant for her people.

But in fighting for these social reforms Saidie realised that something more fundamental than community first-aid was required to change society.

'Public committees were all right, but I soon found out that I was surrounded by people who were unwilling to change the political status quo. Time and again when I made a suggestion for a change in the law I was told that I was "being political" and going beyond our brief. My colleagues never seemed to realise that many of the issues we faced simply *did* require a political initiative. Worse, still, they seemed to be unaware that a defence of the status quo was itself highly political. As the end of the war approached I became increasingly frustrated with these attitudes.'

By 1945 it was obvious that a desire for a new social order was sweeping the country. Many remembered the story of the troops in World War I who had been promised 'a land fit for heroes' only to find that you had to be something of a hero to survive in what was waiting on your return from the battlefield. Those returning from the Second World War had learned from their parents' experience. This new generation was determined to change the social order and all the political signs indicated that they were looking to the election of a Labour government to build that future for them.

Even Unionist-Conservative Northern Ireland began to look for radical alternatives, with the small Northern Ireland Labour Party which Saidie had helped to revive in 1938 emerging as a rallying ground for Protestants and Catholics who sought a political solution

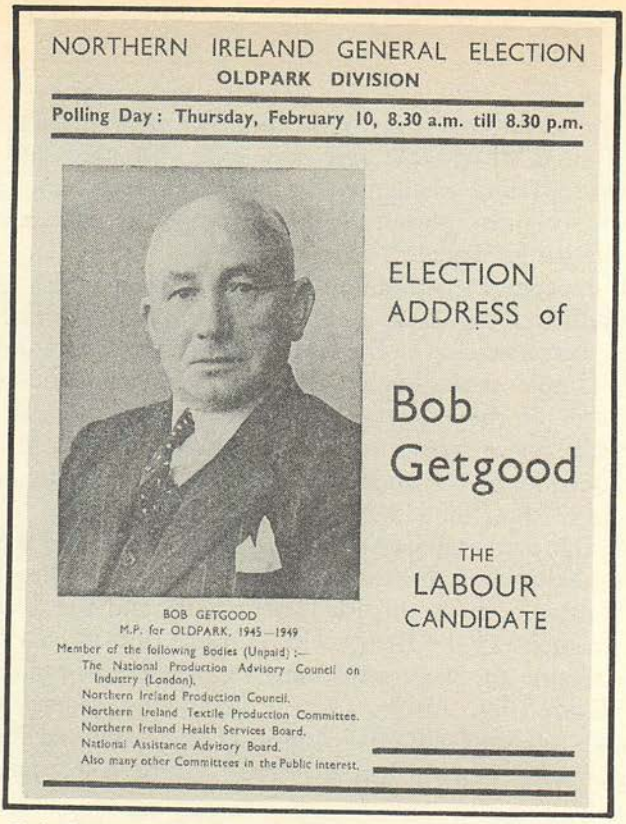
beyond the traditional and sterile sectarian strife. It was just the time, for such an appeal, and very soon 'Orange' and 'Green' politics were being challenged by the non-sectarian appeal of democratic socialism, powerfully reinforced by the success and authority of the British Labour Party.

In this movement of opinion the trade unions, with their substantial political funds and a ready supply of administrative resources, were a key force. The Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union, as the biggest local group and with branch rooms in every area of the Province, provided an organisational network and a secure power base for those anxious to translate trade union social and economic demands into political action. Saidie, as a leading official of the Union, was ready to play a key role.

During the war years Saidie had prepared the ground for political action by helping to organise impressive public rallies to which leading figures from the British Labour Party and the T.U.C. were invited. In this way the Belfast Hippodrome and other down-town cinemas became the venues for some of the biggest political rallies in the British Isles. Attlee, Cripps, Bevin and Morrison became well-known to Ulster audiences and local leaders shared in the publicity. Labour, it seemed, had arrived as Northern Ireland prepared to build the peace.

In this political upheaval Saidie played a central part. She had joined the local Labour Party because 'it seemed the natural thing to do', and she felt completely at home with the Party and especially with the Christian Socialist outlook of many of its members. She was particularly hopeful that the non-sectarian stance of the Party would do for the workers politically what trade unionism had done industrially; the Labour Party's 'United Ulster' theme seemed the political counterpart to the industrial unity she had always sought. And as the Transport Union had given an industrial lead it seemed natural that Union officials should accept their share of political responsibility — all the more so since Ernest Bevin had become Attlee's chief lieutenant in the post-war Labour government and was encouraging trade unionists to become politically involved on behalf of the Party.

In the first post-war General Election in the Province the trend in Britain received local confirmation. Four seats were won by Labour in Belfast and an impressive radical vote was recorded in other areas. In particular, the Party had managed to bridge the sectarian divis-



Bob Getgood's Election Address, 1945.

ions; for the first time in its history Northern Ireland seemed set on a course of non-sectarian political debate.

During the 1945 election campaign Saidie concentrated her attention on North Belfast, pioneered so successfully forty years earlier by Keir Hardie and William Walker. The influence of the Labour pioneers was still strong in the district and particularly in the Shankill and Oldpark constituencies. So it was to these areas, heavily populated by textile workers, that Saidie looked for support.

But first a candidate was needed. Here Saidie was in no doubt — Bob Getgood was her first choice and with the help of her union members she secured his nomination. Once the election was announced she organised the constituencey as thoroughly as she had organised Ewart's a decade earlier. The old-fashioned Unionist machine had no chance against her enthusiasm and efficiency. These activities, along with Getgood's forward looking 'bread and butter' policies were enough to persuade the electorate. To the surprise of

the local Tory establishment Labour was returned by a majority of 2,439. Protestants and Catholics had discovered that political co-operation was possible; Saidie had made possible another famous victory.

Writing of the 1945 election campaign Bob Getgood said:

'Saidie's work in the interests of the Labour Party cannot be overstressed. Under her leadership in the General Election a vast host of men and women laboured day and night for the Cause. She raised all the money to pay for the election and four years later repeated the achievement. This devoted Christian Socialist has no equal in this country for raising money and she does it by inspiring people to give. The greater the need, the greater are her inspiring efforts to secure complete fulfilment.'

A glowing tribute from one who owed her much.

Saidie was deeply disappointed with the result of the next election — 1949. For her the defeat of Bob Getgood meant that the Northern Ireland Parliament was deprived of one of its most diligent members and best informed social commentators. She felt that the election was a return to sectarian politics and that Bob Getgood had been let down by a community to whom he had given a lifetime of service. In a post-election comment she did not mince her words as she reminded the electorate of what they had done.

'The defeat of Bob Getgood is a defeat for all who want to bring our people together and lay aside sectarian strife. Today you are ringing your bells, but tomorrow you'll be wringing your hands. Bob Getgood drove himself into the ground for the working people of Northern Ireland — however, eaten bread is soon forgotten.'

The sharpness of this comment is a measure of Saidie's regard for her old trade union boss and friend.

With the departure of Bob Getgood from Parliament much of the personal pleasure went out of politics for Saidie, but she was determined to reverse the defeat of 1949. In the early 1950s she brought together a group of younger people (again, mostly Christian Socialists) and drew up plans for the rebuilding of the movement. From then on service to the Labour Party claimed parity of esteem with trade union activity. During this period she also began to warn the public of the danger of renewed sectarian strife and predicted community conflict unless a new politics based on 'a Master Purpose' was offered to the Province. Unfortunately the local political Establishment ignored her pleas.

Saidie was again ahead of her time in the 1950s as she began to probe the possibility of partnership politics. For her the cause of the Northern Ireland Labour Party was 'the Cause of reconciliation', as she appealed for Protestant-Catholic unity within the framework of the Labour movement.

'Good intentions are not enough. We need a political system which reflects those intentions. In other words, the road to reconciliation must be politically structured. Only by giving meaning to the phrase "a United Ulster" can we hope to survive. The Labour Party must become the political expression of that aim.'

For a period it seemed that this aim might be achieved. In 1950 Saidie was elected to the key post of Treasurer of the Labour Party and along with an energetic General Secretary, Sam Napier, new policies were developed linked to the theme of a united Province, based on a democratic socialist programme crossing the sectarian divide. Further promotion and recognition came to Saidie when she was elected Party Chairman in 1956 — the first woman to succeed to the office.

Saidie took over the leadership of the Party at a critical moment in its affairs. A general Election was on the horizon and it was essential that the Party should 'get over' its image to the public. During her term of office she used her considerable powers as a communicator and organiser to this end. In her first press interview as Chairman she stressed the 'bridge-building' role of the Party, both inside and outside the Province.

'Bridge-building inside Northern Ireland, and between North and South, and between ourselves and the nations beyond our shores — that is what Socialism is all about. In co-operative relationships we shall enjoy a better world together.'

As part of this appeal she sought to extend the organisation of the Labour Party into every area of the Province and especially into districts which were sectarian 'flash points'. Eventually in her own area of North Belfast she had the great satisfaction of seeing her strategy rewarded when Vivian Simpson, one of Ireland's leading Methodists, regained Bob Getgood's old seat for Labour in 1958. Labour victories followed in three other constituencies. Once again, Ulster seemed to be responding to a bridge-building appeal.

Saidie also carried her conviction into the Party conference. Not all the delegates shared her spiritually charged view of society, but in her Presidential Address to the annual conference she left dele-

gates in no doubt about her position. It was Easter, so she used the Christian theme of rebirth as her means of encouraging delegates to rededicate themselves to the faith of the socialist pioneers.

'My thoughts go back to the new hope that came to men on that first Easter centuries ago when the inspiration to build a new world was born. That has ever been our socialist objective — to build a new world in which poverty, unemployment and war would find no place.'

Democratic socialism was the central aim, but the conference was also reminded of William Penn's keynote for true democracy:

'Men must either be guided by God or they will condemn themselves to be ruled by tyrants.'

Delegates warmed to the theme. This was 'Our Saidie' in action, speaking a language which Ulster people understood.

In other parts of her Address the practical side of Saidie's philosophy was reflected in her concern for industrial reform. Here her trade union experience was in evidence as she appealed for an Ulster based on co-operative principles. She was particularly scornful of the profit motive, castigating it as morally and economically defective.

'We have been told that the main aim of society is to acquire wealth on a competitive scale — the most successful business being the one that makes most profit. Such a policy is self-defeating because it places self-interest at the centre of things. Consequently it becomes difficult to convince people to exercise restraint as long as there is more money to be had. But such a restraint is a moral choice which requires a moral lead — and that lead must come from those in control, with an honest placing of all the cards on the table, face upwards.'

And, as always, she saw in the Ulster setting an opportunity to give a lead to the rest of the world. New motives for industry were offered.

'What if industry were to concentrate on producing goods not simply for profit, but because they were beneficial to the whole society? What a revolution that would be!'

She also believed that Northern Ireland with its closely-knit community of interest was well placed to give such a lead. In a peroration reminiscent of E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful.* she pointed the way.

'When industry really sets out to meet the needs of the nation, to feed, house and clothe and provide a satisfactory life for all, then

the workers will respond with a loyalty that will surprise even the most cynical. We need a new philosophy of industry acceptable to all. It is this new thinking that Labour must bring to every national problem; we must mobilise all our resources to find an answer.'

Delegates and press had been treated to a speech full of prophetic content. The themes were repeated time and again during the ensuing decade. Saidie, who has always believed that 'ideas have legs', has lived to see many of her proposals for the reform of industry gain general acceptance. Equally, as the century proceeds, her criticism of the profit motive becomes ever more relevant.

During the 1960s Saidie's interest in public affairs began to focus more urgently on the problem of constitutional and political reforms in Northern Ireland. Her increasing contact with international situations made her acutely aware of the danger of community conflict in her own Province and long before the world became aware of the Ulster crisis she was advocating 'New Frontier' policies, which might bring together 'Planter' and 'Gael' in her beloved Province. She was anxious to preserve the link between the Province and Britain, but she saw that link as an agreed arrangement, based on Protestant-Roman Catholic unity in the North of Ireland.

An admirer of Martin Luther King, she also recognised elements of the black-white divide in the Ulster situation. Black and white, orange and green, they were each part of the rift between neighbour and neighbour — an apartheid that was fundamentally wrong.

She was particularly concerned that Britain should awake to its responsibilities in Northern Ireland and pay more attention to the views of those who were working for reconciliation. At every opportunity she alerted her English audiences (the Scots she felt were more aware of the facts of life in Ulster) to the crisis that was building up. At Blackpool in 1962 she warned delegates to the Labour conference:

'The colour bar in Ireland is between "Orange and Green", instead of "Black and White". Indeed, Ireland has become a model of division. People come from all over the world to see how we do it. Yet there is no country in Europe which had had to fight for bread and work as much as Ireland. If we spent as much time struggling for one another as we do in fighting over the past what a people we would be — what an inspiration we could become to suffering humanity. But time is not on our side in Northern

Ireland. We are building up a terrible harvest of hate for our children. If we are not careful their inheritance will be grim.

'This is a problem for the people of Northern Ireland; but it is also a problem for all the peoples of these islands.'

Time was even shorter than Saidie and her friends realised. Three years after her Blackpool speech the Labour Party in Northern Ireland was heavily defeated in the General Election of 1965, and so the effort of the Labour Movement to develop its non-sectarian political appeal was checked at a crucial point in the affairs of the Province. Community polarisation was greatly encouraged after 1965 and, soon after, Northern Ireland began to slide into the crisis which made it world news and, for the first time in its history, put its problems before an international audience. The crisis, with its intense suffering, was to prove a harrowing experience.

Pondering on the 'Ifs' of history, Saidie is firm in her belief that if she and her colleagues had been listened to in the 1950s and 1960s then much of the suffering since 1969 might have been avoided. She recalls that when the Labour movement put forward a reform 'package' in the opening years of the sixties they received a rebuff from the government of the day. Yet these demands for electoral law changes, local government reorganisation and the like were reasonable requests made by people of all denominations anxious to work for a viable Northern Ireland. She recalls, too, that governments at Westminster, regardless of Party, paid little attention to the real problems of Northern Ireland until the crisis erupted.

But fundamentally she has never been one to indulge in pointless looking back.

'We have all made mistakes and it's time we acknowledged our common guilt. The future can certainly be rescued if we agree to forget the past and join hands for the present.'

Nor has Saidie ever wavered in her socialist beliefs. To those who question the effectiveness of her Christian Socialism she has a ready answer:

'Ten thousand difficulties do not make a single doubt. Socialism has not failed in Northern Ireland — it has just never been tried. And the alternatives that *have* been tried have been pretty unsuccessful.

'It will hardly come in my time, but some day, somehow, the ordinary people of Northern Ireland will discover that what unites

them is infinitely more important than any accident of birth that separates them. They will learn, too, that the men of violence are out of date and out of mind.

'When that day comes the Labour movement will be ready to build a society on the principle of need not greed. There is nothing starry-eyed about such a view of things. It is down-to-earth commonsense, making the Brotherhood of Man a living reality.'

The Opera House, Belfast, in 1946 at the time of the showing of 'Freedom'. This film was Saidie's introduction to MRA.

A Meeting with Frank Buchman

Saidie Patterson, proud of her working-class origins, has always served her people well. But as her work matured she noted that the problems she faced on the Shankill and Falls districts of Belfast were often universal in character. As she told a trade union conference in 1945:

'It is never enough nowadays to see what we are doing in purely local terms. Wherever I go the same issues seem to crop up. Surely it's time that Ulster recognised that we are part of a bigger design and accepted our wide responsibility. Parochialism went out with the parish pump.'

This desire to get beyond the merely local was nothing new in Saidie. She was never one to be trapped by her immediate environment. Even as a shop steward in Ewart's she chided the firm for not giving a lead to the rest of industry on matters like apprentice training and joint consultation. No doubt the firm was important, but, she stressed, of far more importance was the improvement of the whole industry at home and abroad.

So too in political work a wider dimension was sought. This reaching-out became evident during the period in office of the 1945 Labour government. Saidie was a strong supporter of Prime Minister Attlee and greatly admired the creation of the Welfare State — 'The greatest single benefit ever gained by the British people,' as she described it. But like many social reformers she began to wonder what came after welfare. Like Keir Hardie, she certainly sought an answer to material problems, but equally with him she regarded economic emancipation as a means of setting people free to do the things that really mattered.

Throughout the late 1940s this point was underlined and many union conferences were challenged by her 'purses are full but hearts are empty' reminder. Nearly thirty years later in an Irish televison interview in 1978 the question remained.

'Personally I have given all my life to fight for our people, and I don't regret one minute of the struggle. But I am disappointed that the material benefits haven't brought the happiness that I thought they could and should. We are still searching for an answer that will really satisfy. Certainly, empty hands must be filled with wórk and so, too, must empty stomachs with food — and particularly in the neglected worlds of Africa, Asia and South America. But, equally, empty hearts must be given an idea that really satisfies. Without this we are back where we started — down-and-out, but in a different way.'

This theme of a 'new idea' dominated much of Saidie's post-war thinking, particularly when she began to have regular meetings with members of the international trade union movement. She noted the daunting problems facing the unions in devastated France and Germany and in the poverty-stricken Third World. These leaders had to think of reconstruction in terms far beyond the confines of their own organisations. Mutual responsibility and inter-dependence were the new imperatives.

'Parochial philosophies were no answer to problems on this scale.

thoughts of my shop stewards were, but mine were pretty unprintable!'

However, Caux in 1946 was an exciting place to visit after a wartime stint in Belfast. The war was just over and with the mingling of the guests from all over the world the debates were good. Saidie, never able to resist an argument, made her contribution on the second day of her stay. It was a typical 'back to the barricades' speech in which she trounced the industrialists in the audience, as she retold a good deal of the industrial history of the Shankill Road.

This was the style she was used to and she and her members sat back to await the expected counter-attack. But none came, and there was no protest. Instead, delegates from every corner of the earth congratulated her on her contribution and acknowledged their own responsibility for the breakdown in the industrial order. They suggested a united front to put things right.

'This was a new line,' says Saidie. 'What do you do when the old enemy nods his head and says there's a good deal in what you say! Opposition I could handle, but this was something different.'

Later that week Saidie was invited to meet Frank Buchman, leader of MRA.

'It was the most important meeting in my life — all I knew and felt about John Wesley was being expressed in a twentieth century man.'

When Saidie met Frank Buchman in 1946 he was sixty-eight years of age and internationally famous as leader of MRA, or the Oxford Group, as it was sometimes called. A Lutheran minister, he came from America earlier in the century to do missionary work among students in Oxford, preaching absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. Such standards, he argued, called for a fundamental change in personal lifestyle and this in turn would permeate the political, social and economic structures with which the individual was associated.

At top political level the moral alternative was offered as a means of regulating relations between government and international institutions. So all of life, personal and institutional, was to be ruled by God's law.

As the founder put it:

'Economic change, social change, national change, international change — all based on personal change.' By 1946 this appeal had produced an international movement with supporters in every continent.

Finnish MPs and Saidie speaking to Dr Buchman at a Helsinki Conference in the mid-Fifties.

Frank Buchman discussed these ideas with Saidie at their first meeting and, though doubtful about their practicality, she was deeply impressed with their author. His opening words to his Irish visitor were encouraging:

'I gather from your speech yesterday that you weren't too keen on the bosses.'

Saidie took what seemed to be the hint and launched out on another frontal attack on reactionary managements.

'But Frank's next words stopped me in my tracks when he said, "Well, suppose I gave you all the weapons you needed and suppose all your hard men were destroyed and gone — well, where do we go from there? Do you really believe that class hatred is the answer — when you're filled with it, where does it get you?"'

This for Saidie was a new approach. Falling back on her trade union experience she replied:

'Well, Dr. Buchman, I think I'd need a Notice of Motion for a question like that.'

In later meetings with Frank Buchman, Peter Howard and other MRA leaders Saidie was won over to the view that reconciliation between people at every level was the first step in human construction, provided always that the need for personal change was recognised. She became one of the most influential members of MRA and in the 1960s travelled on its behalf to every continent. Today she is one of its most respected veterans, and when a book to celebrate the eightieth birthday of the founder was issued it was she who was asked to write on behalf of Ireland.

Saidie, 'blunt, shrewd and compassionate', as she has been described by one of England's ace reporters, gives as her summing-up of the MRA leader and founder:

'He was a very human being — spiritual strength radiated from him. All he said and all he was made you dissatisfied with yourself and critical of your own ways. With his insistence on personal change coming through self-applied moral standards of absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love I began to see for the first time how people, family, nation and the whole world could be changed.

'As a trade unionist I was a great one for the Rule Book — here was a man telling me about the Rule Book of life, which could form the biggest union of all time. And, of course, he was only the shop steward in a mighty co-operative, run by the greatest Boss of all. I couldn't help but be impressed by such a man.'

But back in Belfast it was a different story. What seemed logical and practical in the pleasant setting of Caux began to look less likely against the background of local textiles. For instance, Saidie had been told by Frank Buchman that personal reconciliation with your neighbour — even when he was the boss — was the first step. But somehow or other the process had looked so much simpler when the confrontation was with French or German industrialists.

'I knew that hatred of the bosses wasn't the answer. And, of course, I had seen trade unionists and industrialists at Caux giving examples of how honest apology had changed their lives in situations every bit as difficult as Ireland. I thought when I came home I'd try it out. But it wasn't easy. I went to three meetings in Belfast intending to give it a try, but I couldn't find it in my heart to make a fresh start.

'I'd been a fighter all my life and had never been afraid of the opposition . But this was different. What I feared now, and what I think most people often fear in a moral crisis, was the weapon of the ridicule that might be used against me. The fear of being sneered at as ''a sanctimonious Sarah''.

'But deep down I knew that leadership meant being prepared to take the risk of being misunderstood, so at last I plucked up the courage to ring Belfast's biggest linen lord, asking him to meet me for a private talk. He wasn't very helpful, but after a bit of pressure agreed to give me fifteen minutes.

'When I arrived we talked about every subject under the sun except the one on my private agenda.'

At last Saidie brought up the subject of Caux and told him about her decision to start personal 'fence mending' with him.

'You know, you are a difficult man to deal with. You've always been ninety-nine per cent wrong in my book. Well, I've come to admit my share of the problem. I remember, for instance, how I lost my temper at the last meeting and swept all the papers off the table. I want to apologise for the one per cent.'

Saidie regards that meeting as a turning-point in her career as an industrial negotiator.

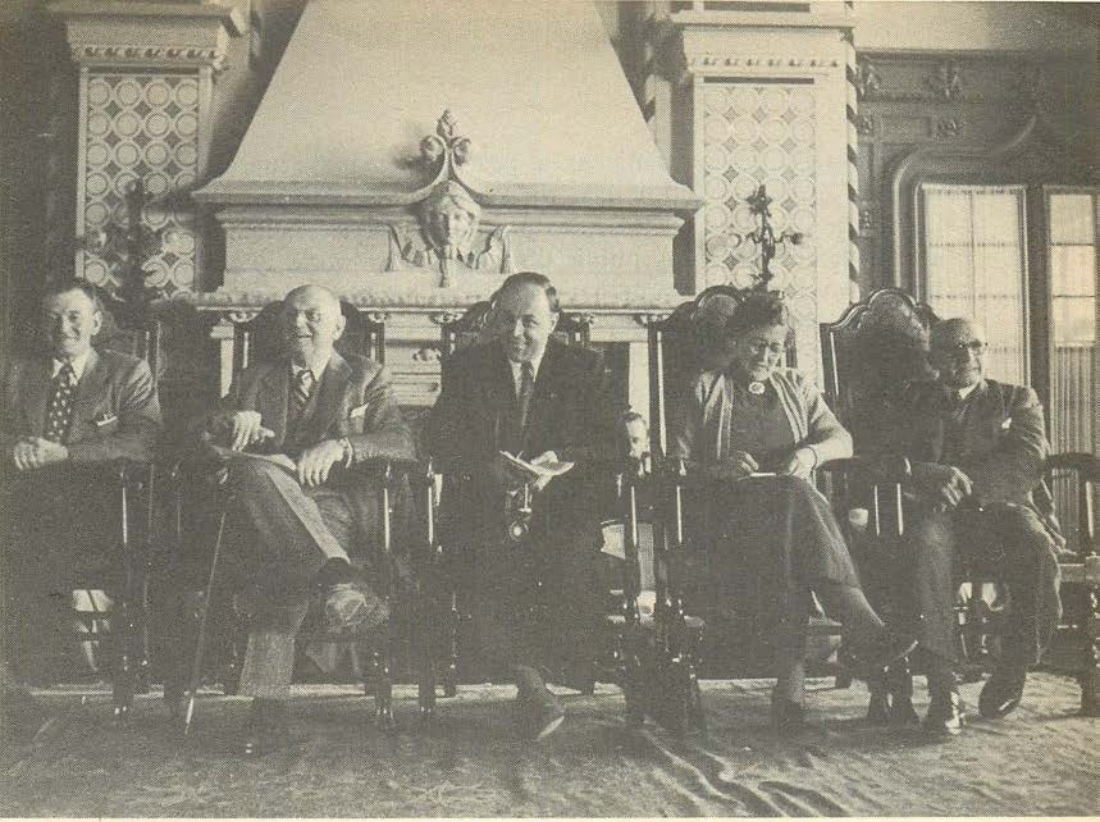
'I think he was a bit stunned at first by what I'd said, but from then on barriers came down that had previously kept us apart. It wasn't a matter of one side or the other selling out — there were still plenty of issues to argue about — but the beginning of a new relationship was born. A bloodless revolution took place in the textile industry, laying the foundation for better relationships all round.'

Ever the realist, Saidie recognises that things did not change overnight.

'I don't want to give the impression that all went smoothly from then on. That's not the way of life. And I certainly don't want to give the impression that all my trade union friends and the industrialists agreed with me. They did not. Some secretly and others openly opposed me. But none of them managed to produce a superior idea able to replace the strife that was harming all of us.'

She remains firm in her view that personal relationships are a vital element in the industrial setting as they are in the whole of life.

'It's sometimes forgotten that there are more problems round the conference table than there are on the agenda. In fact, we are often



Saidie with Bob Getgood and Frank Buchman at Caux in 1956.

held up because of attitudes that have been brought into the room straight from the home breakfast table.'

For the rest of her trade union career Saidie developed her theory of bridge-building in industry. Still an unequalled champion and honoured by her union for her work, she insisted that labour and management must find ways to co-operate across the class divide. For her, industrial war was just as destructive of human potential and resources as other forms of communal tension. Her pacifist principles did not stop at the factory gate.

On her retirement from the Transport Union in 1960 Saidie began to concentrate on international work for MRA. With her experience of Irish conflict she has had an instinctive understanding of the problems of other divided communities. She has found ready audiences in divided Europe and divided Africa, and speaks to their gatherings with the special authority born out of having lived through the Irish tragedy. She has been particularly effective with African groups whose tribal difficulties have an Irish look about them.

More recently her fame as a peacemaker has attracted international attention and with it the opportunity to make increasing use of the BBC and overseas broadcasting services. She has acquired a considerable listening public throughout the world and she uses her broadcasts to promote her pacifist philosophy. In her talks she has developed — probably without realising it, for her ability to 'make contact' is one of her great gifts — a universal language which evokes a response wherever it is heard.

In one such message in 1976 to Africa she made a plea for a coming together of Black and White based on the Ulster experience.

'None of us picks our parents, whether we come from Belfast or the streets of Johannesburg. Why then do we confront one another on things over which we have no control? When tragedy strikes it doesn't matter what tribe we belong to. There are no Protestant tears in Ireland nor are there Catholic tears; and the tears of Africa are neither Black nor White. All of us shed tears of human sorrow — Christ's children suffering together.'

The women of Capetown were so impressed with this message that they decided to set up an action group to deal with their own colour divide. Said one of them:

'Listening to Saidie Patterson on the radio I was moved to action by her sincerity and courage, coming as it did at the end of another year of bloody violence. She inspired me to get all our races together, as she is trying to do with the different religious groups in Ireland. Like her, whatever our colour, we are all concerned about the future of our children. If Saidie Patterson can do that in the conditions of Belfast we can start co-operating across our divide for a society where everyone will have equal opportunities whatever their race.'

Such response is typical of the international impact which Saidie has made as she has toured the world with her message of reconciliation. She is convinced that MRA, with its 'global strategy Christianity', has prepared her for this work.

But she has never felt it necessary to deny her other spiritual affiliations. Throughout her involvement with MRA Saidie has retained her close association with the Methodist Church. Faithful to her family's Methodist traditions, she is proud of her links with the church on the Shankill Road where her people have worshipped for nearly seventy years. She is a regular attender and still observes the childhood practice of arriving twenty minutes before the Service opens.

'We were brought up to believe in giving yourself time to settle down in God's house before the worship began. It's not a railway station where we dash in to catch the last train.'

There is no conflict of loyalties in Saidie's faith and mission. She does not see MRA as a new Church or a separate association. She explains:

'It is the name for a band of comrades from every walk of life and every land and every continent who have surrendered their lives to God and who seek to live their lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.'

Saidie Patterson is proud to be one of that band. At the end of the day this for her is 'Methodism at its very best' and in line with the traditions established by her revered John and Charles Wesley.

Saidie with leaders of 'Women Together' in 1975. Mrs Ruth Agnew, the founder of the movement, is second from the right.

Women Together

When Saidie retired from trade union work in the 1960s she had hoped and expected to give more time to her various community interests, and, in particular, to the Girls' Club Union. Indeed, for a few years she acted as Warden of the Club Union hostel, Drumalla House, on the Antrim coast and during her stay carried out developments which renewed its reputation as a conference and social welfare centre.

However, these same years were a time of growing political instability in Northern Ireland. The communal confrontation, which

Saidie and those who shared her views had tried to avoid, erupted in 1969, producing a constitutional crisis which became world news. With the intervention of the terrorists the political divisions were deepened and dialogue between political leaders became increasingly difficult. The whole of Northern Ireland became alarmed, suspicious and unable to look far beyond the day-to-day struggle for survival, as community suffering on an unparalleled scale developed.

Into this tragic situation stepped a new organisation — one with which Saidie was to become internationally identified — 'Women Together'.

In many ways the emergence of women as a peacemaking group was a natural development. In times of crisis Ireland's women have always spoken with a special authority; in Northern Ireland since 1969 this authority has been strengthened by the recognition that it is the women of the Province who have suffered most. Most of the political argument has been conducted by the men, but more often than not, after the strife it has been the women who have been left to pick up the pieces. Mothers and wives, in particular, see the human dimension of the crisis and, with Chesterton, know the cost of losing 'the divinely ordinary things of life'.

Like the housewife who wrote to the *Belfast Telegraph* defining peace in terms which every woman understood:

'Peace is going to the sales with worries only about money; it is looking at a parked car without wondering what it holds; it is giving one's opinions in mixed company without worrying.'

Or another mother, with six children, in a riot-torn area who brought out the true meaning of violence when she was asked on television whether she would like to meet the Provisional IRA leader in Dublin to discuss the situation. But she didn't want to see him — it was his wife she would like to speak to:

'I would ask her to change places with me for a while and bring her children into the thick of things and see for herself what our children have to put up with.'

In 1970, women like these, in the front line, decided to take a hand in their own affairs and out of their determination 'Women Together' was born.

The new organisation was a unique creation. Before 1970 Northern Ireland had been well served by community groups dedicated to reconciliation, but most of them were middle-class in

composition and were made up in the main of members who lived outside the troubled areas. What was lacking was a mass peace organisation for working-class women, which would enable them to bring their influence to bear on the local scene, particularly in 'peace-line' districts. There was also a need for a body which could get beyond divisive party argument so that the women of the Province might speak with a united voice.

Women Together was formed to meet these needs.

The movement was born in 1970 out of the inspiration of Ruth Agnew, a Protestant housewife who worked as a cleaner in the Belfast Gas Works. Mrs. Agnew, who lived in one of the city's troubled areas, had a persistent dream that the women of Northern Ireland were uniting to say, 'Put away your guns and bombs and give us back our peace.'

This dream became Ruth Agnew's call to action and she began to contact women from both Protestant and Catholic areas. She was joined by Mrs. Monica Patterson, an English Roman Catholic resident in Northern Ireland, who had considerable administrative experience. Out of this partnership came a first public meeting in Belfast in September 1970, at which 400 women from all areas came together for a 'dedication to peace' ceremony. It was the beginning of one of Ireland's most significant and longest lasting peace movements, which more that any other has crossed the working-class sectarian divide in a sustained programme of effective action.

The practical aims of the movement reflect its authentic link with the working-class:

1. To bring together women who believe that violence with all its heartbreaks must be banished from Northern Ireland;
2. To give them the corporate strength to resist undesirable pressures and to use their influence for peace in their homes, their street and their neighbourhood;
3. To foster a sense of pride in their locality and enable them as a group to bring effective pressure on the local authorities to fulfil their obligations;
4. To offer a wide range of activities which they can engage in as a relief from their home commitments and as a means of working together.

Planting a memorial Peace Cross for her nephew in 1979.

Many observers accustomed to dealing with highly structured peace organisations have been baffled by the simple approach of the Women Together philosophy. But this very simplicity, because it reflects the real needs of the membership, has been the greatest strength of the movement — the life-style of the members has never been in conflict with what they have been required to do.

The central strategy of Women Together has been particularly sound. They have always believed that the greatest victory for terrorism would be to allow the violence to drive Protestants and Catholics apart into ghetto groupings. For this reason, Fellowship — simply getting together, being seen with 'the other side' — has been stressed at every opportunity. On such occasions things are not over-organised nor are they over-published. Instead, the meeting is dominated by the cup of tea, the informal chat about the latest local incident and, above all, what can be done about it by those who live on the spot. On the morning after a night of communal tension these gatherings have done much to keep together the social fabric of the neighbourhood involved.

In fact, the informality of Women Together has been at the heart of its success in counteracting the community destruction fostered by terrorism.

In the foundation year of the new women's movement Saidie was in Australia on an extended visit to the brother who had been forced to emigrate in the depression of the 1920s. During her visit a critical illness intervened, lasting for several months. In one of her crises she heard her doctors discussing the news from Belfast. Instantly, Saidie, like Ruth Agnew ten thousand miles away, had a vision about rallying the women of Ireland in a crusade for peace.

'It came to me like a flash — the time had come for the women in Ireland to give a lead. From that moment I began to recover and I vowed that this was one last battle that I was not going to miss.'

To a doctor who counselled caution she gave the assurance:

'God never asks you to do a job without also providing the means. If you lift one foot you may be sure that he will lift the other for you.'

Saidie's resolve to organise the women for peace was a natural reaction stemming in part from her experience in textiles; but, of greater importance, it was also part of a view of humanity which saw women as an under-used and under-valued group in society. She had always been aware of this imbalance and had worked to have it redressed. She certainly preached equalilty between the sexes, and above all, a partnership based on the recognition of what women had to contribute.

With Michel Quoist, whose approach she admires, she believes that the modern world suffers because it has been built without women and suffers from the lack of a mother. For Saidie the result is inevitable — society becomes inhuman. As Quoist puts it in one of her favourite passages from *The Christian Response:*

'What mother is for man in the building of a home, she must also be for society in the building of a world. The life of woman is one of openness to man, to her child, to her home and family. She must be in the world, for it is she whose thoughts are absorbed with the life of man, it is she who listens to his deepest aspirations, those beyond mere physical need.'

In 1970 the troubles in Northern Ireland amply illustrated the validity of this analysis for Saidie. Returning to Belfast, she decided to test the faith which she shared with Quoist in the power of womanhood to reconcile. In practice, this meant translating her belief into action by throwing her full weight behind the efforts to organise women on behalf of peacemaking.

When Saidie was invited to become Chairman of Women

The foundation meeting of Peace Point, Ireland, in Dublin, 1974.

Together in 1973 she assumed leadership of the movement at a difficult time in its affairs. The imposition of Direct Rule by the British government and the closure of the local Parliament had created new political problems, and the continuing violence had deepened sectarian polarisation. The women's movement needed a fresh input of support, particularly from outside Ireland if it was to remain effective.

Saidie, with her worldwide contacts, was well placed to gain such support and under her leadership the movement entered a new phase of development which greatly strengthened its influence. Fortunately at this moment she was joined by a secretary, Betty Gadd, with whom she formed an invaluable 'knife and fork' relationship, ensuring administrative back-up.

Sensing the fuller potential of Women Together, Saidie began her office by sharing with the public her vision of a new Ulster and a new Ireland in which women would play a central role. In a St. Patrick's Day Letter to the local and national press she indicated the approach she brought to the task.

'As the newly elected Chairman of Women Together, I pray that St. Patrick's Day sees what we call in Ireland "the turning of the stone" — a year which may bring an answer to our prayers for peace.

'I believe that the women of Ulster will create a society in which ignorance, fear and hate will give place to liberty, justice and peace. But if we want to change Ulster we must start on our own doorstep.

'Women must choose to be governed by God or they will condemn themselves to be ruled by tyrants.

'In an age when we have learned to split the atom surely we must learn to unite humanity. It's get on together or go down together.

'Today we don't need a gun in our hand; what we need is an idea in our head and an answer in our hearts.

'Women, I believe, hold the future of our country in their hands.

'I pray this call will bring more women within our ranks, not only in Ulster, but throughout Ireland and in every part of the world.'

This appeal and others like it took the message of Women Together far beyond the Irish shore and provided a base of international support unparalleled in the history of previous peace groups in the Province.

The St. Patrick's Day letter also emphasised the specifically Christian appeal at the centre of the Women Together programme. Saidie encouraged this emphasis and was particularly anxious that the power of prayer should be used to unite and direct the movement. So, at 6.45 each evening there is 'a Women Together minute'.

'It is a minute to pause and pray that we may be instruments of peace. We mourn all suffering, the waste of life, the fear and hatred. We remember, "Blessed are the peacemakers", and with each other's support we believe that ultimately we shall prevail.'

But, as ever, it is in the practical witness of Women Together that Saidie sees greatest hope — prayer becomes action. Often the action is difficult to categorise, but it has always been real and at times dangerous to carry out — separating rival gangs by physically stepping between them in a local riot; stopping children from throwing stones at security forces; sitting up all night with a neighbour who has been threatened by local sectarian gangs; comforting those who have been the victims of violence from whatever source; or demonstrating for peace on occasions when others are encouraging communal warfare (Saidie was severely injured on one such occasion).

There is a significance in such activities which is well understood by those involved. A typical example of the peacemaking gesture took place after St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church in East Belfast had been desecrated by sectarian vandals. On that occasion Protestant members of Women Together got mops and buckets and went in to clean up the mess. The women were all aware of the risk

they took, but true to the movement's traditions they demonstrated their opposition to what had happened in language recognised by all — practical and symbolic peacemaking. Years later when Saidie attended the Phoenix Park celebrations during the Pope's visit to Dublin she was reminded of the cleaning-up operation by a group of grateful parishioners from St. Anthony's church.

Such stories do not receive wide publicity, but they cover the sort of work which Saidie believes to be important.

'One day when all the speeches have been forgotten these little things, the kindly and courageous deeds done for one another when the going was really difficult, will be remembered. These are the gestures that life is all about; they make up the human cement that binds people together.'

One other imaginative activity of Women Together, and one that has given Saidie much pleasure, has been the provision of shared holidays for Protestant and Catholic children from 'peace-line' areas. The holidays are organised mostly in Ireland and far from the troubles.

Saidie regards this and other work among young people as vital. Of all the groups involved in Ulster's strife it is the very young that gives her most concern. She is frightened for the future of a new generation of young people who have grown up in an atmosphere of sectarian fear and communal tension. Worse still, Ulster's children have become more physically separated than ever before as a decade of crisis has encouraged a drift to estates populated on the basis of religious affiliation. So, children who do not learn or pray together are denied also the opportunity to play together. She is haunted by the Old Testament lament, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

In this situation of division Women Together have offered children the experience, often for the first time in their lives, of getting to know one another across the sectarian divide on holiday which all enjoy. Sometimes the reaction is memorable. Saidie tells of one camp:

'I'll never forget two wee fellows, one a Protestant and the other a Catholic, talking to me excitedly about being at church together for the first time. One said to me with wide open eyes. "Missus, do you know we've been praying together at the same service and we both prayed to the same Man."'

And, typically, she caps the story with a line from the Gospels:

'Unless we become like little children we shall never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'

Thousands of children in Northern Ireland have been given the chance to go on one of the Women Together inter-denominational holidays and the success of the scheme has stimulated reconciliation groups outside Ireland to offer facilities for similar outings. Indeed, the response on all sides to the special plight of children in conflict has been one of the most positive by-products of the Northern Ireland crisis. Educationists and other community workers have co-operated at all levels with the members of Women Together.

Saidie has also encouraged the development of informal hospitality centres in private homes throughout the Province and in Britain. By this means 'recovery stations' have been made available for the use of parents and children in urgent need of rest and re-creation.

Such activities constitute a practical support programme for those who have become casualties of strife in Northern Ireland.

However, it is as a roving ambassador for Women Together that Saidie has become most widely known. During her first year in office she visited four European countries and eleven English cities. At home there were 150 other meetings. As a result, the organisation has gained international recognition and has received generous financial backing for its work from kindred groups in a host of countries.

Press publicity has accompanied these visits and though the movement has had to maintain a discreet silence about some of its more delicate human operations and achievements (good news is often anathema to those who live by violence), the media has been generous in its coverage and sympathetic in its presentation of Women Together news.

For instance, when Saidie was nominated for a 'Special Woman' award by readers of *Woman's Own* magazine the response of readers in Britain was so enthusiastic that the journal decided to send Alan Bestic, one of their best investigative reporters to write a full-length story of her work. His coverage was splendid and his story and pictures of the courage of the ordinary men and women of Belfast won for the movement a new following in every part of Britain and the Commonwealth.

Bestic was in no doubt about the power of Ulster's women:

'It shows what people can do when they are confronted with what

seems impossible. I know that in the end this active peacemaking will triumph over the tragedy, the trouble-makers and violence.'

And Bestic ended his report of Women Together by asking Saidie, 'How can you stand it? How can you think of a future?'

The answer impressed him:

'She looked at me, this powerful woman full of courage. Then she said: ''We women are fighting to build an Ulster where ignorance, fear and hate will give way to liberty, justice and peace. With a cause like that we shall not lose.'' '

And the tribute from Bestic concludes:

'In spite of the scars I saw in Northern Ireland, in spite of the acid of bitterness that scars so many minds, I believe those words of Saidie Patterson. It will be the women of Northern Ireland, not the politicians, not the soldiers, who will beat the violent ones in the end. They will overcome.'

Alan Bestic's tribute was typical of the many which Saidie received on behalf of Women Together during her Chairmanship. Her leadership resulted in a great growth in the membership and influence of the movement at a local level, and, at the same time, the women of Ulster took up a leadership role for women throughout Ireland and became a symbol of encouragement for similar women's groups throughout the world.

Sensing the need to develop this wider role, Saidie, before laying down the Chairmanship in 1976 to become life Vice-President of the movement, presented a new Charter of Dedication to the movement and in a twelve-point programme prepared the women for what she realised would be a long-haul political situation. The old aims and methods were all repeated but they were now presented in a wider context, based on the experience of five years of active service.

The Charter was presented to Women Together in a ceremony of re-dedication in May, 1975. It took the form of a 'Call' from Saidie to the assembled membership:

The Re-Dedication

Fellow Members,

We are meeting here tonight to re-kindle the spirit which came into being when Ruth our President had that dream to get women together.

We all know that violence and hate can only destroy; they cannot build.

I ask each one here tonight to re-dedicate themselves to build bridges and remove barriers.

1. I know how easy it is to get down-hearted, how easy it is to criticise without accepting responsibility.
2. Thank God we have each other; for many of us may never have met if it had not been for Women Together.
3. We have a lot to be thankful for; most of us have enough to eat and to keep us warm and we are grateful to those whose work makes this possible.
4. Let us re-dedicate ourselves to tackle today's difficulties as a challenge and not depress others with our grumbles.
5. Let us care about the standard of living and true happiness of families across the world; have we the right to get richer every year when so many go hungry?
6. We must accept that food will cost more everywhere; we should be ready to spend less on luxuries. We should shop from need not greed or from hoarding and re-think how much is enough for us.
7. We must refuse to let hurt and bitterness or entrenched attitudes of the past shape our future. We will accept honestly our own share of the blame for our present troubles.
8. We will make new friends, including people of different backgrounds.
9. We will put right disagreements with old friends and neighbours, starting from our own side.
10. We will think for ourselves about what is right and be ready to stand firm and speak out for it.
11. We will take on the building of a different Ulster for our children and grand-children; we know this cannot begin without a change of basic human motives which need the power of God.
12. Will you pledge yourself with me to free our country from greed, hate, and fear, starting with ourselves and in our home?

This is our New Declaration; God help each one of us to carry it out. May God Bless You All — Saidie Patterson, Chairman, 28 May 1975.

In this New Charter there is a move towards a greater involvement with issues which concern women everywhere and not simply in Northern Ireland. The local crisis and the sectarian divisions are still to the fore and so, too, is the injunction to build bridges; but there is a concern for the plight of people everywhere and an awareness that Ulster women, regardless of their local troubles, can help others in need.

In recognition of this wider obligation Saidie has involved her members in work for International Women's Year, the Year of the Child and has won support for the appeal of the 'Boat People' for refuge in Northern Ireland. She is particularly proud of the way in which the giving capacity of her Province has grown throughout the crisis and praises the success record of Belfast in becoming so often a pace-setter for Oxfam, Christian Aid, Blue Peter's Cambodia appeal and other international charities. She is not surprised at this response.

'A people that have suffered recognise the suffering of others, they are more likely to give than those who have had an easy time.'

At another level — the level of public affairs — the influence of Women Together has grown. They have not abandoned their non-political stance nor do they wish to become involved in party politics. But the movement is listened to with respect by government and party politicians, and it is widely recognised that its members are in touch with life at a level which institutional structures do not know. As a speaker for the movement, Saidie is often called upon to give her views on matters of community concern and she is a frequent visitor to Stormont, Westminster and Dublin Ministers.

She was involved in an event of unusual significance when Pope John Paul made his historic visit to Ireland in September 1979. On that occasion Saidie was given an audience by the Papal Nuncio and was invited to give the Peace Oration at the ecumenical peace vigil in Dublin's St. Patrick's Cathedral. Her call for Christian unity to the great gathering in Dean Swift's ancient church was hailed as one of the most moving appeals at the end of what had been for Ireland a memorable day.

Her opening challenge, 'Which one of you here tonight picked your parents', struck exactly the right note and ended for Dublin a day of celebration in which the people of Ireland, Catholic and Protestant together, had been more united and more at peace than

ever before in their long and turbulent history.

It was fitting that on such a day a woman from Northern Ireland's Protestant Shankill Road should have been called to make the ecumenical appeal; and it was a reminder of the special place which Saidie Patterson through her work for Women Together has won in the hearts of the people of Ireland.

A portrait of Saidie, taken before presiding at the mass rally for peace on the day of the Shankill March, August 1976.

Miracle on the Shankill

When the history of the present Ulster troubles comes to be written, Saturday, 28 August 1976 will be marked as a day when the people of the Province forgot their differences in an unbelievable gesture of unity. Protestant and Roman Catholic together, they marched through the stronghold of the Loyalist Shankill Road, and at a mass rally 50,000 people dedicated themselves to work for peace and reconciliation.

There were to be many peace rallies during the rest of 1976 but none equalled the Shankill march in community appeal or courage

and effectiveness of organisation.

For Saidie Patterson there has never been any doubt of the importance of the event.

'I chaired that meeting; and it was the proudest moment in my life. I was proud of the Protestants of the Shankill and the Catholics of the Falls. At last we were all God's suffering children looking for a way out. But I don't think we really appreciated the significance of what we had managed to do together. If only the direction and inspiration of that day had been maintained great things might have been achieved.'

The story of 'the Shankill miracle' started at the beginning of August 1976, when three Catholic children were killed in West Belfast in a terrorist incident. The local people were appalled at the happening and feeling against the Provisional IRA ran high.

At this point two local women, Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams (later to become joint recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize), quite new to public affairs and to the peace movement, began to organise protest meetings throughout the Catholic areas of Belfast. They were joined by Protestant women who sympathised with their protests and very soon a remarkable wave of public opinion surged behind their appeals for an end to violence.

The two Peace Women, as they began to be called in the press, had intervened at the very moment when the pent-up outrage of the community was crying out to be expressed against terrorist brutality. The close link of the two women with the cause of the martyred children — Mairead Corrigan was their aunt — and their passionate rejection of the men of violence triggered off a new wave of support for peace in Ulster, sweeping them into the leadership of a community demonstration which for a while won world-wide attention and attracted massive financial support for the new organisation which they founded.

Within a few weeks, the many well-established peace groups in Northern Ireland found themselves caught up in a unique peace initiative, based largely on rallies after the style established by Martin Luther King and preceded by marches on a scale never before witnessed in Ireland nor, indeed, in many Western countries.

Unlike previous peace initiatives in Northern Ireland, the 1976 campaign was given committed and sustained coverage by international television and press agencies. Belfast was the place to be in that hot summer, and a glittering array of outside talent

joined the local marchers, as prestigious offers of help, particularly from Scandinavia and America poured in.

For a while in 1976 the people of Northern Ireland began to hope as they had not hoped for seven years. Overnight, all things had begun to seem possible.

Looking back on the events of 1976 Saidie believes that the time was ripe for a new peace initiative. Like many others, she sensed the special feeling in the 'air' of Belfast in the uniquely warm summer (good marching weather). The working-class, in particular, had been sickened and angered by a long winter of sectarian bombings and killings during which a good deal of social life had been brought to a standstill; the fall of the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention had caused a political vacuum; and long years of bloodshed culminating in the deaths of the three children had put the IRA and all para-military groups on the defensive as never before.

In such an atmosphere many who had previously stood on the sidelines were stirred in action, flooding into the peace rallies and bringing a spirit of renewal to the existing Irish peace movement, which had been in the front line for seven exhausting years. Old and new, peacemakers joined in a fresh effort with an enthusiasm which for a while swept all of Ireland, much of Britain and a good many areas of Europe and America.

Saidie, as a peace veteran, was anxious to encourage the new recruits and was ready to give her assistance in every way possible. But when the idea of a peace march up the Shankill was first mooted even she regarded the suggestion as something of a tall order.

The possibility of such a demonstration was mentioned quite spontaneously in a moment of enthusiasm by some Protestant women who attended in support of their Catholic friends at an anti-terrorist rally at Andersonstown in West Belfast. The idea seemed a good one; all were agreed that Saidie Patterson was the person to organise such an event.

The difficulties of the operation were obvious to all who knew the territorial rules of divided Belfast. To the Ulster Loyalist the Shankill Road is sacred ground, regarded with a pride of possession equalled only by the Republican feeling for the nearby Falls Road. And there is a mutual respect for the conventions governing the respective territories, with ground rules binding on all: 'If you respect our strip, we'll respect yours.'

Saidie was approached as one who knew the Shankill inside out and as one whose presence on the platform would encourage an orderly demonstration. But with a lifetime of experience behind her she was an expert on local attitudes and knew only too well the difficulties involved in organising an inter-denominational march and meeting, especially at a time of the year regarded by the Orange and other Protestant Orders as the time for Loyalist festivals.

The risks in organising a Shankill peace march were obviously great and Saidie did not underestimate them; but in the atmosphere of August 1976 the challenge was compelling.

'This, I knew was going to be a real test, but at my age there was really no excuse for caution. I knew that I was taking on the biggest single task of my life and that I was literally responsible for the lives of thousands if anything went wrong. I knew that there was a danger of all hell breaking loose if things got out of hand. But what a bonus for peace if we got it right.'

She told the deputation of peace women that she would do her best to help, but when the delegates left Woodvale Street she wondered what she had let herself in for and hardly knew where to begin.

'Quite frankly I decided to consult the "Boss" above. I believe that the good Lord will speak to you if you're prepared to listen. If you sit quiet, it's just amazing the thoughts that come to you. And that time I listened very carefully, for I knew that we needed something of a miracle on the Shankill to see us through.'

So, in another of her regular 'Quiet Times' Saidie evolved a plan of operation for the Shankill demonstration — a plan which reflected a good deal of the experience she had acquired in the organisation of her women during her trade union years. Later, in a television interview she explained her strategy — a strategy which relied on the backing of local housewives and on the organisational support of street captains from the areas flanking the march route.

'The thought came to me that it was essential to win over some of the "hard-line" women from the Shankill streets so out I went on the door-knocker. The first visit wasn't very profitable, but it showed me what I was up against and warned me to tread carefully. I was spat upon, and told in no uncertain manner that there would be "no bloody Fenian march" up the Shankill.'

The next visit was to one of her former woman shop stewards, a stalwart of the local Orange Lodge. Again, the first reaction was discouraging:

'My God, Saidie. You and your peace talk; you'll get us all burned out before you're finished.'

But after a good deal of harking back to old campaigns together she got the promise she wanted — help to canvass assistance in the neighbouring streets. This was the beginning of a door-to-door campaign among local Loyalists that secured for Saidie the powerful grass-root support among women for the marshalling of the parade — and, just as important, it brought the support, or at least the neutrality, of the men of the district. With such guarantees the firm base had been established.

Saidie was equally thorough about the details of the march. She was particularly anxious that the right 'image' should be projected by the marchers. Above all, she was determined that the 'sign language' should be right. For this reason she insisted that all banners and slogans should be vetted before being introduced to the parade. Not all agreed with her on this matter, and on several occasions she had to exercise her veto.

Many, for instance, wanted to display the various colourful emblems of the organisations to which they belonged; but she took no risk and excluded them all. She even excluded her beloved trade union banners, fearing that some of the symbols and slogans might be misunderstood.

'This is a united peace rally and we must give our opponents no chance to separate us from our mass support. Take James Connolly, for instance. He's a great working-class leader in my book, any day. But just imagine his picture on a trade union banner being carried up the Shankill on a Loyalist anniversary day like the last Saturday in August. Can you think of a better way to start a riot!'

Eventually Saidie suggested that each marching group should carry a single banner, especially designed for the occasion, indicating the area represented. The linen was provided by the women of the Shankill and the Falls supplied the sign-writing expertise. One of these banners was brilliantly simple and most effective — an example of the sure 'touch' which Saidie brought to the organisation of the occasion.

'I got two of the peace leaders from the Falls and we walked over the proposed route. As we passed up and down the Shankill Road we came to many public houses and street corners with floral displays, marking the spot where people had been murdered. I suggested "Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could get two children

to carry a banner with that magic little word 'Sorry' written on it and to bring it to each bombed site.''

On the day of the march the simple ceremony was carried out. As the marching children came to each mourning point they stopped, bowed their heads and dipped their banner in respect. This was a message which all sides understood and appreciated.

But by far the most important element guaranteeing success was the backing of the citizens of the Shankill Road. Saidie kept in hourly touch with her street captains and eventually late on Friday evening was assured through the local 'grape-vine' that the men of the district would see that there was no disturbance and that no one would be allowed to interfere with the arrangements made by their women to support the event.

Yet, up to the last moment it seemed to outside observers to be a case of touch and go. Journalist Sarah Nelson caught the tense atmosphere for the *Fortnight* magazine:

'Before the start, omens from the ''Heart of the Empire'' were scarcely encouraging. ''King Billy'' in full flight, ringed by Loyalist pennants, glared expectantly from a high-rise block of flats. Three intoxicated National Front supporters weaved an unsteady path up the Road under the weight of an enormous Union Jack. Tapped gently on the shoulders by a para-military snatch squad they fell into a nearby pub.'

The tension was there, but there was good humour as well. It was a splendid August Saturday afternoon and the crowds were in festive mood as they began to line the route to Woodvale Park.

On the Falls there was similar excitement and also some apprehension as in thousands their contingent approached the point of no return at the bottom of the Shankill Road. Suddenly they arrived — a Catholic multitude led by Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan inching cautiously into the waiting mass of Protestants, receiving them on ground which had seen seven years of communal strife.

But this time it was different: a miracle of reconciliation took place. To shouts of 'Welcome to the Shankill', the crowds mingled — 50,000 strong, with equal numbers of spectators.

Nothing like this had ever been seen on the Shankill before. Nuns, dressed in fashions unfamiliar to Loyalist districts, stretched out hands to clasp and be clasped by Protestant women; priests and Protestant ministers walked as brothers; and strangers from either

History in the making on the Shankill Road; the hands of friendship during the march to the Peace Rally.

side of the 'peace-line' linked arms as they had done since the troubles began.

For Saidie it was a moment of supreme triumph.

'I never thought I'd live to see the day of such a miracle. Arm in arm together — 50,000 of us from Shankill and Falls and all over Ulster marching to Woodvale Park together to let the world know that we wanted peace.'

On reaching the Park the marchers for a moment seemed disorganised — experiencing something new, in which they were not sure what was expected of them. They needed a central point of reference. Again, they got it in Saidie when she mounted the platform to start the meeting with her Chairman's appeal.

As usual, the message was simple, but exactly phrased to suit the occasion.

'I'm proud of you today. You have poured in from every corner of the Province, bringing with you a spirit that can never be quenched. You Catholics have shown courage in coming to the Shankill and the Protestants have opened their hearts to you. That is what the future is all about. It is time the people in high places got the message that the people want peace right at this moment.'

And again the appeal to working-class solidarity.

'The last time I walked up the Shankill with Catholics was in the early Thirties when we were marching to the workhouse for bread — and some of us were in our bare feet. Today we walked up the Shankill not as Protestants or Catholics but as children of the King of Kings. This day is the crowning experience of my life.'

The crowd roared its approval. Saidie had struck just the right note and had secured the success of an historic occasion. She had also provided a perfect emotional base on which Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams were able to make their greatest ever appeal. And she had helped to bring together an audience which in its composition brought a special dimension to the new thrust for peace which was about to begin.

But as Saidie herself stressed when later that day she thanked her helpers at a gathering in the local Methodist Manse, it had been 'a near thing'. And more than anyone else she knew that a very careful 'grass-roots' follow-up would be needed if the Shankill demonstrations were to have the long-term results she sought. Superb local organisation had made possible a demonstration which could not be easily repeated in different circumstances on other tribal territories.

Fortnight was quick to note the key factors which lay behind the success of the day:

'As the people drifted home they gazed curiously in shop windows they had not seen for seven years and would not see again for a while. No one had thought the wall of fear and bitterness cemented by so many mutual savageries could be breached so easily and so suddenly. But they knew also this was a special day — like an amnesty. To return tomorrow would be to push their luck and the other side's forbearance.'

This observant commentator concludes:

'It was the familiar ringing tones, evoking the King of Kings and the hunger marches, reawakening our pride and courage which did the trick. "It's Saidie," muttered the crowd in tolerant and reassured recognition.'

Saidie's personal presence, plus days of patient staff work with her army of women workers in every street in the district, made the Shankill peace march a success, and ensured a safe conduct for Ulster's biggest-ever ecumenical rally in one of the Province's most politically sensitive areas — and on a day in August which is set aside for specifically Loyalist celebrations. Her 'message' got through — peacemaking spelt out in terms her people understood.

Other rallies would be held in Northern Ireland, but they proved most successful when held on relatively neutral ground. In an area like the Shankill the local prestige and organising ability of Saidie was indispensable.

A short while later the difficulties of a follow-up march were illustrated when a group of courageous peace workers organised a parade on the neighbouring Falls Road. This time the marchers were stoned and abused by supporters of the IRA. Banners were destroyed and many marchers, including Roman Catholic and Protestant clergymen, were attacked and injured. Even the venue for the meeting had to be changed when the way to the field was blocked.

Saidie paid a personal price for the part she played in the Falls demonstration. In a little publicised incident she was trapped in Falls Park when an anti-peace mob invaded the ground and locked the gates, wrecking the arrangements for the planned rally. Her story is a reminder of what being on the peace-line in Ulster can involve:

'Once I was recognised it wasn't long before I was badly beaten as the mob set about me; there wasn't much I could do to save myself. If it hadn't been for the courage of a group of local Catholic women who came to my aid I think I'd have been finished. I owe them an eternal debt of gratitude.

'I was in hospital for months with an injured spine. When I was in pain and very weak I prayed, "Lord, there is nothing you and I cannot do for peace together." During the months in hospital I made many converts for the cause — doctors and nurses as well as patients. They are on *my* list now, ready to be called when they are needed.

'I wear a steel support as a result, and I'm on crutches, too — but there's nothing wrong with my tongue.'

Saidie at home.

The Sayings of Saidie

Saidie Patterson is one of Ireland's finest communicators. Brought up in a testing 'school' of trade union and open-air meetings, she has had to use language in a fashion that has been simple and persuasive. In the process she has developed a way with words and phrases which finds her a ready audience whether it be at the level of the community discussion group, the international conference or the 'fireside' chat over radio or TV.

Down the years Saidie has been a creator, collector and adapter of the fitting phrase. I give below a selection of some of her favourite

remarks; some have been chosen by herself, others noted by her friends.

Many of the sayings recorded reflect the experience and wisdom of the Shankill and Saidie's knowledge of her working-class background; others are part and parcel of her religious devotion; yet others have been gathered and adapted from people whose work she admires.

The Religious Life

The great saints inspire us — they give all to all. God never lets them down. He always sees to it that they have an inexhaustible supply of love and care for people.

God never asks you to do something without at the same time giving you the strength to do it.

Why do we so often look for God in the sky when He is all around us here on earth?

When you are at the end of your tether, remember God is at the other end.

If I was charged in court for being a Christian, I wonder would there be enough evidence to convict me.

God is generous — when I ask for a nib he gives me a fountain pen.

One with God is a majority.

Get into church in good time on Sunday and give yourself time to settle down before you meet the Lord.

Just when we begin to admit that things are beyond our control, God acts — and everything falls into place.

We give ourselves to God through service to our neighbour.

Prayer

Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen today that you and I cannot handle together.

I'm tired, God. But I'll lift one foot if you'll lift the other for me.

Morning prayer is important — it's when we put our daily armour on.

We are always ready to give God a good talking-to in prayer. It's wise to give *him* a chance to get a word in edgeways.

I might as well not have prayed — I got between myself and God.

The Love Of God

Without Love there can be no peace;
Without Peace there can be no joy;
Without Joy there can be no Hope.
Without God,
There can be no Hope or Joy or Peace
or Love.

Personal Standards

Preach hope. If all you have to offer is despair, remain silent.

Difficult situations have never been mastered by discouragement.

A moral revolution is no place for timid people.

Make up your mind to be part of the cure and not part of the disease.

Service is not an optional extra — it is the rent which we pay for our room on earth.

Look at your hand when you point a finger at your neighbour; you'll see three fingers pointing back at yourself.

If everyone cared enough and shared enough, then surely everyone would have enough.

When we see something wrong in this world and do nothing about it, we are committing a crime against the whole of humanity.

We need to hate injustice so much that we tackle it not only in society where we see its fruits, but in the human heart where it has its roots.

Put right what you can and leave the rest to God.

Never worry about playing second fiddle; be thankful to be in the orchestra.

The rank and file have hearts of gold. Our job is to mine that gold.

Dean Swift was right — Dr. Quiet, Dr. Diet and Dr. Merryman. Well worth getting to know.

If we stopped working every time our body wasn't feeling well, we'd never get anything done.

When you are young there may be some excuse for 'playing safe', but when you're mature there's no excuse at all.

Be generous — don't give it on a salt spoon when you should be using a shovel.

Big words often diminish big ideas.

Our actions are a looking-glass in which we see our true selves.

Our Lord was easy to understand. What a pity so many wise men find difficulty in following his example.

Commonsense advice

You cannot stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from nesting in your hair.

The weakest of ink is better than the strongest of memory.

Take time to answer your letters — and write so that a man on a galloping horse can read what you say.

Write the thought down, Brother, write the thought down.
You don't know for certain what may be found.
It may be the key that will change history,
So write the thought down, Brother, write the thought down.

It takes a steady hand to carry a full cup.

While the miracles happen daily the impossible takes a little longer.

Remember you're not the Man who put the salt in the sea.

Never jump out of the bowl you were baked in.

God feeds the ravens, but he doesn't put the food in the nests.

The closer you get to the big and pompous the smaller they look.

The half-truth is often worse than the full lie.

It's easy to hold a city that never was sieged.

Men and Women

Ever since Adam blamed Eve for that apple men and women have been blaming each other — and that achieves nothing.

Some men are like that — nothing between the ears but sawdust.

A mahogany head if ever there was one.

Too many women put their thinking out with their washing.

It's time we taught some of our men to pass more pubs and fewer resolutions.

No consistency — he's been in everything bar the crib.

There are no old maids — only undiscovered treasures.

Heady, bossy women make cowards of men; appeasing women make dictators of men; and both demoralise the nation.

The wishbone of men and the backbone of women — not a bad combination.

Thoughts on Peace

Peace is love expressed; it is being at one with our neighbour; it is removing the things that separate us from God.

Peace cannot come through violence. You need a superior idea in your head and love in your heart.

Hate multiplies and has a million children.

We must decide which we prefer — to bury the hatchet or bury the dead.

None of us picked our parents. Why then do we battle about our origins?

What does it matter what foot you dig with, if one is in the grave?

In hospital — isn't it amazing how Protestants and Catholics share one another's blood at the transfusion table.

There's no such thing as 'Orange' tears and 'Green' tears; we all weep together.

Bigotry — leave it aside. It went out with hobble skirts and button boots.

If you don't love your neighbour, you just don't love God.

Dean Swift said it all a long time ago — what a tragedy when we have just enough religion to make us hate but not enough to make us love one another.

Our English friends can talk about the Ulster crisis till the cows come home; and they can send whom they like to rule us; but one day we will have to agree among ourselves.

A miracle of the spirit is what we need in Ireland. Pope John Paul's visit has shown us that such a miracle is possible. But Protestants and Catholics must work for it together.

Saidie with her peace awards in the back yard of her home.

Our Saidie — Recognition

'All of us know women who are mothers to a whole district, to a town or to a nation.'

The French writer, Clair Evans, makes this observation in her book *Free Woman* and includes Saidie Patterson in this category of rare women.

But it is only in recent years that such general recognition has come. The delay has not been unusual — it is the fate of the Irish that their 'greats' are mostly honoured for their achievements outside the land of their birth. The world is slow to honour the Irish who make their mark in Ireland. So, natives of Ireland restless for

wider recognition often seek to develop talents in Britain or further afield.

Even the Irish in Ireland are sparing in their praise of one another and there is still a good deal of truth in Dr. Johnston's observation, 'The Irish are a fair people; they never speak well of one another.'

But in recent years there has been a mellowing. Suffering has drawn the people together and has made them more aware of the need to value one another's contribution to the defence of their threatened society. Saidie Patterson, in particular, has won national recognition as a symbol for peacemaking, uniquely acceptable in every part of the island.

She has become one of Clair Evans' 'rare women' — to a whole people she has become 'Our Saidie'.

A variety of explanations have been given to explain this universal appeal. We have already noted the early tributes of trade union and Labour leaders who saw in the young textile worker great human gifts likely to take her into spheres of action beyond her trade union work. The tributes continue.

To Alf McCreary of the *Belfast Telegraph*:

'She is a remarkable woman by any standard, whose contribution to reconciliation is incalculable.'

And for Joy McGibben, Dublin journalist and for some years press officer of Women Together, there is the impressive diversity of talent:

'I find it hard to isolate any particular characteristic from the whole of Saidie. Such uncompromising integrity has shaped her that, in today's jargon, she is completely ''together''.

'Her constant, profound search for what the Master, as she calls Him, wants her to do, inspires and challenges all sophistication and leaves it revealed as weak and helpless to meet our deepest needs.

'A woman of such richness, much courage and such humour, Saidie has in her still an element of the youthful tomboy, full of adventure and with just a touch of impishness.

'She is irreverent of pomposity, unabashed by authoritarianism and totally rejecting of any passivity in the face of injustice, cruelty, greed or despair.

'She is a veritable Christian soldier and a wonderful model for any woman today who wants to live a life that is not overwhelmed by fear of tyrants, either without or within.'

Joy McGibben's sensitive appraisal brings out the moral militancy

of Saidie and its range; at the same time she identifies the keen Christian compassion which always accompanies that militancy. It is a special combination.

Clair Evans also notes the blend:

'She has all the fire of the Irish, but what shines from her is not a hatred of a system but love — a personal practical love for each of the thousands of women she is responsible for. Now in the present trouble, this love has spread even more widely.'

All of these tributes stress the practical side of Saidie's philosophy: it is love translated into action, giving her the capacity to speak to those around her in language which is readily understood. And there is also a staying-power about these actions which few in the grinding Irish situation have been able to equal. In her seventies she sets a dedicated pace. Four or five meetings a week are normal, many of them at national and international level.

But the vital 'core' work remains — hour upon hour given to the unglamorous but real-life community service among her people on the Shankill and Falls. She not only inspires others to work — she shares in their labours.

This constancy of service is an essential part of Saidie's contribution to the Irish peace movement. No fly-by-night reconciler, Saidie in the years of the current Ulster crisis has been doing what has been part of her everyday life since girlhood — she has been building bridges in Ireland and around the world between divided people.

Gerald Priestland's words are fitting: 'a Peace Woman from way back.'

This long-term service record confers authority. Saidie cannot be upstaged in terms of experience or personal contribution. Everyone knows that she will be there, as she puts it, 'to the end of the chapter'. To Ulster people who often feel alone with their problem, such a point of certainty is reassuring.

Saidie's way of life had also proved a source of strength — she practises what so many of us preach but never quite manage to express in our lives. She is never embarrassed when she presses today's great point, 'Live simply so that others may simply live.' Nor does she make a great fuss about her modest means. To her, the simple life is entirely natural — no 'nest eggs' are necessary for those who believe.

'The Lord always produces the means to do his work. When the

time comes, He will provide. With such backing you just don't need to worry about an earthly bank balance. Certainly money is important, but it must never be allowed to determine our moral responsibilities.'

To Saidie this attitude to material things is perfectly logical — it works and has done so for over seventy years. To the 'practical' who doubt her reasoning she points to her ability to balance her own books. But, of course, it is not as easy as she makes out; there is a discipline and a technique involved based on make-do-and-mend practices and avoidance of today's various credit schemes.

'If I died tomorrow, I'd only owe the milkman from Sunday till today.'

This stress on knowing the simple life by actually embracing it — and by facing the economic realities involved in so living — is central to Saidie's philosophy of life. She endorses the message of John V. Taylor's *Enough is Enough* and comments:

'Long-distance leadership is ultimately ineffective. If I started to live away from my people I'd no longer be one of them. I'd lose the things we share together; before long I would become a mere observer, writing and talking about them.'

All of which has a quality which challenges the values of the affluent society which Saidie regards with a good deal of caution. She emerges from her attitude to material things as a woman with a deep sense of Christian stewardship. She gives generously to all who need her; and she goes well beyond her abundance to give of her substance.

Locally these qualities are recognised by her friends and neighbours to whom, in the greatest compliment they can pay, she is one who 'has never jumped out of the bowl she was baked in'.

But — a fact that many around her may not recognise — she has never been stuck in her 'bowl'. She belongs to the Shankill, but she has never been possessed by it — no more than her great friend Mother Teresa has been trapped by Calcutta.

For instance, when ecumenism has been on the defensive in Northern Ireland she has never bowed to the Shankill wind. During various sectarian campaigns she has openly demonstrated her opposition when many of her local people have been involved in the emotions and tribalism of the time and have disagreed with her ecumenical attitudes. Equally, she has met the challenge of violence from whatever source it has come and has witnessed for her pacifist

views without compromise.

'They'd have to kill me to silence me,' she declares, as she hammers home her message, 'Protestants and Catholics — an accident of birth. What are we fighting for?'

This special brand of courage has not gone unnoticed: the recognition of her home as a place of sanctuary, open to all of any faith who need help (and they come at all hours); the thousands of willing volunteers on whom she can call; or more simply, the nearly two thousand Christmas cards which arrived in 1979.

Sometimes the 'thank you' gestures are both homely and practical. For example, in the Ulster Workers' Stoppage of 1974, two intrepid messengers arrived from the Falls bringing a supply of coal from Catholic friends who thought she might be without fuel.

'Look after that stuff, Miss Patterson,' quipped one. It's not often that you get Fenian coal on the Shankill these days!'

But Saidie's recognition has been more than local — it has spanned all of Ireland and has been international as well.

In Ireland she has been the recipient of the Joseph Parker Peace Prize. The Trust, founded in 1973 by the Reverend Joe Parker whose son was killed in a terrorist explosion, makes the award to groups offering distinguished service to reconciliation and is particularly concerned to bring together those who have lost relatives in the troubles. In 1977 the Trust broke with precedent and awarded the Parker Prize to Saidie, as an individual, in recognition of her outstanding work for peace in Ireland.

Soon after this award came wider recognition — the World Methodist Peace Award. Instituted by the World Methodist Council representing fifty million Methodists, the prize was awarded to Saidie 'for her courageous work, her creativity in crossing hostile barriers to mediate between persons on both sides and her long-term efforts for the cause of peace'.

With her lifelong devotion to Methodism, Saidie greatly appreciated this gesture and the fact that the first award had come to an Irish Methodist. But the happy occasion was tragically marred. At the very moment when TV cameras were recording her reaction to the announcement of the Geneva award the proceedings were interrupted by the news that an hour earlier her nephew's son had been gunned down in an IRA ambush.

'The news made my blood run cold,' she said. 'But I prayed that bitterness would not enter into my heart. I was more determined

than ever to continue the work for peace.'

Ironically, the shield which had been presented that day as part of the ceremony was inscribed 'What price peace?' with the citation, 'She has sat with the men of violence and dissuaded them from bombing and shooting.'

Later that night in a moving TV interview Saidie again demonstrated her moral consistency. Living up to the spirit of her citation, she spoke out from the screen to the unknown killer of her young relative and used the personal grief of her family to rise above the violence of the day.

'Young man, you who killed someone dear to me today have done a terrible thing. But there is no bitterness, only sadness, in my heart. Nor do I want anyone in Northern Ireland to react with bitterness. We have enough of that; these things are not in our hands.

'Robert was a good boy who loved his country and tried to serve it well. He is with his God tonight. Someday, you who have done the killing will have to meet your Maker to explain your action. In the meantime, we who believe in peace will see that the work goes on without bitterness in our hearts.'

The whole of Ireland and practically every newspaper in the Western world carried the story of Saidie's grief that day. Her response to the tragedy was an inspiration to peacemakers everywhere. In the tribute of a later American peace award from the Church Women United, 'The world saluted a valiant woman'.

Saidie's home is now well filled with the emblems of the many peace awards which she has received. She holds them on behalf of the peace fellowship to which she belongs — all the money which has accompanied the awards has been given to local and national welfare groups.

But more unusual than her peace awards has been the recognition which has come increasingly from academic circles. In recent years the universities have recognised the rich store of human history in which her life's work has involved her.

'I feel like setting up my own radio station, they seem so anxious to tape me these days,' she comments.

In 1977 the Open University marked her achievements by the conferment of an Honorary Degree for contributions 'to community development and the history of our times'. She was the first Irish woman to receive the Honour, and Bill Lindsay of the Open

Church Women United

recognizes

Saidie Patterson

As A Valiant Woman

Causeway Friends — Mary Louise Rouard

UNIT PRESIDENT — NATIONAL PRESIDENT

March 3, 1978

DATE

An award from the USA.

University welcomed her as one of Northern Ireland's most distinguished women, who had 'earned her Degree through many years of study at the University of hard experience, with an examination a day to pass the course.'

Never overawed by such occasions, Saidie reminded the academic gathering that she had enjoyed opportunities which they had lacked — she had had the privilege of studying in the very special university cloisters of 'the streets of the Shankill and Falls, whose dons are the wise men and women who live in those streets'.

She was given a standing ovation by the assembly who realised that they had listened to someone who had not only studied history but had also made a considerable contribution to it. The award was an imaginative gesture on the part of the Open University; Saidie had since reciprocated by adding the OU to the long list of good causes which she champions in her round of speaking engagements.

But undoubtedly the most prestigious of Saidie's many honours came in International Women's Year when the Geneva Committee of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom celebrated their fiftieth anniversary in 1975 by publishing a message on Equality, Development and Peace from fifty of the world's most distinguished women, representing differing ideologies, regions and perspectives.

In the announcement making the selection each woman was chosen by the world executive 'by experience and achievement, to write down their thoughts as they go about making and changing history'.

Among the distinguished group selected were prominent politicians, academics and community workers from every continent, among them the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Martin Luther King, Joan Baez, Margaret Mead, Alva Myrdal, the Swedish Minister for Disarmament and Valentina Tereshkova the Russian cosmonaut. Saidie was chosen as one of the fifty and her message appeared in the anniversary volume for International Women's Year circulated throughout the world.

What she wrote on behalf of Ireland's women brought letters of response from every continent. Many of the messages came from quite unknown workers for peace who saw in her situation circumstances like their own and whom she had inspired to action. She was especially moved by the words of an isolated black woman working for reconciliation under great difficulties in Southern Africa:

'You are the one woman who has had something of what we South African Blacks have had and are still going through and will continue to go through unless Christian standards are accepted by our masters.

'How I wish you could come over to South Africa. I honestly believe your experience would change the Whites. Your struggle and battle to take a stand against bitterness despite all that has happened would lift many a bitter African from muddy pools and marshes of deadly despair.

'I thank you with all my heart for what you said. I shall carry it as a treasure cure for many in my country. Keep closely in touch so that we can help one another to find solutions to many of the problems that beset us.'

The signal honour accorded to Saidie in International Women's Year was not much noticed in Ireland and she, for her part, said little about it. Indeed, she has displayed a supreme disregard for most of the honours which have come her way, preferring to get on with the task in hand. For her, peacemaking requires a dedication which must not be eroded by self-glorifying publicity. She believes:

'Brickbats and bouquets have one thing in common — they get in the way of the work from which they arise. Anyway, why should we worry whether our work is noticed or not; it will be recorded in the final reckoning that really counts.'

However, after a long life in which she has served the cause of peace at home and abroad Saidie Patterson's work *is* being noticed by men and women in many lands and her continuing efforts have become a source of inspiration for all who strive for reconciliation within the human family.

Saidie will say, 'it's all in a day's work' — but there is more to it than that. She has a capacity to give and a capacity to inspire that makes her one of Ireland's great peacemakers, with an appeal that is both universal and eternal.

Yet, like others who have had this spiritual gift, she has grown into mission without realising what was happening; nor does she give time to worry about where her mission leads her. This woman who is 'together' knows where she stands on the things that matter. Her inspiration comes from roots that go down into the soil of life's enduring values — her mother's vision, her friends of mill and factory, her simple and profound Christian faith.

Significantly, when I asked her how she would like her life to be

summed up she handed me a presentation document which had been given to her twenty years ago at a trade union celebration in her honour. It was an occasion when the Irish Labour Movement had gathered to honour 'Our Saidie'.

Chosen to speak for the gathering was Victor Halley, known to those on the 'inside' of Labour affairs as one of Ireland's most gifted trade union sons; a self-taught scholar and an eloquent orator whose gifts, like those of so many of Saidie's generation, went largely unrecognised.

For Saidie, all that she had been trying to do and say in her life's work came together in Victor Halley's tribute:

'If faith can move mountains then that is the sort of faith Saidie possesses and with which she is possesed. I have never seen her actually move a mountain, but I have seen her tackle a task as big as a mountain — the organisation of the women workers in the linen industry; and I have seen her move the Linen Lords.

'I think from the first day in her job she was conscious of the Pauline teaching: ''We are each one of another''.

'She articulated in language that was understandable and free from jargon, the feelings of women workers in textiles. She created a justifiable pride in workers that they were (as they are) important people giving much to human society and that they had much to give.

'In her early days ''A Wall of Ignorance'' enclosed the textile mills, more securely than the red brick structure put up by the Linen Bosses to keep the workers in and the Trade Unions out. She battered that wall down. The weapons were truth and justice.

'Saidie, your contribution was a massive one.

'*Nor* was her effort purely a local one. For, if John Wesley travelled the length and breadth of England on horseback, Saidie spanned the world on a thousand horse-power.

'Believing as she does: the material gains should be tempered with spiritual humility, Saidie spent time and effort (she spent herself) in the service of her fellow-man and woman.

'Great Men and Women are not those who, in an Acquisitive Society, acquire riches and honours and leave a million dollars, but those who contribute most to the common good and leave the field of conflict of ideas knowing that they have left a million friends and well-wishers.

'Saidie — that we wish you a long and full life goes without

Presentation of the Joseph Parker Peace Award by the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Sir Myles Humphries.

saying; but something I can say with great sincerity — I am glad that we have known you.'

The Address was signed: 'To Saidie — from Victor Halley, on behalf of her friends in the Irish Labour Movement and a wider world beyond.'

It was an apt summing-up.

When Saidie handed me the inscribed Address she did so with the words, 'That's how Saidie Patterson would wish to be remembered.'

...And so she shall.

Appendix 1
International Women's Year Message, 1975

Only the blind or the very selfish are content with the world as it is. Mass poverty, hunger, war, racial conflict cry out for a solution. Man can fly through space, walk on the moon, calculate with computers and transplant hearts, yet seldom has he felt more trapped by processes he cannot control.

'The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world' may be true, but we must help women to play their part in building a better world, starting with themselves and their own country.

Throughout my life, I have had direct contact with about 90,000 women and the first thing I had to do was to help them to see that they counted, *as they do,* and had much to contribute to society.

We are all free to choose what we live for and want to give our energy, talents and imagination to in creating a new society.

The women learn daily that a person's character is more important than the colour of their skin or where they worship, or don't, on a Sunday. In every nation, there are forces at work which create bitterness, disunity and destruction. We all want peace, but we have not yet paid the price for peace — the price of facing, with God's help, where we and our nation have been wrong.

I ask the leaders of every nation to unite in a programme which puts right the past and reconstructs the future.

Our Women Together have a single message:

> If you face a wall of hate, climb it with help in your hands and hope in your heart.

Appendix 2
Women's World Day of Prayer, BBC, 1976

'Only the very blind or the very selfish are content with the world as it is, especially in Northern Ireland.

We have many problems here, and in order to tackle our problems we must not be hooked on power or hate. We must help all we meet each day to play their full part in building a New Ulster.

I believe the power of God can break the power of hate in our lives. We are all free to choose what we want to live for and what we want to give. We women can do what the politicians have failed to do. We are the givers of life and we can bring our country back from the hell of recent years.

Today the disease is hate. And hate has its roots in the human heart, which means in our own heart.

Instead of taking the burdens of the whole country on our shoulders we can begin to work for the ideal by seeking reconciliation with those who are near to us. Instead of always asking what the Government can do to bring about peace, or even what the Church can do, if we were to ask what "I" can do, and proceed, in however small a way, to generate peace and reconciliation in society, then progress can be made wherever we live.

In my lifetime I have had direct contact with thousands of women, mostly from the textile industry, and over the years we learned that we all belonged to one another. Together we fought to change our status as a pair of hands or a number on the pay-roll.

Today I am disappointed at the goals we have missed. Material gains are all very necessary, but they have not brought all in terms

of the happiness we hoped for. Too many hearts throughout the land are empty today; we need to fill those hearts if we are to play a full part in the building of a better life for all.

I ask all women who are listening this morning to help fill those empty hearts with an answer that really satisfies.

Appendix 3
Open University Honorary Degree Speech, 1977

In July, 1977 Saidie Patterson was awarded an Honorary Degree by the Open University. This is her acceptance speech given at the New University of Ulster, Coleraine, on Saturday, 2 July 1977.

Pro-Vice Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very proud to have been given this Degree today. I regard it as a tribute, not only to me personally, but to all that I have tried to stand for during the past fifty years of work in Ireland.

But this is not my first Degree — like so many of my friends and colleagues in the Labour and Trade Union Movement and in the Peace Movement, I have taken my primary Degree in the University of Life. It is a hard University, but a great place to learn.

I want to say a word about the University of Life *that I know.*

My University cloisters have been the streets of the Shankill and Falls Roads — streets whose Dons are the wise men and women reared in working-class houses.

I was born and brought up on the Shankill and lived through much of the social history which so many Open University students now read about. Indeed, a good many of you probably have working-class parents who contributed to a good deal of that history and suffered through it.

And what was it like to live and work on the Shankill and Falls at the beginning of the twentieth century?

In my early days textiles was one of our main industries and employed 100,000, mostly women. We were plentiful and cheap. The working week was one of fifty-five hours and many a time we worked sixty; and no overtime was paid. As for paid holidays, they were unheard of — in fact, a holiday was regarded as a lay-off without pay.

In those days before the First World War our women worked to 6 o'clock at night; babies were often born the same evening, perhaps two hours later. And the same women were back on the job in forty-eight hours, hardly fit to stand all day on the job. It was either that or lose the job and the desperately needed money that went with it.

Children of eleven years — the half-timers, as they were called — went three days to school and three to work; and they often had to go on their bare feet, winter and summer. On cold and snowy mornings the women of the district would lift the children going to work and carry them in their shawls trying to protect them. When the children did get to the factories at six or half-six many of them were half asleep on their feet and wandering about near dangerous machinery. It was a factory inspector's nightmare.

And if an injustice was done in the workshop, workers were afraid to speak out; you could have lost your job, and if you lived in a firm's house it was possible to lose this as well. The rent for the house came out of your wage, which was paid fortnightly.

And the material rewards for all this hardship were few. We who produced the finest linen in the world had to be content with the newspapers on our tables, too poor to buy what we produced. Often we slept on sheets made from flour bags.

The workers, and especially the women, were not treated as human beings; we were just cogs in the wheel or a pair of hands to produce wealth for the Bosses. The wages we got covered only the barest necessities of life, even for a craftsman; for labourers and their families it was a case of the wolf being always at the door.

Today the story of those years is so well known to require no recital here, yet the memory goes deep; what happened in those days cannot fail to evoke the deepest of feelings in my generation. Is it any wonder that we have been cautious in our industrial relations?

But looking back on the past seventy years a bloodless revolution has taken place. Gone are the days of crude hiring and firing, with all its indignity. Then there is the change in personal living standards. I am amazed at the contrast with my childhood days: the improvements in our homes, the TV, the carpets on the floor, and the car in the garage. We can now choose our food and so many have more than enough to eat.

Or take the changes in working conditions — canteens, first-aid rooms, showers and the like. And our weavers who were the hardest worked and lowest paid workers are now craftsmen, loom attenders, and paid the rate for the job.

In welfare benefits, pension, sickness and unemployment rates the strides taken have been enormous. As a woman I welcome especially the family allowance system, though when it was first made possible it was paid to our men folk. The women soon put stop to that: we marched to Stormont and told the powers that be that until we could teach our men folk to pass more pubs and less resolutions the money must be paid to the women. I am glad to say we won that particular battle.

I want to pay tribute to the people who made these changes possible. It looks easy now, but it took men and women of vision to get things going. Bob Getgood, Ernest Bevin, Joe Devlin, Beatrice Webb, Clem Attlee — they have all gone to their reward.

But there's still much that's missing in today's world. We have made great material advances and must welcome them and the opportunities they bring. But we must use these opportunities to set our people really free. And there's a task for all of us, including the Open University.

How do we deal with a situation when purses are full, but hearts are empty — weakened family life, neglect of children; many on tranquillisers, others on drink, some using guns. These are tomorrow's Mums and Dads.

Add to all this the plight of lonely and aged people, and the bigotry and violence which divide our people — the result is a real University challenge.

But hope is the grandest word in the English Language. Bridges

are being built daily all around us and I rejoice to see the way in which the younger generation (and it's probably more besieged than any previous generation) is facing up to the challenges.

And I want to pay a special tribute to the Open University. Pioneered by Harold Wilson and Jennie Lee, it is a great step forward in educational opportunity. More than any other institution of higher education it is giving men and women an opportunity to develop their God-given ability; and it is also breaking down the exclusiveness of the older Universities which all too often were out of touch with the real needs of the community.

And in Northern Ireland in these dark days the Open University is more than just another educational institution — it is one more way of bringing our people, Protestant and Catholic together. Your University is making us aware of life's greatest lesson — that what unites us is far more important than anything that separates us. I trust that one outcome of your teaching will be to make more of our people aware that a man's character is more important than the colour of his skin or where he worships on a Sunday.

I only wish I was twenty years younger — I'd be in the queue to 'sign on'.

To the student of the Open University I would say — the future is yours. God and nature has given you the means to satisfy every reasonable human need and the people of Ulster have need of your services as they struggle to cope with the very difficult circumstances which surround them today.

The Open University will flourish because you are offering something that is needed in our society. I believe that neither men nor nations can live unto themselves and I welcome the fact th[at] co-operation is the keynote of your endeavour.

I pray that you will move forward to the creation of the land of all our dreams: a land in which ignorance, fear and hate shall give place to liberty, justice and peace.

I want to say a very sincere 'thank you' for the honour bestowed on me today.

God bless you all.'

Appendix 4
New Year News-Letter, 1980

32, Woodvale Street,
Belfast, Northern Ireland.
BT13 3DB.
January, 1980.

Dear Friend,

First let me wish you a Happy New Year; and I thought you would like to know some of the positive things that have happened in 1979.

So many people were shocked at the murder of Lord Mountbatten and members of his family, as well as eighteen soldiers at Warrenpoint. Many of our Ulster men served under 'Lord Louis' in Burma and won the Burma Star Medal — and how proud they are to wear it.

Women were angry about this, feelings running high. I got a number of women to my home and after a prayer we decided to send a letter of sympathy to our Queen in her sorrow and we received a wonderful reply. Then our eighteen soldiers were honoured by a Vigil held in Warrenpoint and flowers were sent to relatives. They did not bring back loved ones, but it showed people that there are caring folk in Ulster.

Then the visit of the Pope to Ireland. When news came that he would not be coming North one of our Protestant Councillors put a notice in our local newspapers asking if Protestants felt the Pope should come North and would they sign the petition, 'Yes'.

It was hard work but we collected half a million Protestant votes saying 'Yes'.

I felt this news should be given to the Papal Nuncio, Cardinal Alibrandi in Dublin. An appointment was made and the votes were handed over. At the interview we were told of the Interdenominational Vigil for Peace and Reconciliation to be held in St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin and I was asked to make a response to the visit of John Paul.

I had a long talk with the Good Lord. He told me what to say. I started by asking if everyone there that night were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict *you* and *me*.

I told them:

'It is one thing to pray during a crisis as many are doing, but it is another thing so to live that it does not happen again. Women are learning that when the same bomb rips the slates from a Roman Catholic or a Protestant house in fringe areas it is the same rain that seeps through the ceiling.

'Either the Sermon on the Mount can rule this world or it cannot. The devil has a right to rule if we let him, but he has no right to call his rule Christian Civilisation.

'Men must be guided by God or they will condemn themselves to be ruled by tyrants. It is not an easy job, but not impossible if we believe that one with God is a majority. But it takes more than lip service to fight for God.'

I never thought I would see so many tears shed by so many men. It was a history making night. RTE television and radio carried the speech and I have received 800 letters, so I am trying to Build Bridges with the pen in my replies.

I ask for your prayers in this work, remembering Ireland is her people and the love of Ireland is best demonstrated when we learn to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Yours very sincerely,
SAIDIE PATTERSON

Saidie with friends at Phoenix Park, Dublin, in September 1979 when they were attending the visit of Pope John Paul II. The author is standing behind Saidie, and his wife is sitting beside her.

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