

The Aims and Ideology  
of Cora Wilding and the  
Sunlight League 1930-36.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CORA WILDING.....	2
EUGENICS.....	7
ANCIENT GREECE.....	14
GERMANY.....	16
NEW ZEALAND.....	18
EARLY DAYS OF THE LEAGUE.....	21
HEALTH CAMPS.....	23
THE SUBCOMMITTEES.....	36
II. CONCLUSION.....	43
FOOTNOTES.....	45
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	47

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	Facing Page
I Rest after the mid-day meal.....	32
II The mid-day meal in front of the manuka shelter.....	33

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All newspaper articles appearing in the footnotes can be found in the Cora Wilding Papers.

The abbreviation C.W.P. has been used throughout to refer to the Cora Wilding Papers.

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Late in 1930 the Sunlight League of New Zealand was founded in Christchurch with the aim of improving the nation's standard of health. Its founder, Cora Wilding, feared that the general ignorance of health matters evident throughout the community would produce a continued erosion of health standards. Under her leadership, the Sunlight League set out to arrest the alleged decline in health standards by alerting New Zealanders to the dangers inherent in continued physical decline. A propaganda campaign was launched by the league in 1931 to highlight the need for health education in New Zealand. Despite the nation's relatively good record in infant and child health, the League argued that a sound start in life was often negated by a failure to provide adequate advice in general health matters. Once out of the care of the Plunket society the responsibility for an infant's health was left to the often inadequately informed parent. Ever fearful of the possible ramifications of public ignorance on the health and wellbeing of future generations, Cora Wilding determined to increase community health consciousness. By encouraging sound health habits in children it was hoped to counter unnecessary illness in later life.

The most effective means of spreading health knowledge to those children most in need proved to be through health camps. These camps, which at first catered only for girls between 10 and 12 years of age, were the most successful aspect of Sunlight League activities. In accordance with the eugenic ideals held by Cora Wilding and other Sunlight League members, only girls felt to be of potential civic worth were taken to camp. The rationale behind taking only girls was simple: most would marry and have children, and any good habits acquired at camp would, it was hoped,

be passed on to a future generation. The main aim of the health camps was to make the children better citizens and among other things, "to encourage ... ideals of health, work and service to others."<sup>1</sup> Tacit approval for the eugenic-inspired ideals of the Sunlight League, which were most evident in health camp activities, came from many quarters. One significant sign that the League was influencing official thinking was the recognition given the camps by the Minister of Health. The suggestion to stage health camps came from the Hon. A. J. Stallworthy who, in 1930, invited Cora Wilding to a camp in Auckland for malnourished children. Subsequent changes in the Ministry did not effect the official approval given Sunlight League camps until 1936; a year which marked a turning point in Sunlight League affairs. In August the first Labour government passed legislation to standardize the various independent health camps being held around the country. The autonomy of Sunlight League camps was lost and standardisation made necessary a significant change in selection procedures. Two other independent events hastened the change in the nature of the movement. The unprecedented success of the Health Stamp Campaign of 1935-6 boosted health camp funds and meant that the Health Camp Committee overshadowed all others within the League. Second, Cora Wilding, who had shaped the Sunlight League according to her own beliefs, resigned because of home responsibilities.

Cora was born into a well-to-do Christchurch family which placed great emphasis on physical fitness. Both her father, a prominent lawyer, and her brother showed great sporting ability. Her father, Frederick Wilding K.C., was an especially able cricketer and was instrumental in securing Lancaster park as a recreational ground. Anthony, her brother, also made a contrib-

ution to the on-going physical fitness of Christchurch when Wilding Park was named in his honour. An able tennis player, Anthony was a member of the winning Australasian Davis Cup tennis teams of 1907-9 and 1914, and winner of the Wimbledon singles from 1910-13.<sup>2</sup> Physical fitness played an important part in the lives of the Wilding family. Recalling early influences which formed her dislike of illhealth and respect for a good physique, Cora cites her mother's love of walking and her father's devotion to gardening and outdoor exercise.<sup>3</sup> Another influential figure in Cora's childhood was her brother Anthony. His fine physique was the result of dedicated training, and his example led Cora to dislike needless suffering brought on by physical neglect. As she later stated "It is these two early characteristics probably which after all these years helped to form the Sunlight League with its aim of promoting good health and preventing suffering."<sup>4</sup>

Physical suffering soon became common-place throughout New Zealand and across the Empire with the advent of war in Europe. The outbreak of the Great War saw the Wilding family actively contributing to the war effort. Cora Wilding's three brothers entered active service but only two returned. Anthony lost his life on the field of battle in 1915 and was buried in France. Cora herself was anxious to make some positive contribution and at a tennis tournament it was suggested to her that the best way she could serve her country would be to go to Dunedin and train as a physiotherapist. Consequently, Cora then went to train at the Otago School of Massage and Medical Gymnastics. During the course of her studies the treatment of war veterans and children afflicted by an infantile paralysis epidemic forced her to overcome her horror of physical deformity.

Throughout the course of the war Cora Wilding qualified as a physiotherapist in Dunedin and was appointed to the military orthopaedic staff of Christchurch Hospital and later transferred to Rotorua. Despite being interested in her work, the strain of the war and an accident her mother sustained which needed constant care, led Cora to resign.

Just a few years after hostilities ceased, paintbrush in hand, she set off to Europe via Tahiti, Polynesia, New Mexico, Africa, Morocco and England. After a four year absence, during which time she studied art in Paris, Cora Wilding returned home to celebrate her parents' Golden Wedding. It was not long before the recently returned Cora felt her war-time physiotherapy training should be put to use and she joined the staff of the North Canterbury Hospital Board as a Physiotherapist. In 1928 she revisited Europe, this time intent on studying the cure of disease by means of light treatment.

During her time in Europe Cora studied closely the effects of light in the treatment of children's diseases. She spent three months at the Treloar Hospital for Crippled Children at Alton, where she worked in the light Department and was for a time in charge of the Massage and Remedial Exercise Department. She visited or worked at numerous other hospitals and clinics concerned with light treatment and exercise for children suffering such physical disabilities as rickets and bone tuberculosis. Among these were the Queen Mary Hospital of Carshalton, the Finsen-Reyn Light Institute at Copenhagen, where she worked when infra-red and ultra-violet light treatment were in their infancy, and the Orthopaedic Children's Hospital at Owestry in England. She also studied Children's Homes and hospitals at Stockholm, Berlin and Leysin where she worked in Dr. Rollier's heliotherapy clinic, and the colonies and open air schools in

Italy.

The study trip to Europe was a turning point in Cora's career. Soon after her return to New Zealand she set in motion steps which led to the formation of the Sunlight League. She was especially influenced by two organisations which she observed while in Europe. In London Cora attended a course of lectures by Sir Arbuthnot Lane and Dr. Caleb Williams Saleeby. The two men were to have a lasting influence upon her thinking on preventive medicine. Both lecturers were founders of societies pledged to improving community health standards. One, the Sunlight League, was founded in England by Dr. C.W. Saleeby, who believed that disease was largely preventable by adequate exposure to sunlight and fresh air. The other was the New Health Society under the leadership of Sir Arbuthnot Lane, which drew a link between improper diet and ill health.

From these men, their societies and her work in the various institutions around Europe, Cora Wilding learnt four important lessons. From Sir Arbuthnot Lane and the New Health Society she realized the vital importance of diet in constructing a sound framework of health. A second important consideration in attaining good health was gained from Dr. Rollier who conducted heliotherapy treatment for sufferers of tuberculosis and other debilitating diseases, in the belief that the sunshine and fresh air are nature's greatest cures. The third lesson derived from the open air schools which awoke in her a realization of the necessity of fresh air in the school curriculum if a healthy population was to be produced. From all the places she visited Cora Wilding drew a conviction that if health was to be improved throughout society it was imperative to start with its youth whose habits had not yet been fully developed, and who could more easily be moulded into health and hygiene conscious citizens.

the future health of the population would derive from these children who would become the adults of tomorrow and wield influence over forthcoming generations. Correct mental attitudes toward health and illhealth are a necessary pre-requisite for any improvement in the health of a community.

Having returned from Europe where valuable work was being done in preventive medicine through the application of these simple rules, Cora Wilding was alarmed by the situation in New Zealand. She was particularly concerned by the large number of cases admitted yearly to hospital for the treatment of 'preventable' illnesses, and the high social and economic costs presented by such illnesses. New Zealand, she felt, possessed a 'healthy' climate and the majority of illnesses and diseases present in the community could be avoided by a simple diet and regular exercise in the open air. Miss Wilding had been greatly inspired by the successful use of heliotherapy in overcoming rickets and tuberculosis at Leysin in the Swiss Alps and saw the possibility of similar successes in the Southern Alps. On her return from the study tour of Europe Cora felt she had been supplied with so much knowledge that it was her responsibility to share it with the people of New Zealand. So much of the suffering she saw around her Cora held to be directly attributable to a lack of adequate knowledge on matters of health and hygiene practice and she resolved to lead the crusade against it.

Shortly after her return from Europe, Cora Wilding floated the idea of a Sunlight League. At first there was little response but within a year circumstances and opinions changed, and the idea was greeted receptively on 6 December 1930 by a small gathering of health experts who formed the nucleus of the Sunlight League. No less than four physicians were present among the nine people who attended the meeting held in the Hereford Street office

accountant, C. McKellar. At least two of the remaining five had medical training; Miss Fair was matron of Christchurch hospital and Miss Wilding a qualified Physiotherapist. Thus most early members were professionally concerned for the wellbeing of the community.

From the two societies working in England toward similar ends came the original name, 'The Sunlight Health Society'. The society's aims were an amalgam of those of the Sunlight League of England and the New Health Society. They included the prevention of disease through the spreading of knowledge of nutrition, the benefits of fresh air and sunbathing, and smoke abatement. "It was hoped by means of newspapers and radio talks ... to assist in the education of the public by spreading knowledge in regard to sunlight, fresh air and newer discoveries relating to health.<sup>5</sup> By health education, particularly in childhood and adolescence the society believed enormous improvement in national wellbeing and vitality could be achieved. It was a desire to work toward the creation of a stronger and healthier race which formed the nucleus of Sunlight League aims. Although superficially a humanitarian inspired organisation, a more fundamental ideology moved the Sunlight League.

The stated object of the League - to work for a Healthier New Zealand and the Betterment of the Race - was in the early days synonymous with the eugenic ideal of increasing the average standard of the population by fostering reproduction of the fitter elements of society. Subsidiary objects of the league centered upon health education. Implicit in their motto was a fundamental belief in the value of eugenics in improving the quality of life in any society. The role of eugenics was made explicit by their endeavour "to educate people through the medical and scientific advisers of the League, in the knowledge of the laws of heredity,

the importance of civic orthodoxy and racial value, and by the study of eugenics to exchange racial deterioration for racial improvement."

First put forward in 1869 by Sir Francis Galton who was influenced by the theories of his cousin, Charles Darwin, eugenics was enjoying popularity in antipodean society during the 1920s. It suited majority opinion in both Australia and New Zealand to accept that an hereditary 'sloth gene' was responsible for society's 'wastrels', and not, as others protested, a disadvantaged environment.<sup>7</sup> This belief, that many social traits can be ascribed to hereditary factors, sits well in eugenic theory. Eugenics can be traced to a belief in Social Darwinism, and eugenicists believe that the laws of natural selection have been corrupted by modern civilization which coddles the less fit elements in society. The first premise of eugenics is that civilization is allowing these unfit individuals to outbreed the fit, causing racial degeneration.

These eugenic views had enjoyed currency in New Zealand from the turn of the century, but the First World War intensified the eugenicist's fear that New Zealandstock was degenerating. "World War I made the question of 'national deterioration' assume alarming importance for nearly 60 per cent of all men of military age had to be rejected as unfit."<sup>8</sup> The war had provided a great opportunity for the taking of a census of the health and physical state of the country's manhood.<sup>9</sup> Physical fitness came into prominence during the war when it was rather a shock to New Zealanders that so large a proportion of the population had been rejected as not physically fit for active service. Of 140,000 men aged between 18-42 whose physical condition was examined Mr Renfrew White, a prominent Dunedin surgeon, claimed only one third were found fit for active service.<sup>10</sup> As a result of the medical examination the men were categorized according to their ability to serve in

the war effort." Those who were not totally rejected on medical grounds were subsequently subdivided into two grades, C1 and C2." <sup>11</sup>. Although as a result of training 49.1% of those attending C1 camps were later made fit to join the expeditionary forces, it remained a source of concern that so many were initially rejected. Such alarming national figures in a country which prided itself on its health record called for some remedial action to be taken.

Eugenists adopted one of two approaches to remedy the situation. The first, "negative eugenics", although it was less socially acceptable, had its advocates in New Zealand medical circles. It amounted to preventing reproduction, by incarceration or castration, of those individuals whom it was thought were of little social worth. Mental capacity was often used as a parameter for measuring social worth. In 1928, a New Zealand doctor, Mildred Staley, when advocating the sterilization of the feeble-minded, attributed divorce and illegitimate birth to mental illness. <sup>12</sup>. Such anti-social behaviour which undermined the family unit as the basis of society was considered to be a dysfunction and symptomatic of mental deficiency.

Rather than preventing procreation, 'positive' eugenists encouraged those individuals felt to be of civic worth to breed, in order to counteract the propagation of the unfit. This view held rather more currency among those medical and professional men and women associated with the Sunlight League.

"While physicians were by no means the only members of the eugenics movement, they along with various university professors, gave it its scientific validity." <sup>13</sup>. In Christchurch, Professor John Macmillan Brown, appointed Chancellor of the University of New Zealand in 1925, wrote articles on eugenics under the auspices of the Sunlight League for local newspapers.

The support of society leaders such as Macmillan Brown lent a tone of respectability to the eugenic cause. He favoured the positive method of improving the quality of racial stock. In May 1931, alarmed by the relative decrease in the reproduction of 'superior' persons and its detrimental effect on the overall standard of the race, he gave a public airing to his views;

Every child should be taught both at home and in school that the one thing that has obstructed the advance and development of mankind is the disease of mind or body that is handed on from parent to child, and that it is the first duty of every human being to discover as early in life as possible what diseases or weaknesses exist in the nature and are transmissible by heredity, and to take care that none of those be transmitted. 14.

According to Macmillan Brown, who believed there to be no worse crime than disease, "No one is as healthy as he could be or should be. No part of New Zealand tries as hard to prevent sickness as it does to fight it when it comes." 15. The Sunlight League was acutely aware of the "ambulance at the bottom of the cliff" mentality of most New Zealanders when it came to their personal health. In response to this the League saw as of prime importance the prevention of illness by means of public education in eugenic principles. If the League were able to approach this goal, be it ever so slightly, Macmillan Brown felt it would be deserving of "the gratitude of Canterbury and of the whole Dominion." 16. In accordance with their eugenic beliefs both Professor Macmillan Brown and Dr F. Montgomery argued that the individual had a responsibility to future generations to conserve the higher elements in society.

The subject of eugenics was again raised in connection with the work of the League in 1934, at a speech delivered by

Dr. F. Montgomery of Auckland to their Annual General Meeting. 17.

Because of what members saw as the ever mounting birthrate among the lower classes, it was imperative that definite action be taken to arrest the deterioration of the British race.

Persons of 'sound stock' should be encouraged to procreate and the remainder discouraged, according to Dr. Montgomery. "Sound stock" he defined in terms of the two outstanding qualities of a good citizen: civic worth and racial value. He foresaw difficulties in discouraging members of the lowest strata in society whose stock was necessarily unsound and suggested other, unspecified, measures would be necessary to prevent procreation.

Instruction in eugenics Montgomery, also, felt should form an integral part of the education and training of children. In that way social responsibility could be instilled from the earliest opportunity, when the opinions of the child were still being formed. Dr. Montgomery had a ready made counter to the cries of humanitarians, who, he foresaw, would object to his policies. Segregation and sterilization of the unfit was not cruelty but kindness, he argued, because it was a return to the way of nature. Civilization, by perverting the law of nature, had allowed the situation to arise where the able were burdened by the disabled. Nature herself is careless of individuals. Montgomery contended that, in nature, it is concern for the species and the race which determines that the lower orders will die out. He believed that the work of the League should be to conserve the higher qualities of humanity.

Eugenics and the Conservative movement become closely linked in both Australia and New Zealand. Eugenists were not just fanatics, ill-versed in biology and the embryonic discipline of sociology. They were well educated men and women, representing

the professional classes, who saw in eugenics a remedy for the ills of society. Where liberal thought adopted humanitarian ideals of freedom of the individual, and the obligation of society to its lower orders, eugenicists followed a more conservative line, placing social good ahead of individual liberty.

The Sunlight League took care to justify the pre-eminence of eugenic thought in their ideology. It was held by the League that scientific research was not justifiable as an end in itself. Of equal importance was "the subsequent utilisation of this sound knowledge to form public opinion, and arouse a eugenic conscience".<sup>18</sup> Members stressed the moral duty of every individual to maintain the quality of the racial stock.

The ethical basis of eugenics is not merely duty to neighbours, but also to posterity. Eugenics has no concern with class or wealth: only with health, character, and the individual's ability to be of value to the community.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these protestations, the Sunlight League tended to favour working among those people for whom they felt there was some hope. Given their belief in the presence of an errant gene which accounted for society's "wastrels", it followed that they were less concerned with those continually out of work, despite the severe effects of the depression which engulfed New Zealand in the 1930s. Class and wealth did play a decisive role in determining the perceived value of the individual.

The effects of this can most easily be seen in the policy adopted for the running of health camps. The main criterion for selection of 'needy' children to go to Sunlight League camps was that they be capable of becoming 'good' citizens. Children of 'ne'er-do-wells' were declined entry because it was felt such children were precluded by heredity from ever becoming worthwhile citizens. As Cora Wilding explained to Dr. Baker McLaglan

in a somewhat disjointed letter outlining selection procedure for Sunlight League camps:

However great our sympathy for the poor and weakly children of those unemployables may be, yet we do not want this type, but children who are capable of becoming good citizens. 20.

The primary concern of the Sunlight League was thus to improve the quality of life for the deserving, who, it was felt, were being crippled by the overwhelming burden of taxes necessary for the humanitarians' care of the undeserving poor. The implications of the criticism levelled at the undeserving on the grounds of taxation were twofold. First, because the numbers of 'undeserving' were steadily mounting, the revenue collected from the bulk of society to provide welfare services had also to be increased. This additional burden of taxation, necessary to sustain the 'unemployables', prevented 'worthy' members of society from themselves maintaining their living standards. Furthermore, they were financially unable to increase the size of their own families because they were, in effect, feeding someone else's. This is linked to the second implication; that the Sunlight League was fundamentally opposed to welfarism because it acted to further 'coddle' the unfit to the detriment of society at large. Such a belief falls within the broad scope of conservative thought and the notion of individual responsibility which was only reluctantly modified by the conservative governments in the depression years.

Cora Wilding traced the problem of crippling taxation to the corruption of society by unfit individuals. She saw the adoption of eugenic principles as a viable solution to the problem and drew support for her ideal from a great civilization of the past. Ancient Greece presented a working example of the ideal society.

In the opinion of Cora Wilding, who founded and shaped the Sunlight League, New Zealand had the potential to become a modern day Greece, strong and healthy in mind and spirit. The Greek ideal of health was not 'living to be fit' but 'being fit to live', and in New Zealand Cora saw many sickly people who had, she claimed, through their own negligence, hastened their death. The Sunlight League interpreted the word health according to the original Greek meaning, which includes not merely the physical side but the mental and spiritual as well. The emphasis placed on a healthy disposition by the Ancient Greeks was seen by Cora Wilding to be at the root of the magnificence of their civilization. According to the Greeks, the development of a beautiful body reacted beneficially on the mind to produce a clear thinking and well balanced intellect.

Cora Wilding regarded ancient Spartan society as her model. A healthy population was especially important to the Spartans, who had to maintain a physical dominance over their subject peoples. A system of eugenics was practised to ensure only the fittest survived to adulthood. Delicate children were greatly despised because of the high premium placed on physical fitness. A sickly infant was considered a curse and parents took such a baby out on a hillside and left him to die. The sole aim of the individual was thus to become as fit as possible, so as to be of most service to the state. A Spartan boy received a stringent education directed toward one end - to make him a soldier. It was to this end he exercised daily to cultivate hardiness and develop his muscles. The aim and ideal of every Spartan girl was to build a vigorous and beautiful body, for a girl had but one purpose in life - to become a healthy mother of a healthy son. 21.

Ideals of health and physical fitness were inculcated into every Spartan at a very early age, and served to mould the rest

of his adult life. Each Spartan child had instilled into him the necessity of regular exercise and keeping fit. Daily exercise in the open air was regarded as an almost sacred duty to be adhered to throughout life. The mind of a Spartan was so well trained in ideals of physical fitness, that the maintenance of his strong, healthy body continued throughout life as a matter of habit.

It was this that particularly appealed to Cora Wilding. The Sunlight League's efforts to improve the health of the average New Zealander reflected the Spartan pattern of indoctrinating children with ideals of fitness and wellbeing. <sup>23.</sup>

Miss Wilding used stories of the magnificence of Ancient Greece when appealing to the imagination of children. In the many speeches she delivered on the subject of health, the Ancient Greeks always served as the example of a society dedicated to the maintenance of a healthy population.

The methods used by the Greeks were particularly appealing to the Sunlight League, not only because of the implementation of eugenic practices, but also because of the importance attached to sunlight, fresh air, exercise and a simple diet in attaining good health. In order to maintain their superb physical fitness the Ancient Greeks took their exercise out of doors, exposing their bodies to the influence of sun, wind and air. Sunshine and fresh air together on the naked skin were felt to strengthen and heal the body. This was felt to be particularly important in the case of boys attending gymnasia who were encouraged to exercise daily to maintain themselves in peak fitness. The English word 'gymnasium' is derived from the Greek which meant 'school for naked exercise' (Gr. Gymnos - naked.) The gymnasia of Ancient Greece, initially devoted to athletics, came to exercise a greater

cultural and educational role. They developed into important educational institutions for boys, teaching all matters except those directly concerned with letters or music. Most, if not all lessons were conducted out of doors, weather permitting, and the fruits of such an education were felt by Miss Wilding to be self evident. 23.

For a contemporary model Cora Wilding looked to Germany. Admiration was expressed by League spokesmen for the way in which Greek ideals of disciplined rhythmic dance, sunbathing and tramping were adopted by Germany for its youth. Furthermore, the eugenic platform upon which the German race was to be rebuilt greatly appealed to members of the League. In 1934 the League hailed Germany as leading the world in eugenics legislation. Earlier that year a far-reaching law had been passed which aimed to regulate the reproductive capacity of mentally deficient Germans. Their law resulted in the incarceration or castration of an estimated 40,000 individuals. The Sunlight League applauded its intent:

In regard to restrictive eugenics, that is preventing disease from tainting future generations, the German law which came into force this year is by far the most drastic of any country - Dutch, Swiss or Californian. The Germans passed this measure as a people, because they realized that the mentally deficient and lunatics were increasing, and because the intolerable burden of their maintenance devolved on the ever diminishing section of the workers and taxpayers. 24.

Cora Wilding believed only such eugenic inspired measures could rid society of the basic problems facing taxpaying individuals of proven civic worth. A vigorous population would, she hoped, result from these measures to justify their adaption and serve as an example of their worth. In conjunction with increasing the increasing vitality of the population by means of eugenics,

the Sunlight League aimed to impress on the minds of the people the value of sunlight in the maintenance of health. Whereas the example of Sparta and Germany might have appeal to the educated public, a common-sense appeal to make better use of sunlight excluded no-one. In all of its multifarious activities the Sunlight League functioned on a belief that the benefits derived from sunlight could improve the health of the race.

Sunlight is an inexhaustible resource, freely available to all, and it troubled Cora Wilding who had seen the potential of suntreatment realized in Europe, that so few New Zealanders availed themselves of the sun's therapeutic rays. In undertaking her crusade against unnecessary ill health Cora Wilding carried the banner of sunlight into all aspects of daily life. Although an advocate of regular sunbathing, she was careful to impress on sunbathers that it involved more than stripping off and basking in the sun for a few hours. Rather than lazing under the sun on hot summer days, Cora preferred regular exercise in light clothing throughout the year. In this way the hardiness of the individual could be increased in parallel to his resistance to disease.

The main aim of heliotherapy, as it was medically termed, was to prevent disease from overtaking the body. Knowledge of the benefits of vitamin 'd' in the formation of calcium to strengthen bones and teeth, provided the medical basis of suntreatment. In Europe, heliotherapy was used successfully for the treatment of bone deforming diseases. Similarly, dental hygiene was improved by building strong teeth early in life with adequate intakes of vitamin 'd'. Although their advocacy of the use of sunlight for the prevention of disease was open to charges of quackery, contemporary medical knowledge gave substance to the belief that 'goodness' was derived from the sun.

That this beneficial property of sunlight was recognized by the Ancient Greeks is unquestioned. Classical history acknowledges that the Greeks were among the first to practise heliotherapy. The League also found support for the practice in Maori mythology. Ancient Maori society acknowledged the importance of sunlight. According to one legend the sun at one time traversed the earth too quickly. Food didn't ripen, and meals prepared in the short period of daylight had to be consumed in darkness. Maui, the great hero and benefactor of man, set forth to snare the sun as he made his appearance over the edge of the world. Maui beat the sun lame so that he would journey more slowly, increasing the length of the day.

The Sunlight League adopted the legend of Maui snaring the sun because it presented their beliefs in a manner unique to New Zealand. A competition was run and the winning design, illustrating Maui snaring the sun, appeared for the first time on the cover of a booklet published in the early thirties.<sup>25</sup> A short article appearing in the booklet outlined the story behind the emblem, and owed a debt to Sunlight League ideology. Like accounts of Maori mythology, which themselves differ in their explanation of Maui's feat, the Sunlight League version had some unique elements. The essence of the story, that as a result of Maui and his brother catching the sun he traversed the heavens more slowly, remained in the Sunlight League account, but the detail was an exercise in propaganda. According to the booklet, the population was beginning to suffer from lack of sunlight and Maui set forth to gain the sun's promise to journey more slowly "and so bring back health to mankind".<sup>26</sup> By adopting Maui as their emblem the Sunlight League had an indigenous hero whose work it could continue. Through bringing sunlight

into people's everyday lives Cora Wilding hoped to bring about some form of racial improvement by raising the average standard of health.

At the time of its inception many other individuals and service groups gave tacit support to the endeavours of the Sunlight League. According to the first annual report "the fundamental aim of the Sunlight League, underlying all its activities, is to promote a higher standard of national health, thereby increasing not only the individual's happiness, but also his capacity of service to the community." <sup>27</sup>. Community service is an essential component in the theory of eugenics which aims to propagate those individuals proven to be of civic worth. Thus, a sort of apolitical communism was a motive in Sunlight League work. The subordination of the wants of the individual to the needs of society had been characteristic of Ancient Greece, and, according to Miss Wilding, had given that society its strength. <sup>28</sup>. This idea found new currency in the face of World War One. In an article concerned with Sir Truby King and the ideology of the Plunket Society, Erik Olssen exposes the notion of 'Breeding for the Empire' as fundamental to the work of the society. <sup>29</sup>. King held views which neighboured on eugenic thought. Among the aims of the Plunket Society was a desire to 'raise the standard of health ... and thus ensure a race of capable efficient children, strong, healthy, and resistive to disease." This, he felt, was "the only way to prevent the increase and accumulation of the unfit, submerged and diseased who have become such a very serious problem at Home." <sup>30</sup>. The Plunket Society was working toward the same end as Cora Wilding by advocating preventive medicine. Thus, through his belief in the duty of the individual to help create a healthier society, Sir Truby King was ideologically

suites to serve on the Sunlight League Council, which applauded his work in child health.

The belief in the obligation the individual had to society, shared by Cora Wilding and Sir Truby King, became institutionalized when the Health Department officially endorsed it. Cora Wilding had been inspired by the Spartans of Ancient Greece to create a perfectly healthy New Zealand. Sir Truby King wished to improve child health, not only as an investment for the future, but also to benefit King and Country. Both of these sets of ideas were incorporated into the work of the Health Department which proclaimed, in 1934, that the "Health of Children is of the Greatest National Importance, and the Parent who brings up a Child Healthy and Virile performs the Greatest Service to the Empire." 31.

Therefore, although their motives differed slightly, at least three distinct groups were working in the early 1930's to achieve some recognisable improvement in the health of the country's children.

The initial members of the Sunlight League were enthusiastic in their endeavours and worked tirelessly to see the fruition of Cora Wilding's ideal. Most were people of some standing within the community whose financial security gave them the time to become benefactors to the less privileged. This is not to say that the members of the Sunlight League were any less genuine in their work than the less well-to-do who also gave their services to charity. However, it is noteworthy that many members represented notable Christchurch families of some importance in the community. In general, they were people who could afford to be charitable.

Many eminent medical and professional men and women were drawn by the opportunity to put their time and abilities to good use. The Sunlight League was but one of the many service groups to benefit from this group of people. The inaugural public

meeting of the League, held on 14 May 1931, boasted many famous names in New Zealand Health Circles. At the meeting which packed Jellicoe Hall 'to the doors', Archbishop Julius, Anglican bishop of Christchurch, presided. The main speakers were the Minister of Health (the Hon. A.J. Stallworthy) Mr Renfrew White, the well known surgeon, Dr Elspeth Fitzgerald of Oamaru, and Miss Muir, member of the Sunlight League Committee and Matron of Christchurch Hospital. 'Stirring messages' were read from such world health authorities as Dr. A. Rollier who established the first clinic for tuberculosis at Leysin in 1903 and thus founded modern sunlight treatment, Dr. C.W. Saleeby, the chairman of the Sunlight League of England which had been benefitting Englishmen with suntreatment for seven years, and Sir Truby King, founder of the Plunket Society and member of the Sunlight League Council.

Sir Truby King's cable from Sydney made reference to an Italian proverb which, he hoped, the work of the Sunlight League would realize: "Where the sun goes there not goes the doctor." <sup>32</sup>. It went on to say that it seemed strange that a period of 2,000 years should elapse before mankind should resume the use of solaria similar to those revealed by the uncovering of Herculoneum and Pompeii. Sir Truby King then referred to the Great War which he, too, saw as testing the fitness of manhood. The war had revealed major physical defects previously concealed by the trappings of civilization. New Zealand was not alone in recognizing that its manhood was not as sound as it might be. On the basis of this, Germany launched a campaign for the improvement of national health, and now, he believed, the Sunlight League was set to emulate its model.

It might well have been a telegram written by Cora Wilding

herself, so closely did it mirror her own beliefs. King had succinctly traced the background forces which had helped Cora Wilding determine the direction the Sunlight League would take. Another speaker who drew on Cora's background beliefs was Dr. Fitzgerald, a well known physician from Oamaru

In her address Dr. Fitzgerald placed most importance on the value of sunbathing in improving personal health. Recalling the physical prowess of Ancient Greece, Dr. Fitzgerald stated "the idea of sunbathing is thousands of years old, but it is only of late years that we are beginning to return to it again." 33. In her opinion the value of sunbathing for all ages could not be overestimated. One had only to turn to the example of Scandanavia and Germany who were building up strong healthy peoples through "this important cult of open-air life." Dr. Fitzgerald was in accord with Cora Wilding when she stated "In a country with such advantages as ours, with a good climate, moderately good economic conditions, and colonised by some of the best of the British race, we should produce a people of perfect physique." 34. A diligent execution of the aims of the Sunlight League augured well for a healthy future for New Zealand. Dr. Fitzgerald, like many others involved in the League, was enthusiastic about the potential for racial improvement:

Let us hope that with the increase of knowledge disseminated by the Sunlight League, that diseases due to faulty hygiene and diet will disappear from our midst, and that it will be regarded as a disgrace and not merely a misfortune to produce and bring up a family which is physically unfit. 35.

A belief in eugenics superseded the humanitarian aims also held by many people associated with the League. It was, however, the practical, humanitarian side of Sunlight League affairs which impressed itself on the public's mind. Nonetheless, Cora Wilding

was still pleased with the success of Sunlight League activities. Most successful of all was the annual health camp which was successful on both the practical and theoretical levels.

A significant development in the work of the League was the official recognition given Sunlight League aims by the Minister of Health, who had personally recommended to Cora Wilding that she introduce Health Camps into League activities. The Minister had invited Cora Wilding to attend a health camp at Motuhie in Auckland. She attended this month-long camp at which eighty malnourished children were in attendance, and was encouraged by what could be achieved with such children. Similar camps were in existence elsewhere in the North Island but "the driving force behind the health camp movement locally was Cora Wilding and her Sunlight League." <sup>36</sup>. Miss Wilding was actively involved in the organisation and running of Health Camps between 1931 and 1936. From modest beginnings (four girls in 1931) these camps grew in size and number to their peak in 1936, when 171 'needy' children were taken for periods of up to four weeks to six different camps.

From 1931 to 1936 the size and number of Health Camps run by the Sunlight League increased. In September 1931 a small health camp organized by the Sunlight League had the honour of being the first in the South Island. Encouragement for the work the League was undertaking was expressed by A.J. Stallworthy from the office of the Minister of Health: "I trust that your Tiny Health Camp will prove to be but a forerunner to quite a big movement in the South Island." <sup>37</sup>. This first camp was run on a humble scale and comprised four young girls aged between eight and twelve, who were taken to Geraldine. At the time the League had only been in existence a few months and their

bank balance showed only about £2. The success of this camp was very encouraging and the League decided to hold a more ambitious camp the following January.

In 1932 the League took fifteen girls and three 'prefects' (or secondary school girls who took charge of a small group) to Quarteris Bay for a month. According to Cora Wilding, "it had been a nightmare trying to raise funds, selling asparagas and lily of the valley, and holding parties, for we had determined not to run into debt. Our relief was great when a £5 cheque from the Rotary Club prevented this." <sup>38</sup>. In 1933 the government grant from the sale of health stamps the preceding Christmas meant that the running of children's camps became less of a financial worry. Twenty five girls were taken by the League to a camp at Okains Bay in that year. The erection of a manuka shelter at Okains Bay in 1934 enabled thirty-two girls to enjoy camp life. Two venues were chosen for the 1935 camps and the number of girls taken into camp increased four-fold. The successful staging of these camps was regarded as the outstanding feature of Sunlight League activities for the year. <sup>39</sup>.

However, the achievements of 1936 overshadow all of the previous years. The six camps held in 1936 were the last Cora Wilding took an active part in. She personally supervised the girls camp held at Kaikoura. In all, 112 girls were taken to camp for four weeks, 32 boys for three and a half weeks, and 27 boys for an unspecified length of time. Twenty-four girls attended a camp at Mrs Acton Adams' Cottage at Tipapa, and the remaining boys and girls attended camps on Banks Peninsula and at New Brighton. All were felt to have been very successful and most of the children returned home invigorated, sporting a healthy tan and carrying a few extra pounds in weight.

The first Sunlight League Health Camps catered only for girls between the ages of ten and twelve. Cora Wilding believed that they, as mothers of the future, should be chosen first because any knowledge of Sunlight League ideals imparted to the girls would be shared with a wider audience when they became mothers. It was the opinion of Cora Wilding that on-going education in 'healthful' practises could be achieved most easily by instructing young girls. Because of the close bond between mother and child in his or her formative years, the responsibility of a child's start lies, so the League asserted, mainly with the mother. The welfare of the next generation lies very largely in the hands of school girls throughout New Zealand. Cora Wilding believed that if each schoolgirl aimed at building a healthy and beautiful body by observing simple health rules she would not only promote her own present and future happiness and wellbeing, but also, if she were to marry, that of her children. Knowledge of health principles gained in youth could be imparted to a future generation to give them a sound and healthy start in life.

If a child grows up healthy, he or she is not only far happier but is able to be of much more use in the home, to work and play better, and later, will be of greater use in the world. Ill health means not only suffering to oneself, but also trouble to other people. 40.

The importance of following health rules in childhood to build up a healthy body that would be of service in the future was stressed. It could only be hoped that if young girls were to form sound health habits they would grow up with them and later pass them on to their children. Similar results could not be assured if the Sunlight League were to take boys to camp as well. With limited finances available to stage a camp, a decision had

to be made between the long term advantages of taking boys or girls to camp. In reply to complaints of discriminating against boys levelled at the Sunlight League by Dr. McIntyre, himself a Sunlight League member, Cora Wilding publicly justified the exclusion of boys from camp.

... I believe that because girls in the future have the main work of teaching the laws of health and the ideal of physical fitness to the next generation of children, that it is more important to teach girls in a practical way in camp knowledge of sensible diet, encouraging them to be hardy, the necessity of daily exercise and love of fresh air, and to sleep in the open with wide open windows. In addition girls do not have the same opportunity for outdoor life as their brothers. 41.

Moreover, the League argued that there were other service agencies offering camps for boys. A small number of boys were taken to two camps in 1936, but Cora Wilding chose to concentrate her efforts on young girls.

Most of the girls who attended Sunlight League Camps were below par physically. They were often undernourished and many displayed some tubercular tendency. The selection of girls was undertaken by school medical health officers who chose girls between the ages of ten and twelve in real need of a holiday, but whose parents couldnot afford to provide one. The Sunlight League reserved the right to make the final selection. It was a policy of the Sunlight League that a token payment of 2/6d per child to help meet the expenses of the month long camp was made by those parents able to afford it. In this way the stigma attached to charity was removed from the camp, and parents with daughters in camp were able to retain their dignity.

The selection procedures for children going to camp ensured that the tone of Sunlight League camps was never lowered by 'undesirable' types. Despite humanitarian inspired pressure, to

open Sunlight League camps to all showing need, Sunlight League selection procedures prevailed while Cora Wilding was active in the League. By way of justification for her camps discriminating against children who were arguably most 'needy' Cora wrote:

With so many little children in need of a holiday to choose from, only children are selected who are capable of making good citizens and who come from self-respecting homes, where perhaps the father through bad luck is temporarily out of a job: none are taken from bad homes with mentally deficient and unemployable parents. 42.

Thus eugenics provided the basis upon which Sunlight League camps were run. Only children displaying the potential to become 'worthy' citizens were taken to camp. Social Darwinism had alerted the educated public to the dangers of physical and mental degeneration. Members of the Sunlight League were thus wary of any 'contamination' of otherwise good stock which might arise from their intermixture in camp.

With so many children whose physical and social position qualified them for consideration, League members were able to stipulate the qualities they wanted in girls attending the camps. Preference went to children with good parentage. They were the children of the deserving poor. Children of widows or widowers, returned soldiers or middle class men and women thrown out of work by the slump, formed the main body of children represented at Sunlight League Health Camps. A distinction, based on biological determinism, was made between those who had lost respectable jobs through the vicissitudes of the depression, and the unemployed whose genetic background precluded them from any hope of betterment. There were, it was argued, two classes of unemployed; the 'out of work' and the 'unemployables'. Cora

Wilding was prepared to state that the latter would never work and were perfectly content to be supported by the hard work of others. Needless to say, the Sunlight League favoured self-help schemes ahead of government funding to alleviate the hardship inflicted by the depression. It was hoped that after their time in camp, girls would learn to recognize undesirable elements within the community, and by working to exclude them from desirable company, achieve a small degree of social reform.

In its work toward social reform, the Sunlight League made an appeal to nationalist justifications. Civic worth and racial value were held to be the two outstanding qualities of a good citizen <sup>43</sup>. and those who could not fulfill these requirements had a moral duty to safeguard the national stock by not procreating. To be a good citizen one must be conscious of the common needs of the community and the rights and responsibilities of the individual as a citizen. The community must be healthy in order to function correctly. It is the first duty of the modern citizen to be fit in order to maintain the health of the community and hence it is the first duty of the Education authority to teach the art of being fit. Camp life developed as a microcosm of New Zealand society and the instruction in health and community training received by the girls would receive a wider application in the outside world, Cora hoped.

Some elements of the social reform undertaken by the Sunlight League in their camps are reminiscent of National Socialism. Individual members of the League expressed admiration for the way in which German youth groups were able to instil a new set of values and the desire for a stronger, healthier race. The aims of the Sunlight League were similar, although less sinister. Each child had impressed upon her the importance of maintaining her own

health for the good of the community, and future generations. Heavy emphasis was placed on training for good citizenship in the camps. A democratic motto was adopted which each girl was required to live up to: "Each for all and all for each". Qualities of selflessness and service to others were looked for and encouraged in the girls and it was hoped that democratic principles would be absorbed by them when they took part in the election of 'best citizen'.

These aspects of Sunlight League camps, which Cora Wilding felt to be the main purpose of camp life, were threatened after 1936. In compliance with legislation introduced by the first Labour Government, in August 1936, Sunlight League camps joined a parent body which aimed to provide uniformity among the camps. The New Zealand Federation of Health Camps was set up by government and its complicated machinery stifled the autonomy of Sunlight League camps. Further, Cora resigned from her position as Honorary Organising Secretary, and from the League because of 'home responsibilities'. A change in the character of the Sunlight League can be traced to this time. Proceeds from a Health Camp Campaign launched for the 1936 camps had already led to a big increase in the work of the Sunlight League but meant that certain other aspects had to give way to the camps. The educational, tramping and smoke abatement subcommittees found it increasingly impossible to carry on and the Health Camp Committee, although its direction was altered, was left to carry on the work of the League. In the opinion of Cora Wilding the Sunlight League grew beyond its founding principles and ceased to function as she would have liked. A telling comment jotted in a shaky hand on the bottom of a Sunlight League leaflet and signed 'C.H.W.' reads "Suggested organised and worked for a

few years in the early thirties".

The legislation introduced by the Labour government to standardize the many camps being run around New Zealand under a central administration effectively ended the eugenic basis of Sunlight League camps. The new government, in accordance with its socialist persuasion, disapproved of the conservative aspects inherent in the selection procedures. Unlike Sunlight League camps which aimed to produce worthy citizens, the new legislation was designed only to produce healthy bodies. Sunlight League camps were run with the object of making children better citizens by endeavouring in camp to encourage an appreciation of country life, a love of beauty and ideals of work and service to others. <sup>44</sup>. The camps did not aim solely to inculcate Sunlight League values into the children. Rather, the first and foremost aim was to give the child a really happy time. <sup>45</sup>. Nevertheless, all children who went to a Sunlight League health camp were there not only to have a happy holiday by the sea, or in the country, but also to have their health improved. From the very beginning those holding the camp aimed to do their best for the children. The Sunlight League strove for quality rather than quantity and for this reason the number of girls admitted to each camp remained low.

The attendance at Sunlight League camps was small because the League wanted to maintain a family atmosphere. Each camp was subdivided into 'hapu' under the leadership of an 'ariki' or prefect. Close personal contact with those in authority was felt to be beneficial to the children. In addition to preventing homesickness, the system capitalised on the tendency of children to be impressionable and imitative. By maintaining a close proximity with the children, the staff could exert a great deal of influence over their

conduct. In this way the children were painlessly indoctrinated with Sunlight League beliefs so that they might live more profitable lives in the future. The Sunlight League placed heavy emphasis on citizenship training and civic worth, and health camps provided an unrivalled opportunity for implementing 'democratic' principles into the lives of children. If from their time in camp the children obtained a spirit of service to others then, as citizens of tomorrow, they could take up their part in the building of a better, happier and more just world.

On a less idealistic level the work achieved in health camps was felt to have left some legacy to the future.

To many children a few weeks in a health camp means the laying of a foundation of good health which will be of inestimable benefit in their future lives, and this in itself is not only of value to the individual but a saving, and a gain, to the State, which it is worth making every effort to ensure. 46.

The Sunlight League camps, run on the basis of leadership, by example, taught health principles through practise. A regulated diet which conformed to Sunlight League beliefs was administered at the camps. In order to ensure all of the girls derived the maximum benefit from the food provided, only children who were not at all fussy about food were permitted at camp. A screening test was applied to girls who were asked in front of their mothers if there were any food they would not eat. No girl was taken who said 'I don't like this and I don't like that.'

The diet of each girl in camp was carefully balanced to ensure that the maximum benefit was derived from the food. Milk, leafy vegetables, fruit, nuts and eggs were apportioned each girl to build up her physique and protect her from illness. Seafood was also regarded as invaluable in counteracting deficiency diseases



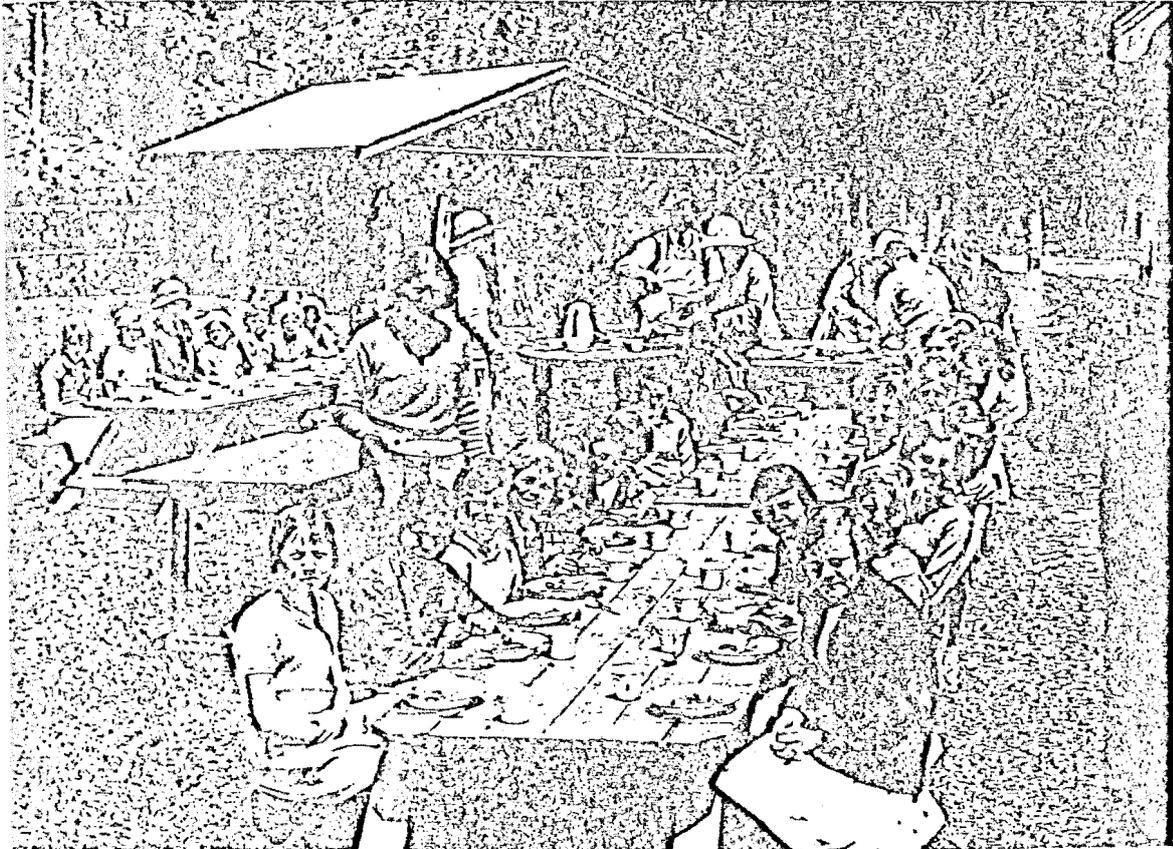
I Okains Bay camp- Resting at lunch-time.

such as goitre, and the girls themselves gathered shellfish from the rocks about the peninsula. In addition to 'protective foods', wholemeal bread and whole grain cereals were eaten at Sunlight League camps. Each meal was concluded with a hard, fibrous food such as apple, carrot or celery, in order to clean the teeth and exercise the jaw.

The diet at Sunlight League camps was not aimed solely at 'building up' the girls who attended. Major emphasis was placed on improving the general health of the child, and included in this was dental health. Before entry to camp each girl had her teeth examined and any necessary dental work completed. Dental hygiene was encouraged at the camp and teeth brushing (with salt) was supervised night and morning. Stress was placed on the need to eat the right foods to maintain a healthy mouth. To reinforce this the mid-day meal was concluded with a tasty treat which was also beneficial to dental hygiene.

After the mid-day meal an enforced period of rest took place. The girls lay down in the shade on sleeping mats and were required to remain there, in silence, for at least an hour. Cora Wilding believed that children needed adequate amounts of rest and exercise and that many children were deprived their rightful amount of rest. It suited the camp lifestyle to include a rest period after lunch. This served a dual purpose. First, it ensured that the meal was properly digested before the girls resumed activities and second, saved the bother of trying to settle them in bed earlier at nighttime.

Sunbathing was also supervised for periods of up to half an hour daily at the camps. The girls were alerted to the dangers of foolhardy sunbaking and had a programme of conditioning according to skin type worked out for them. Each girl was required to expose a larger portion of her skin to the sun daily, so that it



II Okains Bay camp- The lunch-time meal in front of the  
manuka shelter.

might get acclimatized, and although there were instances of red backs, no child suffered from sun blisters. Sunstroke was guarded against by wearing a shady hat and at the Tipapa Camp, held on the property of a Sunlight League member in 1936, this was the only article of clothing worn by the twenty four girls at the close of the camp. The period of exposure to the sun was regulated so that the children arose from their sunbathing feeling invigorated and not exhausted. The benefits derived from sunbathing were more than just a healthily bronzed body, according to Cora Wilding.

In general, an improvement in the child's overall physical condition was noted by the parents on her return from camp. Sunbathing strengthened the child and hardiness was encouraged to build up resistance to disease. A love of the open air was fostered by the camp programme. In addition to taking all meals out of doors and resting in the open air after the lunch-time meal, the sleeping arrangements were designed to promote hardiness. Wherever possible the children slept in an open ended shelter so that maximum exposure to the fresh air might be attained. At the first camp at Geraldine in 1931 the children slept under canvas but this proved less satisfactory than was hoped.

In January 1932 Charteris Bay was the venue and use was made of the school buildings there as dormitories. In 1933 the camp was held at Okains Bay and a suggestion was made that a small permanent shelter be erected there. The advocates claimed the advantages of a shelter to be manifold. It would provide a place to store equipment from one year to the next, lessening transport costs, simplifying holding the camp and saving on the cost of tent hire. When the camp was in progress the shelter would provide shade for the mid-day meal, and shelter for meals in wet weather.

On a more ideological level it was argued that by being open to the air, a shelter would provide a lesson to the girls in the value of fresh air and sleeping out, besides being of immediate benefit to their health. The shelter advocates won out, and in 1933 plans were drawn up, moneys authorized, and a three walled manuka shelter erected. It was to be used for the next three years.

Hardiness was also encouraged at other camp sites and wherever possible the girls slept exposed to the night air. At the very least windows were left wide open in the girls' sleeping quarters. As further encouragement toward hardiness, and, it was thought, resistance to disease, girls were not permitted to wear stocking by day, and discouraged from covering themselves with too many blankets at night. The Sunlight League camps aimed, by practising health principles with regard to food, sun-bathing, and hardiness, to improve the health of the girls at camp, and give a practical demonstration of what would be achieved.

The achievements of Sunlight League camps were many. Previously sickly girls were restored to good health after a sojourn at camp, and re-entered their homes armed with sufficient knowledge to maintain them for life. However, despite their apparent success it was sometimes doubtful whether a camp would eventuate. Finances were a constant source of concern. To begin with money was raised by various means. In 1931 nine guineas was raised at a Bridge Party for the Charteris Bay camp.<sup>47</sup> Other fundraising ventures included the sale of flowers, and collecting the proceeds from tennis tournaments and the sale of letter seals. The idea of the letter seal came from Dr. Averill, then chairman of the Health Camp Committee who showed the League members a seal

he had bought in Canada. The seal, which cost a penny, had no postal value but was attractive on an envelope and through its sale the League raised quite a helpful sum. It was reported to the November Committee meeting of the League in 1932 that "the sale of Health Seals had amounted to £32.18.1 [and] the tennis tournament had realized £14.13.6." 48.

Members of the Sunlight League were also involved in the sale of Health Stamps. These stamps, issued by the Post Office, had a postal value of one penny but a face value of twopence. The balance was apportioned between the various bodies throughout New Zealand involved in running health camps for delicate children. In 1931 the Sunlight League made application to the Minister of Health for a donation of £20 from the proceeds of the sale of Health Stamps. The League had been working hard in Christchurch to promote their sale. Members had given freely of their time to man a desk in the Post Office foyer from which sales were made. The League felt justified in their request for funds because in the past the government had spent large sums on North Island Health Camps but as yet none had been spent in the South Island. In reply to this request a grant of £40 was made to the Sunlight League.

At a public meeting held on 4 November 1932 to arrange the sale of Health Stamps in Post Offices and on the streets, it was decided that the Sunlight League should co-operate in the scheme with the assistance of other groups. The results of this campaign were disappointing, as administrative costs lessened the already meagre grant received from the general fund. However, a grant of £100 awarded by the Minister of Internal Affairs from the Gold Art Union in 1933, greatly boosted camp funds and compensated for the Health Stamp 'loss'. In 1934 a further grant

from the Art Union was put on interest and an additional camp was planned using this money.

The appointment of a national organiser for the sale of Health Stamps meant a lot of the inefficiencies of the previous system were overcome. Mr L.O. Hooker, Honorary Organiser of the 1935-6 'Health Stamp and Health Camp Campaign', demonstrated his fundraising ability in the nationwide child welfare campaign. The Sunlight League worked vigorously for the sale of health stamps in Christchurch and was rewarded when they received over a thousand pounds from the 1935-6 Health Camp Campaign. This compared favourably with the 1934 total of £80, and allowed them to extend their scope in 1936.

Although Cora Wilding believed health camps were an invaluable vehicle for Sunlight League ideology, the provision of camps was but one of the aims she incorporated into the League. At the first meeting of the Sunlight Society in December 1930 it was included among the three sub-committees arranged to work for the specialized objects of the League. The other two were Publicity and Education, and Smoke and Heliotherapy. Combined, these three subcommittees provided the superstructure upon which the work of the Sunlight League was based. Whether they be working for the improvement of dental hygiene or concerned with methods of smoke abatement, members of the Sunlight League remained convinced of the beneficial properties of Sunlight.

The work of the Publicity and Education subcommittee covered the broad interests of the League. It was highly successful in instituting radio-talks on the many facets of health with which the League was concerned. By 30 November 1931 the committee could report that over twenty one radio talks had been broadcast in the preceding months. This form of propaganda became a regular feature

of Sunlight League publicity in subsequent years. In 1932 afternoon and evening talks were delivered on 3YA and 3YZ, by Cora Wilding and members and associates of the Sunlight League. Difficulties were encountered, however, as the depression forced cutbacks in broadcasting. Eventually the radio talks ceased, and the League was obliged to place greater emphasis on other media. The newspaper became the primary vehicle of Sunlight League propaganda after radio broadcasts had been stopped.

From the earliest days of the League articles contributed by members and associates made regular appearance in Christchurch newspapers. The publication of a number of articles written by medical authorities and other public figures kept the community in touch with the theoretical side of the Sunlight League's work. As Archbishop Julius rightly stated in 1933 the work of the League "was not merely giving physical exercises to a few unemployed girls or taking a few young people on a hiking trip, but was educating the people along lines of vigorous health. 49. To achieve this the regular features dealt with the multifarious aims of the League and, together with radio talks, were the main sources of Sunlight League propaganda. In assessing the value of the articles Mr L.F. de Berry, president of the Primary School Headmaster's Association and a hard working member of the League, wrote:

Their purpose had been to awaken or maybe create, first a personal then a public conscience that strives for a nobler race and secondly to encourage habits of health that will lead to the ideals of beauty, truth and goodness. 50.

From time to time material was contributed to the children's page of the Christchurch Star Sun in the hope of winning the interest of children. Similarly, talks had been broadcast over

the air by Cora Wilding and others during children's hour. Thus a children's audience, wider than that of Christchurch and its environs, was reached by the League. In 1932 the League was asked to contribute articles to World's Children (a children's journal) on the subject of health camps, and to the Toc. H. Journal.<sup>51</sup> In late 1931 the Sunlight League published its own booklet containing reprints of articles which had appeared in the Christchurch Times and the Star Sun.

Apart from contributions made under the auspices of the League its activities were newsworthy enough to feature in the local press. The annual garden party received detailed attention in the Christchurch Times. These parties drew large crowds which were entertained by a programme designed to instil an awareness of Sunlight League aims. Typical of events held were 'health plays' acted by children who had earlier attended a Sunlight League Camp, and demonstrations of exercise games. The 1933 play, 'Games of Health', was produced by Miss Ngaio Marsh and acted by children who had attended the Okains Bay camp. Exercises devised by Renfrew White made regular appearance at the garden parties and were accompanied by an explanation of their body building potential. These displays gave "a charming and amusing idea of the way in which health principles may be absorbed, all unconsciously, by the child in his play."<sup>52</sup> Other static displays, illustrating some of the many interests covered by the work and aims of the Sunlight League, were also a regular feature of the Garden Party. Tennis exhibitions were also on the programme of many of the Garden Parties reflecting, in part, Cora Wilding's family background and her belief in physical fitness. The special feature of all the Sunlight League Garden Parties was the afternoon tea. These were served out of doors and consisted entirely of simple

foods prepared with wholemeal flour and bread. Thus, Sunlight League Garden Parties provided amusing and instructive entertainment in the many interests of the Sunlight League.

The Dental and Diet subcommittee which provided the afternoon teas at the Annual Garden Party, quickly became important in the work of the League. Little could be achieved to improve the health of the population, if it were malnourished. It was the belief of the Sunlight League that many mothers were ill-informed of how best to feed their families and that despite, prevailing economic circumstances, the rising incidence of malnutrition among school children could be halted. In 1930 6.3% of school children were malnourished, while a year later this figure had risen to 6.68%.<sup>53</sup> New Zealand was reputed to have the worst history of dental hygiene in the world and in 1925 67% of the population suffered from goitre.<sup>54</sup> These alarming figures were, the League argued, directly attributable to a faulty diet with inadequate intakes of vitamin 'd' and iodine. Many excuses had been made in the past about the inevitability of bad teeth and goitre in the population. The Sunlight League undertook to sweep these "fallacies aside. Simple dietetics showed that the iodine intake of the average New Zealander was poor despite the abundance of shellfish, its natural source, along New Zealand shores. Negligence of dental hygiene through a faulty diet and a general tendency to 'clothe out' the sun were the root cause of New Zealand's dental health problem.

In order to improve dental hygiene, the Sunlight League set up a 'Dentally Fit' scheme among kindergarten and primary school children. The children were encouraged to take care of their teeth so that they might win for themselves an A1 certificate of dental fitness. The scheme was launched at the Opawa and Waltham

Primary schools. Encouraging results persuaded the Sunlight League to extend the scheme to other schools which had a dental clinic and a 'progressive' headmaster. In addition to the scheme being promoted through schools, all children selected for health camps had to have dental treatment and be awarded an A1 certificate before being admitted to camp. The success of the Dentally Fit scheme was limited to those children directly involved. Outside of the schools concerned, little progress was made in improving the 'shocking state' of children's teeth. In 1935 the Sunlight League submitted a remit to the Dominion Conference of the Women's National Council expressing their concern at the unhealthy condition of children's teeth in New Zealand. The remit requested co-operation in an intensive preventive and remedial education campaign. The campaign was to be aimed at the two most influential areas of child development; the home and the school. The League hoped that by encouraging teachers displaying a responsible attitude to dental hygiene and making parents aware of the importance of diet in dental health, some improvement in the standard of children's teeth could be achieved.

The central importance of good diet and adequate sunlight to the formation of sound teeth was the subject of many talks and newspaper articles. Cora Wilding delivered many speeches on the subject to schoolgirls and Plunket mothers because she believed by educating (future) mothers she benefitted whole families. The Sunlight League preached the gospel of good diet and sunbathing as an insurance against all manner of ailments. Dental health can be improved by adequate intakes of milk, eggs, fruit, fish, vegetables and whole cereals which strengthen teeth both chemically through their vitamin and mineral content, and physically through mastication. Regular sunbathing was held to be essential in

improving the condition of young teeth because through the action of vitamin 'd' bones and teeth are calcified.

Cora Wilding's conviction that regular sunbathing throughout the year was invaluable led her to become interested in the area of smoke abatement. It had come to her notice that Christchurch suffered inordinately through a lack of winter sun. The recent discovery that the grey cloud which enveloped Christchurch was brought about by the city's geographical situation meant that some human effort would be necessary to halt the problem. Given that the inversion problem would always be of concern in Christchurch during winter, Cora Wilding believed it remained for the public to prevent undue quantities of smoke from being deposited in the city's atmosphere.

The Smoke Abatement subcommittee, formed at the first meeting of the Sunlight League, had a most difficult task trying to persuade the people of Christchurch to burn smokeless fuels to keep the winter skies clear. The education campaigns concentrated on lessening the amount of smoke from domestic fires. The committee advocated wider use of coke and smokeless fuels in the home and in autumn 1932 launched a campaign to educate the public in stacking fires so that they consume their own smoke. To illustrate their point the committee installed two gauges to measure soot-fall and smoke pollution in the atmosphere in 1933. These gauges, presented by the Gas Company, were erected atop the Hays and Shands Buildings and were functioning throughout the winter. Early in 1933 a smokeless boiler was demonstrated at the Annual Garden party, and a fire burned in the house, using smokeless fuel to illustrate the Sunlight League's interest in ridding Christchurch of the smoke nuisance, to allow more winter sunshine into the city. Despite publicity concerning the smoke nuisance, supported by figures drawn

from the gauges, the achievements of the Smoke Abatement Committee were minimal. Nevertheless, the Sunlight League was the forerunner to the modern day clean air societies which are still trying unsuccessfully to convince the Christchurch public of the cause of the problem, so that they might clear Christchurch skies.

Work in the field of smoke abatement was in its infancy during the 1930s in New Zealand. Few groups or individuals had concerned themselves with the problem of the smoke nuisance. Sir Thomas Sidey member of the Legislative Council was recognised for his efforts to make proper use of Sunlight and felt it was appropriate that he should be identified with the Sunlight League. At a meeting of those holding office on the Sunlight League held in Dunedin in August 1932 Sir Thomas was asked how the public could be educated in regard to the injurious effect upon health of the smoke problem. In reply he suggested a bill to legislate against it. Although such a bill had no chance of being passed it would "help a great deal to educate the public." 55.

It was with the aim of making the public aware of the problem that the Smoke Abatement Committee made a deputation to the Town Planning conference to emphasize the importance of town planning regulations and the influence of prevailing winds upon the smoke pollution of the city atmosphere. New Zealand, and Christchurch in particular, could be made much healthier and cleaner places through the winter months if the smoke problem were solved. In 1935 remits concerning smoke abatement were submitted to the Dominion Conference of the Women's National Council. Legislation for smoke abatement was still being advocated by the League, and Cora Wilding was especially encouraged by the favourable reports received from English clean air societies she had made contact

with on her last journey. However the Sunlight League efforts came to nothing and smoke pollution is a continuing in Christchurch today.

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In the years between 1930 and 1936 the activities of the Sunlight League closely reflected the main concerns of Cora Wilding. A common feature of all her work was a desire to improve community health and thereby preserve racial stock. This derived in part from contemporary N.Z. opinion, and also from her overseas experience which had pointed up the potential for improvement.

It was perhaps fortunate that circumstances forced Cora to leave the League just before the rest of the world became aware of the ends to which eugenic principles had been taken in Germany. Had she still been influential in the League, Cora would have been forced to rethink her acceptance of eugenics, and more importantly look away from Germany to find another contemporary model for her 'ideal' society. However she left the League in 1936 because of family commitments, and perhaps also because of her dissatisfaction over the effects of Health Camp legislation. The removal of Sunlight League prerogative over selection in 1936 ended any hope of ideological success for the camps but nonetheless the physical success of the camps was considerable. Many hundreds of malnourished children received a restful holiday during which time they had the opportunity to recover their health, thanks to the tireless work of Sunlight Members.

The same degree of success was notably lacking in other areas of Sunlight League concern. The Smoke Abatement subcommittee, although publicly active, achieved little. Similarly the dental and

diet Subcommittee was restricted by lack of direct community contact. A few schools which had dental clinics came under the Dentally Fit Scheme but the scope was limited. The disastrous economic situation was a contributing factor in their apparent lack of success. Finances dictated the amount and types of food consumed by a great deal of the population. Few could afford the luxury of a well balanced diet and while they were made aware of the theory, it was very difficult for mothers to put their knowledge into practise until prosperity returned.

Cora Wilding aimed to work for the Betterment of the Race and a Healthier New Zealand at a time when New Zealand society was in crisis. She adopted and adapted contemporary views held by Sir Truby King, Dr C.W. Saleeby and Sir Arbuthnot Lane. All three men, whether consciously or not, employed eugenic principles in their work in the field of health. Cora Wilding carried on the work of Sir Truby King and the Plunket Society in New Zealand by placing heavy emphasis on motherhood training. The Health Camp operated on the principle that today's girls would mother tomorrow's children. Consequently girls were heavily indoctrinated with health principles at camp. Underlying all this was a belief that community health could be improved by the concerted effort of a few to disseminate knowledge to as many as would receive it. Although she concentrated her efforts of the Sunlight League, Cora Wilding also worked through the Youth Hostel Association of New Zealand which she founded in 1932. After a leave of absence in the late 1930s Cora returned to her work in the 1940s and has continued to strive for a healthier nation in the years since.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1) University of Canterbury Archives C.W.P. Committee and Objects.
- 2) New Zealand Encyclopaedia, vol. 3 pp. 659-60.
- 3) C.W.P. 1.9.
- 4) Star Sun 31 October 1935.
- 5) Minutes 14 December 1930, C.W.P. 1.1.
- 6) Committee and Objects object.(h).
- 7) For a discussion of the nature/nurture debate in Australia. See C.L. Bacchi, 'The Nature Nurture Debate in Australia 1900-1914'. Unpublished paper.
- 8) Erik Olssen 'Breeding for the Empire' N.Z. Listener 12 May 1979 p.17
- 9) J. Renfrew White F.R.C.S. Sun 4 April 1931.
- 10) Sun 4 April 1931.
- 11) Lieutenant H.T.B. Drew, N.Z.E.F. (ed) The War Effort of New Zealand. p. 16.
- 12) Gena Corea, The Hidden Malpractice. How American Medicine Mistreats Women. New York, 1977. p. 148.
- 13) Gena Corea, The Hidden Malpractice. p. 145.
- 14) Professor J. Macmillan Brown Press, 11 April 1931.
- 15) Press 11 April 1931.
- 16) Press 11 April 1931.
- 17) Christchurch Times 12 May 1934
- 18) Foreward to a Booklet published by the Sunlight League of New Zealand. September 1934 p.2.
- 19) Sunlight League Booklet. September 1934 p.2.
- 20) Letter from Cora Wilding to Dr Baker McLaglan, 8 October 1935, C.W.P. 1.9
- 21) C.W.P. 4.4 Box 2.
- 22) C.W.P. 4.4 Box 1.
- 23) undated speech C.W.P. 4.4 Box 2.
- 24) Foreward to a Booklet published by the Sunlight League of New Zealand September 1934 p.2.
- 25) C.W.P. 1.23.
- 26) Sunlight League Booklet n.d. C.W.P. 1.23.
- 27) C.W.P. 1.7.

FOOTNOTES (CONTINUED)

- 29) New Zealand Listener 12 May 1979.
- 30) Erik Olssen "The Plunket Society and its Ideology, 1907-42", unpublished paper 1979 p.10.
- 31) Health Department Handout High School 7. 1934.
- 32) Christchurch Times 15 May 1931.
- 33) Christchurch Times 15 May 1931.
- 34) Christchurch Times 15 May 1931.
- 35) Christchurch Times 15 May 1931.
- 36) G. Ogilvie The Port Hills of Christchurch p. 120.
- 37) Letter dated 18 September 1931. C.W.P. 1.16.
- 38) Draught of speech for 3YA, 1934 C.W.P. 1.16.
- 39) Sunlight League Annual Report 1935 C.W.P. 1.7.
- 40) Sunlight Camp League for Children Leaflet 1938 C.W.P. 1.13.
- 41) Draught of letter to the Editor of the Press October 27 probably '34 or '35 C.W.P. 1.9.
- 42) C.W.P. 1.14.
- 43) Christchurch Times 12 May 1934.
- 44) Committee and Objects C.W.P. 4.4.
- 45) Notes for Health Camps Talk on 3YA 1934 C.W.P. 1.16.
- 46) Letter from Hon. Sir Alexander Young (Minister of Health) Hawera Star 14 August 1935.
- 47) Sunlight League General Committee Minutes October 1931 C.W.P. 1.
- 48) C.W.P. 1.1.
- 49) Christchurch Times 20 May 1933.
- 50) Typescript to be released 12 September no year.
- 51) Sunlight League General Committee Minutes 29 May 1932. C.W.P. 1.1.
- 52) Christchurch Times 21 March 1931.
- 53) Sun 22 June 1935.
- 54) Christchurch Times 11 May 1935.
- 55) 31 August 1932, C.W.P. 1.1.

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