

- Rubs by Rambler.

Ah. Now. I am with Sydney Miner when he quits his airy castle and steps down to practical mundane matters. Now the sentiment he gives us is "Mental improvement for workingmen." That is what many have been urging during the past quarter of a century. Indeed the first Gen. Sec'y. of the P. W. A. was reproached for too often placing the moral and mental improvement of the workingmen before the material. But he does not regret the stand he took and may find more satisfaction in the thought that he helped to secure mining schools and night schools than in the securing of better wages. Though I fear, and regret to say, that with most workingmen, the idea of the material benefits to be derived from union is upper most yet the moral and mental objects of the association have not been wholly neglected. At least two lodges attempted to carry on circulating libraries. But life in each case was of short duration. There was a very nice library established in connection with a lodge. Many books were secured, some of them of considerable value. Some members took much interest in the scheme, but only a minority. The most valuable of the books one by one went out and never came back, and there was no one to bring them back as the librarian was a voluntary. The project died of sheer neglect. Reading rooms too were started, but like all good things died young. This was nigh a score of years ago before so general an interest was taken in technical and other education. The establishment of libraries to-day might be, and ought to be, attended with better results. Lectures also were attempted as an educator by one society for a season or two. But the promoters at last grew ashamed to invite a lecturer of repute to address nigh to empty benches. It was disheartening. 'A feast of reason and a flow of soul' was not in it with a burned cork negro show. In order to improve men morally, suasion has frequently been resorted to in the lodge rooms. But more than that is needed. Suasion is not 'practical' enough. The lodges lack courage. They have not, as they should, frowned upon those members who neglected work periodically, through periodical excesses. There is too much diffidence and an excess of delicacy. In short there is cowardice of some sort. Lodges should remember that the good of the majority is sought, and should not pause on account of the 'susceptibilities' of the few. I disagree on one point with Sydney Miner in his reference to the Y. M. C. A. There are Y. M. C. A.'s, one right here in Stellarton where men can get strong meat, and eschew girlish ping pong; where they can read fact or fiction. I'm afraid Miner shows a little animus. I cannot reconcile Miner's statement, that in many mining towns there is no place for young miners to spend their evenings but the rum shop, with his reflection on Y. M. C. A.'s being girlish for the robust nature of a miner. Do robust natures frequent rum

shops? I had thought differently.

In the matter of the housing of their workmen I am not going to say the coal companies have done all that might reasonably be expected of them, even though there has been a very marked improvement in certain localities over conditions prevailing a quarter of a century ago, or a much shorter period. Who would have refrained from a dubious shake of the head had he been told fifteen years ago that miners houses would soon be built fitted with electric lights, and supplied with 'town water'. And yet we have such houses to-day. When rents were low, when men in company houses thought they were being imposed upon if a greater rent than from a dollar and a quarter to two dollars and a half per month was demanded of them, coal operators may have had some excuse for putting up buildings innocent of comfort or convenience, but they have not that excuse to-day, seeing that rents in many cases are as high as six dollars a month. For that sum monthly, and seeing land costs the companies a nominal figure merely, houses should be provided having, beside comfort and convenience, some style about them. The coal companies have the idea that order means sameness, and therefore it is that houses are built in rows, and, unlike the stars, one house does not differ from another in glory. Each house in the row is a fac simile of the other; the same size to a quarter of an inch, the same number of shingles on each front wall, the same number of bricks to each chimney, and all painted from the one red pot. A half a dozen houses may be all of different styles of architecture, all be convenient in their respective designs, and yet all be of equal value. It is this everlasting sameness about the houses, and uniformity in the rows, that give cause for criticism. I asked an operator, why, when he was at it, he did not put up houses of varying styles, and paint them different colors. His reply was that tenants in mining towns did not appreciate these things; that a good house would soon be reduced to a level with an ordinary or common style house, and that not one in ten cultivated the gardens belonging to the houses or made any effort to keep tidy the surroundings. What was I to say to this, seeing there was much truth in it. If, as has been alleged by one in speaking of miners' houses, 'the surroundings are abominable', who is chiefly to blame? My answer, and it is given reluctantly, is, the tenants. I visited a row of eight houses in course of construction and remarked: "Here is a nice clean spot, plenty of open, and a fine view. This ought to be an ideal row". I took a look at the row two years after the houses had been occupied and, dear me, had I been stuck for English, I could have sworn. Not a garden except one, not a single flower patch, not one, but two or three or four coal houses, out houses, pig pens, and ash heaps. Broken delf and empty peach or other tins were all over. Who was to blame for the untidiness and the disorder. The employers only in small part. The removal of the ashes, and the prohibition of the pig pens were theirs. But I forgot. The chief blame of the employers was that they didn't care. One gets vexed at the miners at times. Why can't they show as much spunk as other workmen. In