

THE VARSITY.

Plausible as such statements are, the careful critic must agree with the present Oxford school in holding that for historical speculation to be profitable, or, indeed, possible, the facts of history must first be ascertained. History is a fragment. "The scroll from which she reads is but half unfolded." If one ventures on a hypothesis of humanity, he must know the facts in order to cover them. Buckle's scheme, if only possible, is the most ambitious of philosophies, but he built upon a foundation of sand. Yet we must admire the man, pedantic although he sometimes is, even if we condemn the historian.

He died at Damascus under circumstances peculiarly pathetic. Almost his last articulate words were: "My book, my book; I shall never finish my book." Unfinished, and so lacking the last touches of his hand, the work of Buckle, relegated though it has been by sound criticism to the list of literary curiosities, contains food, historical, scientific, philosophical; as well as ministering to the curiosity of the literary dilettante. Only let the reader be immovably orthodox in his beliefs, whatever they may be. Let no one who is not proof against plausibility enter under the lintel of Buckle's magic structure, lest he go forth stripped of the healthy Philistinism which binds him to earth.

R. H. COATS.

CONCERNING THE WOMEN'S LITERARY SOCIETY.

THE Women's Literary Society of University College is still in its infancy, having celebrated only its fourth anniversary; but, in four years a generation of students enters and goes out from the college halls, and already the founders of the Society, who could best have written its history, are gone from its sphere of action, leaving behind only official documents—the dry-as-dust records of the minute-books—to tell the story of all the enthusiasm, the hopes and fears, the triumphs and defeats of those who gave it their time and thought and energies. To us these chronicles of meetings held, of business transacted, of programmes carried through, are an unintelligible cipher from which we can only guess the inspiring wars of words when Greek met Greek upon the platform, the rousing college glees, and the long train of singers, essayists and readers whose memory has gone to form a part of the ever-growing consciousness of their listeners.

But we must moralize no longer.

The first record in the secretary's book reads thus: "A meeting of the Lady Undergraduates of University College was held in the ladies' room of the college at three o'clock in the afternoon, Nov. 19th, 1891. . . . It was decided to form a general society of the young women of the college, with the object of promoting literary work among them and encouraging public speaking. A committee consisting of two from each year was chosen to draft a constitution for the proposed society and arrange for another meeting." Such was the origin of the present Society, and such the aim with which it was organized. The committee did its work; the constitution was duly drafted with the usual articles respecting members, officers, committees and finance, and rules of order adopted, as we are informed, from those of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario; officers were elected and installed, and the young society began its career in January of 1892, with a literary programme in which any leanings toward frivolity, and the providing of mere temporary and therefore unworthy amusement were counteracted by an improving debate on the grave problem, "Whether humanity has been more benefited by science or by literature." It may be interesting to note that a decision was given in favor of science—a significant index of the progressive views and stern ambitions of our predecessors in office.

At that time, and for two years later, the meetings were held only once a month. In the spring of this year the Society declared its intention of assembling more frequently, and accordingly they now occur semi-monthly. This has been the only important alteration made in the laws through the heat of four election contests and the rule of as many different governments—a fact that might argue stagnation were it not patent that evidences of the progress of such a society are to be sought not in constitutional change, but in steady improvement of programme, widening activity, and fuller recognition as a representative organization.

Such evidences are not wanting in the records. The secretary for the term 1893-94, reports that the Women's Literary Society has been at last recognized as the one representative organization of the women of University College; that the Local Council of Women have requested and gladly welcomed delegates from us; that THE VARSITY asks that we be represented on both its Editorial and Business Boards, on equal terms with the men; and that our beneficent influence has been shed abroad in the Reading-room, where the daily papers and modern works of science and of fiction keep our girls informed of current news and literature. The Secretary of 1894-95 follows with announcements of further recognition, the Society having been asked to hold an Inter-collegiate Debate with Whitby Ladies' College, and having been brought prominently before the public in connection with the Yuncck Concert.

So much for the progress of that abstraction, "the Society;" but what of the aims and methods of the living, thinking group of women of which it is composed? It is true that every new set of officers that takes the Society in hand is governed and directed in a large measure by traditions written, or handed on to each incoming year; it is equally true that every group gives the Society a certain impulse in a fresh direction. What is the new impulse; what the trends in the present year? A glance at the programmes presented since October will aid us in replying. In the four meetings held up to this date, besides songs and readings, there have been given two literary essays, two literary and two political reports, two debates, and four dramatic selections. Noting the fact that there have been twice as many dramatic selections as debates, notwithstanding that the former are comparatively recent innovations, are we not justified in concluding that the tendency of the Society at present is to cultivate the ornamental qualities, the æsthetic taste of its members, rather than to aid them in attaining the strength and vivacity of intellect, the trained judgment, and speedy grasp of problems which its founders regarded as essential to efficient work in any sphere of life?

If this refining of our taste is to bring us greater good than the development of the sturdier qualities, then, by all means, let us be dramatic; but if we are still agreed that "doing whatsoever we have to do honorably and perfectly invariably brings happiness as much as seems possible to the nature of man," and that mental force and quickness are essential to doing what we have to do honorably and perfectly, and that public speaking is a means to this end, then let us have public-speaking; let us debate and discuss, air our opinions and unfold our plans, let us even have in our midst the constitutional crank, if by any or all of these means we may reach the highest end. Granted that increasing numbers tend to hinder free and general discussion of business measures, that a bequeathed constitution, hardened into permanent outlines, has infinitely less interest for us than the still plastic product of our own brain-rackings; perchance the hindrance might prove no hindrance if only there were awakened in the students such a deep and personal concern in the proceedings of the Literary Society, and such an earnest desire for its welfare as alone can ensure it a lasting and far-reaching usefulness.

BESSIE H. NICHOLS.