

moved from a condition of abject barbarism was so closely related to civilization as were the negroes of the South when they were made free. If this is true, —and the statement of the fact is all the proof that is necessary,— then the North and the whole world will be compelled to admit that there was some good in American slavery; will be compelled to admit, in fact, that American slavery was a part of the divine economy which has in view the advancement of the human race.

The truth is, there is a new North as well as a new South, showing that the tempest of war that blew in on honest people was calculated to clear the atmosphere. It strengthened and settled matters, and created that moral ozone so necessary to the health of a nation. In view of these things, it is hardly necessary to discuss the question whether Mr. Cable is entitled to express his opinion that the cause of the Union was a just cause.

A Southern Democrat.

Our Church Club.

IN the so-called "good old times" the dwellers in country villages were not divided into as many cliques as to-day. People were more on a level then, at least as to externals, and they met each other in a freer and more informal way. It was not necessary then, as it is now, to invent ways and means for bringing together those who attended the same church and sat side by side in the Sunday-school. This was owing partly to the fact that life was not so crowded nor so exacting then as now, and partly to the equally evident fact that the churches in the olden times were more the center of all things than they are to-day. In and of themselves they gave to their people a common ground on which to stand—a ground on which high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, met and were as one, to a degree that seems hardly possible to this eager, exigent present of ours, with its multiplicity of interests and its ever-increasing demands.

It was to meet this need—the need of a broad plane upon which those of widely differing tastes, habits, pursuits, and capacities could meet each other and be happy—that, a few years ago, the women of a certain church in a large New England village, with the advice and coöperation of its pastor, formed a society called "The Fortnightly." While it is neither a school nor a prayer-meeting, and is not in the slightest degree sectarian, yet it is as strictly a church organization as is the Sunday-school itself. It could add greatly to its numbers and its resources by throwing open its doors and welcoming all comers with outstretched hands. It would often be glad to do so; just as a family, no matter how united and how sufficient unto itself it may be, sometimes finds that the presence of a guest adds savor to the Thanksgiving dinner, or zest to the Christmas feast. Yet, on the whole, most households find it is wiser and pleasanter to limit the table on those occasions to the family circle. So "The Fortnightly" is purely a family affair; and to make it anything else would seriously interfere with its workings and its practical results.

It has, as a matter of course, the officers common to all societies—a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer, who are elected annually. It has, also,

three standing committees, appointed yearly by the president and ratified by the society: one on Christian or benevolent work, which is popularly called the Christian committee, though it does not claim to be any more "pious" than other folk; a social committee; and a committee on studies. The four officers above named, with the chairmen of these committees, constitute the board of directors, of which the pastor is also a member *ex officio*. He has, however, never availed himself of his right to be present at any meeting of the board or the society, unless on special invitation.

The managers mean to have no more red tape than is absolutely necessary; yet it is found that a little is indispensable, if only to tie it together. Therefore Article Fourth of the Constitution provides that "Any lady of the church or society, above the age of sixteen, whose name shall be presented in writing by not less than three members, may become a member by a majority vote at any regular meeting, on condition of subscribing to this constitution, and paying to the treasurer the annual fee." This fee, as may be supposed, is a small one, so small as to be no burden. But it was thought best, for many reasons, that it should be exacted.

"The Fortnightly" is so fortunate as to have at its command the pleasant church parlors, and there it meets on every alternate Saturday afternoon, except when otherwise ordered by the board of directors.

Perhaps the question oftenest asked of the members is this: "What is the object of your society?" A question that is briefly answered by the motto recently adopted, "First to Receive; then to Give." Its first and most direct object is personal and individual growth; not in any selfish or narrow sense, but because no one can give what he does not in some way possess. He must himself have, before he can share with others; he must be, before he can do. This motto, emblazoned on a banner supported by an appropriate standard, and decorated with the colors of the society, holds a conspicuous place by the president's table at all meetings, and, with the pretty though inexpensive badge worn by the members, has done much to foster the *esprit de corps* so important to the well-being of every such organization.

"What does your society do?" is another question.

It does a great many things. Through its social committee it stretches out its hands to the stranger within its gates. It brings together, and binds in harmonious, pleasant relations, those who otherwise would seldom meet. It keeps its finger, as it were, on the pulse of the social life of the church.

Through its committee on Christian work, it cares for a mission Sunday-school, and in connection with other societies does its full share of the charitable work of the town, beginning always with the work that is nearest to its hand.

Yet, after all, it is perhaps true that the strongest interests of the society center in its regular fortnightly meetings, and that from them go forth its widest and most beneficent influences. Fully to understand this, it must be remembered that the steadily lengthening roll of membership now numbers 170, embracing women of all ages, from girls of sixteen to white-haired matrons, and that, rain or shine, there is an average attendance of half the members. There is

great diversity in the homes from which they come. Some are rich; some are poor. Some have had every advantage that money can buy, social position, and abundant leisure; some have struggled all their lives with straitened circumstances, if not with absolute penury. Some are familiar with London, and Paris, and Rome; some have never been out of sight of their native mountains. It has of "sweet girl graduates" not a few; and it has also many a girl who not only supports herself but helps to support others. It has many whose province it is to minister, and many who are ministered unto.

But with all these differences the club is bound together by the common tie of womanhood. Its members have learned, as perhaps they could have learned in no other way, that these other things are mere externals, mere husks, the outer rind that may be removed without touching the life beneath. It has been proved to them beyond a peradventure that the life is more than meat and the body than raiment.

When "The Fortnightly" was first organized, comparatively little importance was attached to the meetings, *per se*. The journal was read; there was usually some business, more or less, to be attended to; and then the classes in history, literature, and art went each to its own room, and worked each in its own way. For two years this plan was carried out, and with good results. But as the society grew and widened, it became more and more evident that there were steadily increasing numbers who did not wish to join the classes, and yet who did need and long for something that it was the duty of the society to give them in the way of mental quickening and stimulus. An effort was accordingly made, while keeping up the classes, to make the regular meetings more interesting by essays, readings, talks, and recitations, with such good (or bad) results that, little by little, the classes dwindled, and the numbers in the large room increased day by day.

Some time ago, after much deliberation, it was thought best to drop the classes entirely, and try the effect of making two hours of the alternate Saturdays as rich, as full, as varied, as the resources of the united society could make them. This plan has worked to a charm. A programme for each meeting is made out, and the work allotted, as long in advance as is convenient—the particular study of this season and the last having been the lives and works of representative women, covering a wide range of life and thought.

One day, for instance, this was the programme:

France in the Time of Jeanne d'Arc.
Peasant Life in France in the Time of Jeanne d'Arc.
Jeanne d'Arc.
Different Conceptions of Poets and Artists.
Translations from Schiller's "Maid of Orleans."

On easels in the room were a number of pictures relating to the subject for the day, from old wood and steel engravings down to the inspired dreamer of Bastien Lepage.

With Queen Elizabeth as the theme, this was the programme:

Pen-portrait of Elizabeth.
Elizabeth as a Queen.

Elizabeth as a Woman.
Manners and Customs of the Day.
Literature.
Mary, Queen of Scots.
Readings—"Marie Stuart" (Schiller).

On another occasion Mrs. John Adams was chosen:

Life and Times.
Puritan Homes.
Selections from Whittier.
Abigail Adams.
Selections from Letters of Mrs. Adams.
Colonial Belles.

Another group of women was:

Vittoria Colonna. Readings—"Michael Angelo."
Madame de Staël.
Margaret Fuller.

Every possible effort is made to give variety, color, and individuality to the exercises. History alternates with poetry or romance, and mirth with earnestness. On the Saturday after Christmas the subject chosen was Mary, the Mother of Christ. The parlors were made beautiful with drapery, garlands of cedar and hemlock, and appropriate mottoes, among which "Ave Maria" and "Blessed art Thou among Women" were conspicuous. Thirty different Virgins, Madonnas, and Holy Families were on the walls. The papers were on "The Inn at Bethlehem" and the "Legendary Life of Mary," and Mrs. Browning's "Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus" was read.

It will be seen at once that in an organization of this kind nothing very profound or abstruse, and no exhaustive treatment of any theme, can be so much as attempted. Heaviness would be suicidal. To stimulate, to awaken, to lead on, is all that we have undertaken. To this end every diversity of power and capacity may be used. I venture to say that no one can have anything to do with the management of such a society for one year without being surprised at the resources and the talent that will be developed. It has not proved necessary to apologize for the papers, to receive them with large grains of allowance, or to say they were "pretty fair, considering all things." They have been good, and sometimes exceptionally so. At one time, partly for the sake of variety and partly as a sort of test, twenty young girls were each asked to bring to the next meeting some notable instance of womanly heroism, fortitude, or self-sacrifice, the papers not to be more than five minutes long. The result was a pleasant surprise. No stereotyped, hackneyed stories were reproduced. The matter was fresh and relevant, and no two girls hit upon the same incident or character.

The society occasionally keeps memorial days and birthdays, and it has a letter-box, which is not used as much as it ought to be, for "Questions" and "Suggestions." Sometimes it allows its members to vote for their favorite poems, and out of the list thus formed a choice is made for readings and recitations. The last gathering of the season is always made a social event with attractive features.

The suggestive motto of the society, "First to Receive; then to Give," strikes the key-note of its very life. Whoever has received is expected to give; and who has *not* received? But the willingness, the cheer-

ful alacrity, with which all demands are responded to, the absence of all petty jealousies and narrow-minded criticism, the ready assent to all measures for the general good, have been very marked. The tithes of "mint and anise and cummin" have been paid without demur; neither have the gold, the myrrh, nor the frankincense been held back.

In short, "The Fortnightly" maintains that the woman loses her life who devotes it all to material uses—who crowds it so full either of work or of pleasure as to leave room for nothing else.

Like a previous letter, this is written in answer to many inquiries; and this must be the writer's only apology for details and prolixity.

Julia C. R. Dorr.

Another Plan for Women's Clubs.

THE open letter, "More Words with Countrywomen," presenting a new manner of providing intellectual and literary feasts for those women who may wish to and *can* partake of the same, is most praiseworthy. Still there is an impediment to young mothers which cannot be overruled, viz., babies. I am one of that class, and sadly miss the mental food which was furnished me at school. 'Tis true the precious babes are the first care, but they are also a mother's barrier to the acquisition of any but maternal knowledge!

Mrs. Dorr's "Friends in Council" have meetings fortnightly, and organize a committee, board of directors, etc. Then they have a plan of study, also preparation of essays. Now, I want to ask how all this can be accomplished when home requires your presence, time, and care. How can you attend these meetings? I write this in the cause of women of my own standing and social status, who, it is true, have to do their own work, but at the same time crave the intellectual food—not as a necessity, but as part of the manna on which they have been raised.

While we have not time to devote to these councils, we have intervals of leisure at home, which we spend in reading ancient and modern history when we chance to light on them, but frequently intersperse with romances, novelettes, descriptive notes, and, last but not least, THE CENTURY. Now I am going to suggest to many of my friends who are situated as I am a scheme for organizing a literary club of an indefinite number. It will not be productive of any ebullitions of wit, nor will it lead to much learning; but it will be a source of entertainment which we poor mortals sadly lack.

This scheme consists in establishing a library, to be in the most convenient and commodious house of a circle of friends, its mistress to be the librarian. All the members of the club to furnish what works they possess, whether historical, ecclesiastical, poetical, political, novels, or any addition they wish at times to make. No criticisms or formal meetings, which to me savor of the *bas bleu*, but perfect liberty to each member to call and select a book—one at a time—when so disposed, and return in a reasonable number of days. Have the library insured in case of accident, and outside of this there will be no expense. This clique of friends can then exchange notes and ideas during any social call, if so inclined, and no need of

borrowing or lending books, no need of laboring on literary compositions when other things more important demand our attention. I do not place my views in opposition to *any*, but as a woman who loves to study and develop the mental faculties,—which have only lain dormant since leaving school,—and with the restraint of two "darling responsibilities."

DENVER, COLORADO.

M. L. N.

Co-operative Studies—The Natural Sciences.

WHILE reading Mrs. Dorr's very suggestive and helpful letter in the September CENTURY, on the formation of societies for mutual study and discussion, it occurred to us that this is just the time to put in a plea for the coöperative study of the natural sciences.

Not that we undervalue the importance of history, or consider that Greece and Rome belong in any sense to a dead past, but there is such a very "living present" all around us here and now.

Although winter is not the best time to begin the study of a natural science, since the material necessary for thorough work cannot always be readily obtained, still private and public cabinets offer something, and much may be done to create the taste for experimental work—work which could be pleasantly and profitably carried through the summer months, which are now so largely wasted.

The natural sciences seem to be particularly well adapted to society work, so numerous and varied are the phases any one of them presents—sufficient to satisfy the demands of any society, however heterogeneous its elements. Take botany, for example; what opportunities for investigation and discussion would arise from the consideration of

1. The Beginnings of Plant Life.
2. How Plants Grow.
3. Their Pedigrees.
4. Family Traits and How Modified.
5. Varieties and How Produced.
6. Carnivorous Plants.
7. Parasitic Plants.
8. Floriculture as an Art.
9. Floriculture as an Occupation for Women.
10. Flowers in Art.
11. Flowers in Poetry and Song.
12. Flowers in the Bible.

What a preparation such a winter's work would be for the coming of the New Year, the real New Year, which comes to us with the budding spring! What pleasant "field-days" might follow, and what choice collections could be prepared for the following winter's work, or as a nucleus for a village museum.

Entomology, or mineralogy, or indeed any other one of the various branches of natural science, presents an equally broad and rich field for mutual labor and discussion. Will not some society make the experiment and report?

Church Music.

A VOICE FROM THE CHOIR-LOFT.

In the first place, it cannot be doubted that a great reformation has been going on during the past twenty years, not only in the character of the music performed in our churches, but as well in the character of the per-