

# MARY STEWART'S COLLECT

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General Federation of Women's Clubs  
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GFWC B0115

## FOREWORD

Many requests are received at General Federation Headquarters for information regarding the Mary Stewart Collect. The story of the Collect and the biographical sketch given in this pamphlet have been condensed from material sent us by Miss Stewart at our request. We hope it will give you a better understanding and appreciation of this inspirational prayer.

## A Collect for Club Women

Keep us, oh God, from pettiness;  
let us be large in thought, in word, in deed.

Let us be done with fault-finding  
And leave off self-seeking.

May we put away all pretense  
and meet each other face to face,  
without self-pity and without prejudice.

May we never be hasty in judgment  
and always generous.

Let us take time for all things;  
make us to grow calm, serene, gentle.

Teach us to put into action our better impulses,  
straightforward and unafraid.

Grant that we may realize it is  
the little things that create differences,  
that in the big things of life we are at one.

And may we strive to touch and to know  
the great, common human heart of us all,  
and, oh Lord God, let us forget not  
to be kind!

Mary Stewart

April 1941

## MARY STEWART'S COLLECT

The *Collect* was written as a personal prayer for the day and without any organization in mind. It was written at Longmont, Colorado, in 1904, where, just out of college, I was entering on my first job as principal of the local high school.

The prayer was offered for publication under the title, "A Collect for Club Women," because at that time I felt that women working together with wide interest for large ends was a new thing under the sun and that perhaps they had need for special petition and meditation of their own. This must have been true for the *Collect* has found its way about the world wherever English-speaking women work together. In England and in the dominions and colonies of Great Britain, the Associated Country Women of the World have made it their own and distributed it throughout the Empire.

The first printing of the *Collect* was in an obscure paragraph in a column called "Club Notes" in the *Delineator*, a woman's magazine no longer published, but at that time nationally popular. Later, copies were struck off by a local printer for the members of the Longmont Fortnightly Club of Colorado, a federated club. About 1909 Paul Elder and Company of San Francisco printed it as a wall card. In 1924 wall cards were put out by the Armstrong Stationery Company of Cincinnati. All the earlier copies were signed *Mary Stuart*, a spelling used until 1910 as a pen name. Since then the spelling *Stewart* has been used both for pen name and signature, and the *Collect* has been so signed.

The first women's organization to hear or use the *Collect* or to print it in its year books and biennial reports was the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Since then it has been reprinted in many forms in many lands.

From time to time amazing, not to say incredible, errors have occurred in credit for authorship, the most egregious of which is probably that which attributes its composition to Mary Stuart, the unfortunate and devout Queen of Scots, who, it has been alleged, wrote the prayer "while in prison sometime between the years of 1568 and 1587." Since the Queen and the *Collect* are both well dated by internal as well as external evidence it is hoped this forthright statement of its history may effectively put an end to the rumor.

A common confusion in the meaning of the title likewise needs clearing. Frequently one hears it called a "creed." Every line of it is a petition, a prayer, that is, a collect. Nowhere does it assert a declaration of faith, an "I-believe," which is a creed.

In the wide and independent reprinting of the original text throughout the years errors of word, phrase and order have occurred and continue to be repeated. This I think is not strange; stranger, perhaps, that its basic rhythm and meaning have suffered so little. Some of the more frequent errors change the original meaning slightly or not at all; some affect only the rhythm (for example "not forget" instead of "forget not"). There is one mistake, however, and the one most often made, which definitely narrows its import. This is the substitution of "*as one*" for the "*at one*" of the text. *At one* is a fine old English idiom with wide implication and rich connotation. To be *at one* in aim and in spirit is not necessarily to be *as one*. In fact, we may have one common purpose, fix our vision on one high, far goal and yet move toward it from many different directions, richer for their diversity and ennobled for the tolerance and understanding they demand. In these days of world-wide war our prayers must seek a spiritual oneness big enough to comprehend the talents and energies of divergent states and peoples as well as of our friends and neighbors—whose obduracy close at hand seems, alas, so much more apparent! Indeed we have need to grow calm, serene and gentle if in these dire days our judgments would be generous.

Two slight changes have been made at my suggestion in the version as originally printed. One, omission of a title; and two, substitution in the last verse of the prayer of the word *human* for the word *woman's*—which in point of fact but restores the original text, for I changed the word *human* to *woman's* when it was offered for publication under the title of "A Collect for Club Women."

Either reading is authentic and individuals or groups may decide for themselves the form they like. Personally I prefer the prayer without title and with the word *human* in place of the word *woman's*. So written it seems better to express today's needs and purposes. Many of our exclusive women's goals are already won, such as the vote, freedom of the college and the professional schools, and certain long sought opportunities in business and the professions. While one of the ways we still work most effectively together is in women's groups, we work for ends that concern men and women alike and our greatest need, as it is our greatest strength, is to think and to act in terms that are human.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mary Stewart was born in Ohio, but at an early age moved to Georgetown, Colorado, where she lived until she entered the University of Colorado at Boulder. She was graduated from this university with a B.A. degree and in 1927 received the honorary degree of Master of Literature.

Her first position was that of principal of the high school at Longmont, Colorado. It was at this time that she became associated with the General Federation of Women's Clubs. For eight years she served as Dean of Women at the University of Montana, where she also taught Latin and English.

In 1919 she helped to organize the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs and has served with its national board in some capacity almost ever since. For many years she represented this organization on the Women's Joint Congressional Committee, and enthusiastically supported the woman suffrage movement.

After 1921 Miss Stewart's work was with the United States Government. She became assistant director general of the United States Employment Service, Department of Labor, and from 1928 until January, 1942, served as assistant director of education in the Office of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior.

Mary Stewart died in Cincinnati on April 1, 1943.