

## EVENING COLLEGES FOR WOMEN.



HERE are at the present time in London several tolerably flourishing institutions, where working women may spend their evenings in a pleasant and profitable manner. These evening colleges were started to supply a much-felt want—namely, a place of secondary education for women engaged in business during the day, who feel that the

very superficial education they received in their childhood is not sufficient to satisfy their maturer years.

Most of the teaching is gratuitous. It is undertaken by a large staff of lady and gentlemen volunteers: so the authorities are enabled to charge almost nominal fees—an advantage much appreciated by the scholars, to the majority of whom a shilling is a considerable sum, not to be expended without a great deal of consideration. The subjects taught are very comprehensive, and include preparatory classes for writing, reading, dictation, English grammar, literature, and arithmetic, and more advanced classes for German, French, Italian, Latin, and elementary Greek, drawing, singing, business letter-writing, book-keeping, geometry, short-hand writing, botany, geography, physiology, political economy, advanced English composition, reading and recitation, study of Shakespeare; and at one college they have plain cookery classes, at five shillings the course of ten lessons.

The college year is divided into four terms; the fee for membership is in most cases a shilling per term. The colleges are open only in the evening, from seven to ten o'clock. The fees vary somewhat at the different colleges. The charge for teaching foreign languages is from three to four shillings a term, and other subjects are from one to three shillings each.

The requirements of the students are very varied, some of the pupils being unable to read fluently, whilst others are governesses, only anxious to add another accomplishment to their list. The managers do their utmost to meet these different wants, and are always willing to endeavour to organise fresh classes when a sufficient number of students willing to join can be found. But it is very discouraging for teachers, who have come perhaps at great personal inconvenience, to find that three-fourths of their class have not considered it worth their while to attend.

The councils of the different colleges are always glad to hear from competent ladies and gentlemen willing to give their services *regularly* as teachers; but nothing is more likely to be detrimental to the

success of these undertakings than the irregular attendance of the teachers. Like all amateurs, some of them are inclined to think that if they send a telegram at the last minute to an assembled class, saying that "they are unfortunately prevented from attending," it will be quite a sufficient excuse; but the pupils are very apt to think otherwise, and will most certainly take advantage of the example, and stay away themselves on the first occasion that they feel the least inclination to do so. Still, after all, the relations between teachers and taught seem to be, in most cases, thoroughly satisfactory. The teachers have been known to invite their pupils to visit them in their own homes—a privilege much appreciated—and lasting friendships have been formed. Some of the classes are so well under control, that the students would never think of staying away without permission, or at the very least without writing an excuse. But irregular attendance is certainly the greatest difficulty the teachers usually have to contend with; and it is not surprising when one considers what a serious obstacle a wet or snowy night must be to those who are unable to afford the price of a railway ticket or an omnibus fare, and whose homes may be two or three miles from the college they attend. It is rather interesting to know the occupations the students are engaged in during the day. The following list is copied from one of the annual reports:—

Assistants in shops and forewomen .. .. .	14
Bookbinders, folders, and bank-note stampers .. .. .	5
Cartridge and percussion cap-makers .. .. .	4
Church-furnishers, crêpe-workers, and fur-liners .. .. .	5
Domestic servants and housekeepers .. .. .	21
Dressmakers, milliners, and needlewomen .. .. .	72
Feather-makers, piano-silkers, and lace-menders .. .. .	11
Gilder, gold-leaf-cutters, and jewel-case-liner .. .. .	4
Hair-dresser, perfumers, wig-maker, and hair-workers .. .. .	10
Laundress, barmaids, and waitress .. .. .	6
Machinist, outfitters, and warehousewomen .. .. .	18
Hospital nurses .. .. .	6
Photograph colourist, painter on tiles, and art students .. .. .	6
Print-colourers and envelope-folders .. .. .	3
Secretaries, bookkeeper, and articulated pupil .. .. .	5
Teachers and schoolmistresses .. .. .	48
Telegraph, post-office, and merchants' clerks .. .. .	8
Waterproof coat finisher, epaulette-maker, and labellers .. .. .	4
Shell-box-maker, basket-makers .. .. .	3
Toy and button-makers .. .. .	4
At home .. .. .	132

Those students described as "at home" are in many cases young girls whose occupation has not yet been determined; in others, women who assist in the trades of their fathers or husbands, or who by helping in the house-work of the family save the employment of servants. These institutions are not content to be simply places of education, but also do their best to provide recreation for their members; they all have a pleasant room where conversation is not only allowed but encouraged, and it is in this social intercourse that the teachers become acquainted with the true characters of their pupils. The principal daily papers are regularly supplied, and also some of the leading

magazines are sent by the kindness of friends ; lending libraries form an important part of the system.

Slight refreshments, such as tea, coffee, and beef-tea, can be obtained from the housekeeper at moderate fixed prices. The rules at the different colleges are slightly different, but they all provide occasional gratuitous entertainments for their members, such as lectures, concerts, recitations, private theatricals, and social meetings. Their lists of occasional lecturers contain distinguished names. At one of the colleges the following is a list of entertainments given between November and June in one year:—On the 1st of November, Dr. George Macdonald met and addressed the students ; on the 29th of the same month, Mr. Ladell gave "A Chat upon the Earth we Live in ;" on the 22nd of December, Mr. Ralston told "Mythical Stories about Animals," to 120 students assembled in one of the densest fogs of the winter. On the 31st of January, through the kindness of a friend, a conjurer amused a room-full of students who had braved a worse fog than that of December 22nd. On the 28th of February, some distinguished amateurs gave a concert ; on the 20th of March, Miss Gertrude Kellogg recited from American authors. Mr. J. G. Fitch read parts of "Julius Cæsar" with comments on the 8th of April. A conversazione on the 29th of May concluded the list. Members of the Kyrle Society, students, friends, and subscribers on that occasion occupied every room in the house. Wild flowers for decoration were supplied by some friends. Miss Kellogg again recited, and Miss Gerningham played the piano. Several friends took charge of some one room and supplied it with engravings or photographs, with microscopes or telephones. In the cookery kitchen, ices, clear soup, and cakes were made, and supplied at a small charge to cover expenses to more than 200 persons. The very small expense of these entertainments has been met by special donations to the fund, by the occasional sale of tickets to friends and by the sale, at sixpence each, of tickets for a friend to the students.

This is by no means a contemptible list of amusements, and when one considers how dull and pleasureless the lives of most of the students would be without these kindly efforts for their entertainment and improvement, it is impossible to withhold one's admiration from the unselfish and indefatigable promoters of these institutions.

The College for Working Women, 7, Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy Square, has recently been very charmingly decorated by the Kyrle Society ; they have painted the walls and doors of the class and conversation rooms, and even the staircase, with designs of birds and flowers, of course including the inevitable sunflower ; and some of the members have added embroidered mantelpiece hangings and table-covers, so that altogether the house looks very attractive indeed, and is much admired by students. The managers are glad to let the rooms in

the day time for classes or meetings, as a means of reducing the expenses, and have also opened a coffee and reading room for women above the age of eighteen. The subscription to this is five shillings a year, and two references from householders must be produced by ladies wishing to join. The prospectus says : "It is especially intended for the use of ladies engaged in teaching during the day, who have often no place in which to spend the hours that intervene between one engagement and another."

At the College for Men and Women, 29, Queen Square, Bloomsbury, a day school is carried on ; and at the Evening College for Women, 1, Queen Street, Brompton, one of the rooms is used in the day time for the office of the Teachers' Training and Registration Society.

These measures are very necessary, for although the teaching is gratuitous, the unavoidable expenses are too heavy to be entirely met by the students' fees, so that unfortunately none of the colleges are free from the disagreeable necessity of appealing to the public for subscriptions.

The College for Men and Women is, as its name implies, open to both sexes, and the mixed classes are found to answer well. The council in one of their annual reports say, "We fearlessly invite those to come and judge for themselves who have doubted whether the social life which we consider an essential element in the education we offer, can be carried on in a mixed college."

These annual reports are most interesting ; all the teachers are asked to contribute to them a special account of their own class, so that it is possible for even outsiders to arrive at a very fair conclusion as to the progress that has been made in each subject.

Sometimes special classes are held, such as "First Aid to the Injured" and "Nursing" classes by the St. John's Ambulance Society ; these are decidedly popular.

The Fitzroy Street College is in union with the Society of Arts, and its students are able to attend the examinations and obtain the certificates of the Society free of expense ; the College for Men and Women holds its own examinations and grants certificates. Intending students are always allowed to attend the first lesson of a class free of charge. Bad times affect the attendance of the students very seriously, as even the small fees charged are then too much for them to pay, though they are scarcely more than the cost of fire and light during a winter's evening spent at home. These colleges only require to be better known to be more appreciated ; there must be many thousands of girls who would be glad to enjoy the advantages they offer, if they only were more widely known ; probably the great majority of the class they are intended for are not even aware of their existence.

MERCY GROGAN.

