

## GIRLS' OWN SOCIETIES.



HAVING heard from the Editor of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER of the number of correspondents who write asking for information, or advice, about reading societies, needlework societies, essay clubs, and all the

other societies so much in vogue just now, I think it may perhaps be a help to those anxious for information if I give them a little of my own experience of several I have been connected with. It would be quite impossible to answer such numerous inquiries separately, and, of course, the rules of private societies could not be given. They are generally begun on a small scale amongst a circle of friends, and are very easily arranged, the only difficulty being to get them once started.

But for my own experiences. Like most people who are entirely ignorant on any subject, I despised that which I did not understand, and when, soon after the idea became popular, some friends wrote and asked me to join a practising society, I felt that my dignity was insulted, and wrote, I am afraid, a rather hasty letter declining the invitation, on the ground that if girls were not sufficiently fond of music to practise without being compelled from fear of a fine, their performances were never likely to be worth hearing. I must confess that when some weeks after that severe letter I found that my own practising had fallen very much into arrears I had uncomfortable twinges of conscience, and wished I had not been quite so hard on the music of those who only practise under compulsion. But I held my peace, and tried to quiet my uneasy conscience by making good resolutions for the future, which, alas! shared the same fate as many previous ones.

While still bemoaning my own want of determination in carrying out my plans, I had a letter from another friend who had just left school, saying that though she was very anxious to keep up her reading, and intended to read something instructive every day, somehow the days always slipped by without her having read anything worth mentioning; and as she found that many other girls were in the same difficulty, she suggested that we should form ourselves into a society, every member of which should promise to read some really useful book for six hours a week, Sundays excluded; and in order to enforce the rule, there should be a penny fine for every hour missed, the amount of the fines to be given, at the end of the half year, to the member who had missed the fewest hours.

Here was a dilemma; my conscience would not let me again write that girls ought to do their duty without compulsion, as I had so signally failed in doing mine; but I felt it a great come down from all my dignified ideas to consent to pay a fine if I did not read. However, I was very unwilling to offend the friends who had asked me, so I put my pride in my pocket and joined the society. After a little correspondence we elected a secretary, who was to take charge of the fines and be general manager; and we made a few rules, the chief of which were: That there should be an entrance-fee of one shilling; that no reading, for less than twenty minutes at a time, was to be counted; that the books read

should be on science, history, biography, or anything except novels, which could be honestly considered instructive; that at the close of each half year every member was to send to the secretary the amount of the fines incurred, and also a list of the books which had been read. We began directly the rules were finally fixed, and the society has flourished ever since.

Shortly after a friend upbraided me very much for joining one of these foolish societies, and said it would show so much more strength of mind to read or work of one's own free will, and not solely for fear of being fined. Very true; I quite agreed with her in theory, but in practice I have found, from my own experience and other people's, that we are but poor, weak mortals at best, and since we are compelled to acknowledge that painful fact the only thing we can do is to discover how best to supply the deficiency in our own strength of mind; and if we find it a help to give a regular fixed time to a certain work every day, then by all means we had better do it. It is not necessary for every one. Girls who live in very quiet, methodical households probably find time for all their necessary reading, sewing, practising, and other studies; it is those who lead busy, active lives who find this method useful, as affording them a sufficient pretext for sitting quietly at their work, whatever it may be, when, perhaps, otherwise they would have uncomfortable doubts all the time whether they had not better be doing something else.

There are societies in active existence for almost every possible occupation, and each girl who wishes to join one should think for herself what is the useful occupation which she is most tempted to neglect, and should join an established club, or start a new one, for that particular subject.

In reading societies, a useful addition to the rules, though not generally adopted, is to require every member to write a brief account, from memory, of the books which have been read during the half year, and the quality of these little summaries would be considered in the award of the prizes. This rule would at any rate insure attentive reading, and would perhaps prevent the knowledge gained being forgotten as quickly as it often is.

In needlework societies the work is generally limited to plain sewing, and sometimes includes dress-making. Occasionally a judge is elected, to whom the work must be shown, that she may inspect the quality as well as the quantity done. This is one of the societies most highly to be recommended, as, unfortunately, girls in the present day frequently neglect the art of plain needlework, which, however they may despise it, always has been, and always will be, one of the most important branches of every woman's work.

Essay clubs are very popular. The rules generally require that one or two subjects are given out by the secretary each month, on which short essays are to be written, and a fine is incurred in default of writing. Books of any sort may be freely consulted for information, but of course nothing is to be directly copied. The essays are sent in to the secretary on the last day of each month, and are then forwarded all together to each member in turn, who criticises and affixes her signature to the one she considers the best. When they have been all round the secretary counts the signatures on the back, and at the end of the half-year awards the prize to the one who has had the greatest number.

Those who are apt to be unpunctual in the morning sometimes join themselves to an early rising society, in the hope of curing themselves of this bad habit; but I fear the fines for transgressing would have to be very heavy to rouse some people from their beds on a morning when the desire for "just five

minutes more" was very strong. The rules require every one to be up and perfectly dressed by a certain fixed hour every morning, generally allowing however a certain number of "grace" mornings in case of illness.

Besides these, there are societies for walking, singing, reading French and other languages, and for many other things, but as the principle is the same in all, it is unnecessary to describe more. If a girl finds that she has leisure time sufficient for all she would like to do, then there is no object in joining a society; but if there is one who, though she seems always busy, feels that she has nothing satisfactory to show for her time, I should strongly recommend her to look round amongst her friends, and see if there are not any like-minded with herself, who would be glad to devote one hour a day to some definite subject. If she makes a good set of rules there will be no difficulty in getting members, to whom, doubtless, their society will prove a source of pleasure as well as of profit.

DORA HOPE.

## VARIETIES.

THE PRICELESS JEWEL OF PEACE.—Peace on earth is a thing to strive for and pray for, but more important to each one of us is peace in the heart. The Christian is in possession of this great and priceless boon. If the soul looks up to God, it sees Him a gracious Father in Christ Jesus. If it looks around, it is with feelings of goodwill and love to others. If it looks within, it sees chaos being transformed into the cosmos by the Holy Spirit who dwells there; the affections purified, the passions subdued, the desires controlled, submitting to the revealed will of God.

## DOUBLE ACROSTIC.

- He lies and dreams,  
But half awake he seems,  
Thinks his life "better than a play,"  
And has no wish to run away.
- This do we all possess,  
Without it would not be ;  
We see it everywhere,  
In high or low degree.
  - A place to go and sit and hear  
Sounds very pleasing to the ear.
  - The traveller in the desert land  
Carries it when it does not stand.  
It can be used by night or day,  
Or may be decked with colours gay.
  - To take me from my hidden veins  
Men spend their money, time, and pains.  
Sometimes in mountains I am found,  
And sometimes deep below the ground.
  - A state of being which expresses  
The state the subject of these verses  
Attains to, while he idly dreams,  
And only semi-conscious seems.

WHEN charity walks into the dark places of the earth we can see the beautiful purity of her robe the more distinctly.

## GEOGRAPHICAL BURIALS.

- Too constant, I no pleasure will pursue,  
Lest constant disappointment be my due.
- First say A, then say B.
- The bride smiled at the disaster.
- Don't go to sea with a mesmeriser.
- How do you spell cat, with C or K?
- Whenever I emigrate, I will go to N. America.
- Lydia then said spar takes a fine polish.

ANSWER TO DOUBLE ACROSTIC ON P. 222.

M Y S T I C  
I A G O  
L A W  
T R A P  
O G R E  
N E C T A R

ANSWER TO BURIED LITERARY WORKS ON P. 222.—1. Hypatia. 2. Iliad. 3. Hamlet.