



## OPEN LETTERS

### How to Utilize Old Magazines.

LOVERS of good current literature are often unable to decide satisfactorily what to do with their accumulation of magazines, reviews, and pamphlets. There was a time when these were not so numerous or voluminous, and the annual accumulation of two or three thumb-scarred volumes was sent by all well-regulated families to receive the bookbinder's care and attention. This done, they were placed on the library shelf with a sort of old-time parental admonition that they were not to speak until spoken to.

Much that these publications contain is of more than current interest or passing worth; then why this estrangement and neglect? Many of us value and esteem these old friends, but we approach them for the sake of lang syne, or else to remove the dust from their neglected covers. We live apart from them, so to speak, and consult them at long intervals. The gaps in these intervals are growing wider each succeeding year, and with the rapidly increasing appearance of cyclopedias, republications, and reference-books, the poor old shelf-worn bound magazines of ten, fifteen, or thirty years ago will become meaningless, except, like Mrs. Chub's picture, «for the name that 's on the back.»

By reason of the great number and variety of periodicals which nowadays come into the family, and because of their bulk and the cost involved, fewer people bind them. Another reason for not preserving them is because of the space required to accommodate their rapidly increasing numbers. Assuredly the chief reason must be their unavailability after they are bound and shelved. The name of the magazine or of the review does not suggest the subjects contained or the matter for which we are in search, and without a classified index at hand search is always laborious and often fruitless. But even with a classified index of current literature in the library the difficulty is not removed, and the proper disposition of one's magazines and reviews remains an unsolved problem. The experience of one who has given the subject some attention is here recorded, with the hope that it may act as a thought or suggestion.

There comes a time in nearly all families of the present generation when some of its members are overpowered by the enormity of «back numbers» that cover attic floors, out-of-the-way closet shelves, and sometimes deny visitors the use of a library chair or two. At this juncture the presiding genius of the household is seized with a sudden fit of charity or philanthropy, and the city hospital becomes the recipient of cast-off goods. (There have been cases when the inmates were deluged with as many as twenty sets of Congressional Records, enough to make the poor readers inmates for life!) Having been faced with such a dilemma a few months ago, the hospital decree was issued by the aforesaid

feminine genius of the household, and only by a promise to make careful and satisfactory disposition of the literary property could she be dissuaded from her charitable course.

On the following evening, plans having been devised, work was begun, and it was continued through several weeks of an unusually severe winter, with pleasure, profit, and satisfaction, until the task was completed. From their dark corners came trooping forth CENTURYS, «Harper's,» «Forums,» «Scribner's,» «Nineteenth Century,» and «North American,» «Contemporary,» and «Fortnightly» Reviews, and these were destined to warm themselves in turn under the rich glow of the student's lamp.

The work of dissection is begun, the first step being to remove the covers and the pages of advertisements. Next, with a strong, sharp pair of nippers, the wire fastenings are clipped and drawn, or the threads cut with a sharp knife. A careful examination of the contents is now made, and the separation of the leaves is undertaken. This requires great care, and boxes of pins and small rubber bands should be kept at hand. It so happens now and then at the end of one article and the beginning of another that the leaves part easily without having to cut or tear them. The oftener this occurs the easier becomes the task, and if the printer could only be induced to arrange his matter so that the last page of one article would face the first page of another, the classification would be greatly simplified. Recognizing the inexpediency of this, the best must be made of difficulties, exercising always a little extra care and judgment. Such articles as are not to our liking, or for which we do not care, are first removed and consigned to the waste-paper basket. Serial stories, or even short storiettes if they have any merit, are likely to appear in book form, and consequently they, too, can be consigned, like some of our dear rejected manuscript, «to outer darkness.» Having disposed of stories and undesirable articles, and with still further eliminations which suggest themselves before the work of assortment and classification is begun, the original pile of publications is greatly reduced, and the undertaking seems less heroic. Now classification begins, and the real pleasure of the work is fully realized. Every deposit upon the respective piles is a plunge into a world of thought or an excursion into distant lands. Like the cards in lotto, sheets of paper on which are written comprehensive headings or titles are spread out over a large table, or sometimes over several tables, and upon these sheets the respective articles are placed. In the present instance, as many sheets as there were classifications were laid, and the headings used on these were the titles adopted for the respective volumes after the classified articles had been bound. Some of these were taken from one magazine or review, and some from

another, and indiscriminately mixed. However strained the relations of the editors or managers of the respective publications, no estrangement existed here. Everything was upon an equal and friendly footing, and what was best in THE CENTURY would lie down with what was best in «Harper's», and, as if not satisfied without having all that was good, a contribution from «Scribner's», or «The Forum», or «The Fortnightly», or «The Nineteenth Century», or «The Contemporary Review» was demanded, and the demand forthwith supplied. «The North American» was in demand, but it excluded itself because of its size, which is neither so long nor so broad as it is deep and great. It, therefore, usually formed a pile of its own, but met its friends on the shelves. Thus many good things were brought together and grouped, with a view to getting kindred and congenial spirits in one another's company, giving to the reader the maximum of enjoyment, and conferring upon him the greatest benefits.

The size of the respective volumes cannot be definitely prescribed, but in thickness they should not exceed one and a half inches. A book one inch in thickness is a more convenient size, but it is not always possible to restrict it within any prescribed limit. There may be some very slight variation in the dimension of the pages in the respective magazines and reviews, but in the binding they are trimmed to a uniform size, and while there may be some variation in the margin, it is so trifling that it is scarcely noticed.

The periodicals in the present instance must have numbered five hundred or more, and after their articles were separated, classified, and bound, they numbered between sixty and seventy volumes. In a well-selected library they present an appearance inferior to few and superior to many of its volumes, and rank with the best in conferring extended wisdom and pleasure. Here are a few of their titles: «Art Papers,» «Artists,» «Architecture,» «The Stage,» «The Press,» «Clubs,» «Libraries and Museums,» «The South,» «Kentucky,» «Indian and Negro,» «International Questions,» «Biographical,» «Historical,» «Municipal Government,» «Invention and Discovery,» «Industrial Enterprises,» «Educational,» «Colleges and Universities,» «Scientific,» «Financial Papers,» «Authors and Authorship,» «Books and Book Notes,» «Great Ship Canals and Highways of Commerce,» «Government Control of the Railway and the Telegraph,» etc.

Again, the magazines are brought together in more noticeable and delightful companionship, «Topics of the Time,» «Points of View,» and «Easy Chair» commingling, comparing notes, and imparting wisdom in one group, while the «Editor's Drawer» and «In Lighter Vein» go into another, making hearts glad and driving dull care away.

It often happens that it is impossible to separate articles, for the reason that a desirable one ends on one side of a leaf and another may begin on the other side of the same leaf. One article may be on politics and another on some scientific subject, or one on politics and another on religion. This difficulty is remedied by having a volume devoted to «Politics and Religion» or «Politics and Science.» They either should not or do not generally go together in the affairs of life, but in a mute and submissive volume no harm can be done.

Many other titles will suggest themselves to the reader, taste and inclination being the determining factors.

It is inconceivable to the casual reader how much literature of real and permanent value appears monthly in the magazines and reviews of the United States and England, but all doubt is removed and a clear conception is obtained after consulting the shelf of books just described. Here, for example, is the way an interesting symposium is formed by papers appearing in the volume entitled «Ships that Sail the Sea,» viz.: «Are Fast or Slow Steamers the Safest?» «The Limit of Speed in Ocean Travel,» «The Ship's Company,» «The Good Ship *Constitution*,» «The Ocean Steamship as a Freight-carrier,» «The Revenue Cutter Service,» «Ocean Passenger Travel,» «With Uncle Sam's Blue-jackets Abroad,» «With Yankee Cruisers in French Waters,» «Speed of Ocean Steamers,» «Steamship Lines of the World,» etc.

The volume entitled «The Great Ship-canals and Highways of Commerce» contains the following between its covers: «The Present State of the Panama Canal,» «Waterways from the Ocean to the Lakes,» «The Nicaragua Route to the Pacific,» «The Nicaragua Canal,» «Impediments to our Domestic Commerce,» «The International Railroad Problem,» «The Nicaragua Canal and Commerce,» «Our Lake Commerce,» «Ways to the Ocean,» «The Isthmian Ship-railway,» «Ship-railways,» «Evolution of the English Channel,» and «Speed in Railway Travel.»

It would be difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to find any one work containing more reliable information on the subject mentioned, or one so well suited to the tastes, needs, and capabilities of the general reader.

In the volume devoted to «Studies of Sundry Subjects» are collected many odd and incongruous titles, but often a separation is impossible without destroying one or the other of such articles as end or commence on the pages of the same leaf. For example, the splendid paper on «Our Political Dangers» by Professor Simon Newcomb, and the brilliant paper of Bishop Spalding on «Froude's Historical Methods,» could not have been separated without the destruction of one or the other, and for that reason they were properly assigned to the collection in which they appear. The associations formed in these volumes are democratic, cosmopolitan, catholic, and promiscuous. All sides of all questions, and the leaders of thought representing them, are given an equal chance and an impartial hearing. Emperor, king, president, and subject, the pope, Cardinal Gibbons, Bishop Potter, John Knox, Dr. John Hall, John Wesley, and Martin Luther, Andrew Carnegie, T. V. Powderly, Henry George, Professor Ely, and David A. Wells, are brought and constantly kept together in intimate and pleasant relationship. France and Germany, England and Russia, Austria and Italy, China and Japan, form a happy union, disclosing their charms to a delighted and interested audience of impartial readers. The formality of courts, the fashion of the ball-room, the conventionalities of society, the differences of rank and condition, the bitterness of national or party feelings, personal estrangements, religious prejudices, all are here waived and made subordinate to a free and easy, united and harmonious, social and kindly spirit, much to be desired but seldom seen in the more real and less ideal affairs and condi-

tions of human society. Thus may be instituted a modern «Thousand and One Nights'» entertainment. The occupation of arranging and assorting is in itself very pleasant, having its social side, and bringing the family together into close communion; and it is instructive, as it renews acquaintance with subjects half forgotten, and forms acquaintances with others before ignored.

Then the work itself praises its master and friends, illustrating the process of winnowing the chaff from the grain, typifying the reunion of friends and brothers separated and estranged by differences of opinion and belief, and finally establishing a union of good, wise, noble natures in an ideal republic as enduring, as delightful, and as useful as good.

*Herman Justi.*

#### «One Man Who Was Content.»

A DEBT of gratitude is due to Mrs. Van Rensselaer from those who have been so fortunate as to read in the December CENTURY her sketch, «One Man Who Was Content.» This dispassionate recital of the tragedies of a life, and the triumph of personality over fate, is an inspiration to its readers. The tragedies rehearsed in the narrative are not wonderful or unprecedented. They are such as may come into any life, to be taken lightly by the irresponsible or seriously by the thoughtful and introspective soul. It is not to the light-brained, nor scarcely to the light-hearted, that the rehearsal appeals; but rather to him who knows that stinging blows can be dealt by the hand of fate, or to one who has suffered through his own mistakes or the mistakes of others. Personal tragedies are ordinary happenings to the world at large. The death of one man merely makes room for the ambition of another, and each man has his own content to seek, his own happiness to possess, and his own salvation to gain. Individual man, even amid a host of friendly souls, stands sublimely alone with his Creator. To fall by the wayside under adverse circumstances argues only a weakness which fate is justified in crushing out. Mrs. Van Rensselaer says: To dwell in resignation «is to acknowledge defeat at the hands of life, to accept it, and in passive endurance to give up the fight for happiness. . . . But the brave man, the wise man,» cannot do this; «he holds to his birthright of hope, and looks forward to a time when,» notwithstanding the enmity of fate, «in some sure way he will reconquer and reestablish contentment.» It is the cheerful tone which commends Mrs. Van Rensselaer's story. From her position nothing, no adversity, no mistake, is irremediable. No matter what the changing conditions of life may present, there is always a chance for readjustment to new denials and new demands. Unkind fate shall not dominate, for there is always something desirable left which can be secured. Pessimism is at present so rampant in literature that optimism is to be doubly appreciated. «The mood of disdain is upon us,» but it is neither a wholesome nor a desirable state. Only that is desirable which brings content, and «the greatest good to the greatest number.» There is no surer way to make a tired, tiresome, and pessimistic people than to make their literature on that pattern. Grant that life is a struggle; grant that there is more of the minor than of the major: but do not sell the

«birthright of hope» by eliminating or disabling man's power of modulating from the minor into the major.

From the most depressing situations may come the most glorious success; and the writer who inspires the world at large with this idea, who models his literature that it may build up hope, elevate character, stimulate thought, and urge to creditable and noble action—to such a one the world owes a debt. If the writer of «One Man Who Was Content» has inspired one depressed, despondent mind to vigorous action which results in accomplishment and content, then has she used her talents to great purpose.

But, some critic observes, the whole story of this one contented man is full of egotism. It puts a premium upon egotism. It is full of the all-important «I.» This criticism is granted; for in dealing with himself one always deals with an egotist. It is an egotist who says (quoting from the story under discussion): «I feel that I have indeed been successful, not because I have done all that with my chances a man might do, but because I have done absolutely all that with my abilities was possible to me.» But, egotistic as it is, it sums up all the possibilities of a life. It is a summary made by a man with sense sufficient to measure himself; and when such an example is found, be it in fiction or reality, it illustrates and accentuates the fact that when a man can measure himself, and know that he has turned all his talents to account, not burying one of them—to such belong rightfully the earnings of content.

Mrs. Van Rensselaer's story is a contribution to ethics. It defines man's duty to himself, and it tells him how to discharge that duty, in its teaching that hope and happiness are to be gained through earnest and honest development of talent, and again in the reminder of its concluding idea, that there is no «justification in a record of empty days.»

*Estelle Thomas.*

#### A Scientific Basis for Liquor Legislation.

EIGHT years ago a little company of distinguished students of social problems, who called themselves the Sociological Group, took up some of the larger subjects of social welfare, and their studies (for every subject taken up was made the special study of one member, and his conclusions were discussed by them all) were published in THE CENTURY MAGAZINE in 1889 and the years following. Four years ago they decided to enlarge the group and to concentrate their study on one great subject. Thus it came about that the Committee of Fifty for the Investigation of the Liquor Problem was organized. A fund was subscribed, and an original and comprehensive investigation was begun. No more significant or more public-spirited piece of work was ever undertaken, none that showed a more serious purpose. So entangled is the subject with social and even race prejudices, religious opinions, and political purposes, that it could be investigated satisfactorily in the United States only by a voluntary association of men of the highest character and the best equipment. One of the principal lines of inquiry was into the results of our legislative experience in regulating the liquor traffic; this was undertaken under the supervision of Presidents Eliot of Harvard University and Low of Columbia University, and James C. Carter, Esq., of New York. Another was into the economic and social effects of the