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The Ingle Nook.

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In the Ingle Nook "topic-drawer," a repository into which drifts all the float-ams and jetsam of floating ideas and odds and ends that may "some day become useful," there came to the top to-day a clipping evidently taken from a story somewhere, a tale woven about a journalist: "A Woman's Page ought to be for WOMEN," she replied. "All women are not housekeepers, and no housekeeper ought to be merely a housekeeper. Most housekeepers are interested in other things besides housekeeping,—fortunately! I want to write for them about some of these other things."

And now, let's talk about it. Considering the question fairly on all sides, don't you think the little journalist spoke absolutely true? Don't you discern among women everywhere a sort of restlessness reaching out past just housekeeping?

If you can't answer "yes" right off the bat, just stand still and look about for a moment. . . Here in one little district, country and village have united to "put on" a Dickens' play for Christmas. "Where can we get theatrical clothes to rent?" they write, and the Ingle Nook says reverently, "God bless you!" as it burrows about to find out the information. "A Christmas Carol" this year, and a classic is introduced. Next year the standard must be kept up, and, thanks be, there are good playwrights enough to choose from: Goldsmith and Sheridan, Ibsen and Galsworthy, may be none too remote for the rural dramatists of the future.—Just here, I do hope you read Miss Orvis's article in the "Christmas Advocate." We must agitate and agitate, and never rest until every rural district in Canada has similar advantages to those secured by the farmers of Wisconsin; what has been done in one place with a good University as its center, can surely be done in others.—The particular association that has brought this reflection up is that the University of Wisconsin keeps on hand a supply of plays, forwarded for a trifle to any part of the State.

Drama in one place. Turn to another and you find Literary Clubs in full force. cozy home reading clubs, perhaps even a Chautauqua reading circle established on systematic lines.—A "club" can never read trash, and so the banner of good literature is kept waving.

Perhaps there is neither a dramatic nor a literary club, but there is sure to be a Women's Institute. Take a peep at its programmes and see what a vast range of subjects afforded—housekeeping with the rest, but also everything else connected with the public weal, from public-health problems to the establishing of public works,—everything except woman suffrage!

But there are suffragists a-plenty, too, both within and without the Institute, and it is not straining a point to say that the vast majority of women who would like to vote wish to do so, not for the mere sake of doing what men do, not with any desire to supplant or shoulder aside men in any way, but out of a sincere wish to let woman's voice be heard in all things that affect the welfare of women and of those peculiarly dependent upon them, the children.

Yes, there is a restlessness, an out-reaching everywhere in feminine ranks, woman striving to assist herself, not in vainglory, but as a human whose destiny it is to climb, and who cannot climb so well as long as there are shackles about her feet.

There are still a few old fogies on the face of the earth who declare "Woman's place is in the home. If she attends to her housework right, she will not have time for any of this outside nonsense."

Now, the first of these statements is absolutely true. The home certainly is woman's best sphere—and every true woman recognizes the privileges and opportunities of such a spot.—The old fogeydom consists in believing that the home is shut in by four walls and a roof.

Four walls and a roof?—Why, the home reaches out everywhere, especially if there are children in it,—to education, to the broadening religious conceptions of the Twentieth Century, to government of the country—all for the sake of the child.

That a woman shall understand this truth makes all the difference between a household drudge and a homemaker.—And that brings up another question, one, reader, for you to think out for yourself: Is it true that "the most successful housekeeper is often the poorest homemaker"?

Now, to the second statement: "If a woman attends to her housework right she will not have time for anything outside of it."—Here, again, there are questions to be answered. Of course, it is conceded that there are some women so overrun and burdened down with housework as to have positively no time to read or to go out to meetings and lectures; but take the majority of women. Could not the most of them "navigate," by using brain-work enough, to arrange time for something more than baking, scrubbing, and all the rest of it? Is the one who accomplishes most in the long run the one who keeps bright and happy, through being interested in outside things, and who learns of best and quickest methods of work through keeping in touch with up-to-date methods? Or is she the one who moils away in the same rut year in, year out? It is nerve-racking, that muddling along in a rut, and because of it a good many women have had to pay the piper sooner or later. System is good, but let system be the slave, not the master. "The greatest Discovery I have made during fifteen years of housekeeping," says a writer in Good Housekeeping, "is that the earth revolves on its axis, and all other important events take place just the same, whether I iron on Tuesday or Thursday, or clean on Friday or Saturday."

It is, of course, necessary that the housekeeper be a "good housekeeper," that the house be kept clean, sanitary and comfortable, and that the meals be wholesome and well balanced; the point is that commonsense be used in everything, and that neither work nor time be expended upon things that serve no good purpose.

Just in how far, then, should a woman

fuss over her housework? asks someone.

We have talked over this question in the Ingle Nook, you and I and all of us, many a time, have we not? and if I remember rightly have come to the conclusion that the farm woman, who has so many, many things to do, should weed out the "fuss" altogether. A pretty house with plain, smooth furniture, which can be easily dusted, should be hers; tacked-down carpets should be taboo, as they are in practically all city houses, and so should a superfluity of bric-a-brac, "dust-traps"; curtains should be sash length, not trailing about the floor to be soiled; a vacuum cleaner, dustless mop and duster, a good washing-machine and wringer, and cans of patented "cleanser," or even ashes and salt mixed together, for pots and pans, should make the work of keeping clean comparatively easy; meals should be appetizing and well planned, but not elaborate; useless frills, which mean tedious ironing, should be given a long leave of absence, and cotton crepe, which does not need ironing at all, should be substituted for cotton for nightdresses and all thin underwear.

Such a scheme, endlessly added to by every woman capable of thinking out problems, with a house contrived to save every step possible, should give most women time to spare to devote to other things—the mental make-up that is, after all, the real Us. Baking, scrubbing, ironing, sewing, may, indeed, express us to some small extent, but they do not constitute Us; only what and how we think can do that.—And this brings us to another question: What sort of mental pabulum is the housekeeper, as a rule, giving herself?—An important question, because, without food, the mind cannot grow.

Those of you who were at the Women's Institute Convention in London this year, will remember one of Mrs. Courtice's (Wallaceburg) pithily put statements: "Some people think more of scrubbing the last inch of dust out of their houses than of sweeping the dust out of their brains." The observation reminded me of what Hellen Keller—the wonderful blind, deaf girl—also said, that in talking with people she found that the great majority were in a comparatively "infantile state of development." That sounds sweeping, and yet perhaps every one of us, in honestly considering her own mind and the endless possibilities of mind as it may be, must confess that Miss Keller spoke absolute truth.

Now, surely this should not be. We should, at least, be on the upward track, and so we should look to our "pabulum." Books, magazines, and lectures, of good quality, worth-while people, service for others even at inconvenience to ourselves,—these are the things that make us grow, the real Us. And for those of us who are on farms, the winter, with its long evenings, is the best growing season.

We are economizing this winter, perhaps, that we may be able to send more to the soldiers and the Belgians, but let us not economize too much on good books and magazines. There are some good books in every local library, and the best magazines do not cost so very much. Why not coax the good man to read aloud while you knit or make shirts for Johnnie Canuck or Tommy Atkins away at the front?

A delegate from somewhere said at the London Convention that her Institute was taking up, this winter, a study of the countries involved in the war. There is a suggestion in that. For one of the delights of reading is that it ever causes one to branch out to all correlated subjects; for instance, a study of the European countries—their peoples, customs, etc.—very naturally leads on to a study of their literature, their art, their great men and women. So it is with other things.

Won't you write and tell us about any experience you have had in regard to any of these questions? JUNIA.

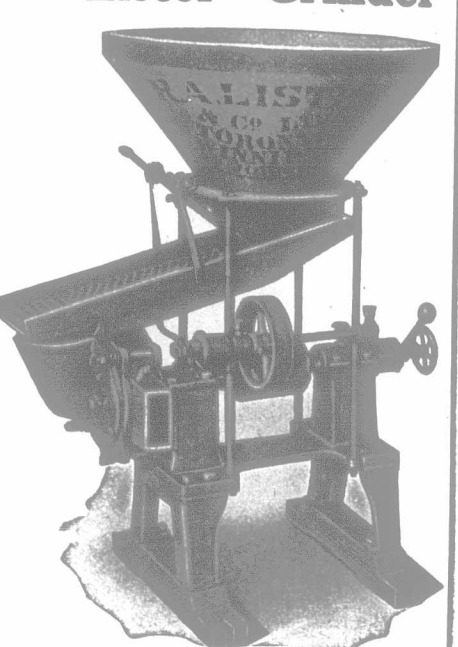
FROM A SHUT-IN FRIEND.

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