

nothing to do. These to me seem certainly the most important, but under the present state of things I see no hope of even gradually introducing them. If the Literary Society were to cease to be and the Class Societies were to take up its work, I think that questions of the second class would have a permanence which they do not now hold. One who is high in authority said on one occasion in my presence that the College Council had no objection to our discussing political questions, but that our Literary Society was so well known and its debates so often published in the papers that it would harm the College if we discussed such questions as Commercial Union or Annexation. There would be no such difficulty in the case of the Class Societies. They might meet and discuss anything they liked. It would also be possible in these smaller meetings to specially introduce literary subjects for debates and essays. Many men who now monopolize a great deal of our time would not be allowed to do so if they only had members of their own year to deal with. Many First Year men who now take no part in the Society would have their tongues loosened in the absence of their Seniors, and many Seniors would grow very bold had they not the fear of making themselves ridiculous in the presence of the Freshmen. A spirit of generous rivalry as to which year would have the best society would soon manifest itself. This could be fostered by each year inviting the members of the other years to be present as spectators at some of their meetings and by the conducting of debates between the different years.

To me, indeed, it seems that we have no choice in this matter. If these class societies are to hold regular meetings, and are to be the success which the founders hoped for and which I see but slight reason to doubt, then they will inevitably kill the Literary Society whether we like it or not. It may be said that all this is very radical, that the iconoclast is abroad, that we should be more conservative. Yes, we should be conservative, but conservative of the good, and reformers of the evil.

T. C. DESBARRES.

[The above was unavoidably crowded out of last week's issue.—EDITORS.]

#### To the Editors of THE VARSITY :

SIRS,—In again addressing you on the subject of College Societies I desire in the first place to add one qualification to my previous remarks; of the smaller societies I am not competent to speak, being acquainted with only one of them. If, however, they are declining in efficiency, and if the Literary Society is also, it does not follow, as W. C. H. seems to think, that the cause in each must be the same. The Literary Society occupies a unique position and makes unique pretensions; and we may advance reasons for its decline without being at all obliged to apply the same reasons to the smaller societies which exist for special purposes. Whether the Literary Society is declining or not, I, being in the lower years, am, perhaps, not able to say; but if it is not, if it is as good as it ever was, then I am at an utter loss to understand how in the world it has continued to live so long.

In discussing College "politics" it is somewhat amusing to see with what holy horror some men hold up their hands at what they call "startling propositions," or "radical sophisms," or "disrespect for ancient customs and traditions." Things must always remain as they found them. The Literary Society was, it is, and therefore must be forever more. Some fair Aurora has won for it immortality, forsooth; it may be so, but it looks very much as if she had made her old mistake, for her Tithonus is already withered, and even now we can hear nothing but the "importunate chink" of the eternal grasshopper. The writer is as firmly attached to old college customs as any who may read these words; but, if a custom conceals and fosters a wrong, or if it prevents a necessary change which will bring great benefit to us all, then, though that custom be as old as the everlasting hills, it will and must pass away and give place to others which are neither unjust nor unsuited to the conditions of College life.

And yet nobody has so far, I think, proposed the entire abolition of the Literary Society. That there is a place for it and work for it to do, I firmly believe. But the great question is, by what means it can be made to fill that place and do that work efficiently. It is not by the elaborate tabulation of that work efficiently. It is not by the elaborate tabulation of seven rules of literary-society morality which everybody has always admitted and always will admit. It not by saying,

"No, really, you *should* do this and you *shouldn't* do that." It is not by empty, useless "urgings of the individual." These will all have about as much vivifying power as a drop of water in a desert of sand. But it is, I believe, by some *organized system* which will stimulate and encourage individual effort. It is by holding out the hope of honour and high reputation as a reward for meritorious success. The College authorities may or may not be wrong in offering scholarships, prizes and graded honours, but as long as these stimuli exist to urge men to strenuous effort in the regular course of study there should at least be some counter-forces to induce them to toil equally hard in the general literary work of our societies. Yet we look for them in vain. There are indeed two or three prizes for essays which are beyond the reach of the ordinary student, (sometimes, it seems, beyond the reach of all) and nothing more. It is no wonder if men are inclined to pay too much attention to the regular course when all the honours lie there. For a means of stimulation I turn, first, to the year societies. As I believe that a healthy rivalry between the years is going to give such an impetus to College sports as they have never yet received, so I believe that a healthy and friendly rivalry in the production of good essays, in debates and in social amusement, will elevate greatly the general character of the literary work of the students as well as of their social life. Speaking as one who can, without boasting, claim a fair knowledge of the feeling in the lower years, I would impress this fact upon W. C. H., and all who may think like him, that, though the Literary Society has been the main feature of our College life in the past, the Year societies are going to be the main feature of the future. Third and Fourth Year men, being conservative, may not realize all that these Class Societies mean for the undergraduates that are behind them. They simply mean such an intensity of enjoyment of College life as those who have gone before never dreamt of. They are going to be first above all, if I read the signs aright, and they deserve to be so. The Literary Society has not done much this year to claim the admiration or the support of, for instance, the Class of '92, and if they feel more inclined to support their own Society it is because they know they can get from it more benefit and higher enjoyment. And this is as it should be. When there is aroused in the students of this College a glowing spirit of loyalty to their respective years, *then*, and then only, will there be a true College spirit. When this feeling urges them to attempt to surpass other years in athletics as well as in literary work, then there will be good College sports and good literary work. This is what I hope to see. This is what I believe I shall see in part, though not in its complete fulfilment, and so, instead of confessing myself "short-sighted," it is to W. C. H. I would say,

"Thou art too shallow, Hastings, much too shallow,  
To sound the bottom of the after-times."

And yet let it be remembered that I am not advocating the total abolition of the Literary Society. I am chiefly pointing out reasons for its failure. As I said before, I think the admission is too cheap; (and here I would ask W. C. H. to try real hard and see if he cannot make out what I mean). The membership of the Literary Society might, in my opinion, by some means which it is useless to specify particularly at present, be made a prize, an honour, to be earnestly striven for, and would then act as a sort of offset to the, in some respects, pernicious influence of scholarships and honour lists.

Then our numbers, I said, (not we ourselves) are too large for successful union into one society; and despite the ridicule which W. C. H. says casts upon the idea (I looked in vain for the ridicule) my present belief is that this is one true reason for the lack of success. That there should be union among the students every one admits; but I believe that it is absolutely necessary first of all to have each year firmly united in itself. As to the next step I am not so certain, but at present it seems to me, to borrow the language of political science, that some sort of federal union upon that strong foundation would be best calculated to effect a real and permanent solidification of the whole. There is now, indeed, the form of union, but it is empty and effete, and the sooner we get a form which has some real life and meaning in it the better for us all. These may be "startling propositions" to some graver heads of the upper years, but it is not, after all, to them that I am chiefly speaking.

MUTAMUR.