

Farm Women's Clubs

NOTE.—Any woman in Saskatchewan, who feels that she would like to have a Woman's Section of the Grain Growers' Association in her district, should communicate with the provincial secretary, Miss Erna Stocking, Delisle, Sask.
Any Alberta woman who would like a Woman's Section of the United Farmers in her district should write to Mrs. R. M. Barrett, Mirror, Alta., who is the women's provincial secretary for Alberta.

SOCIAL LIFE AND ENVIRONMENT

It used to be supposed that social life was the special province of women, and not so long ago it was also taken for granted that for us society meant dress, lavish entertainment, and unlimited gossip. Nowadays, social life means much more than that, but it is still the department of life in which women naturally lead, and in almost every community, in town or country, the social life is what the women make it.

There are a good many people who talk about the difficulty of "getting into society," but, as a matter of fact, it is impossible to get out of it. We enter social life when we are born, and I don't think that many learn its lessons before they die. It is just a question of how well or how ill we fill our place in society; never a question of whether we are in or out of it.

The word "social" comes from "socius," a companion, and social life may be said to have begun when Eve joined Adam in the Garden of Eden, and it has been a necessity to the human being ever since. It is developed by civilized races and neglected by savage ones. Amongst those people who are lowest in the scale of civilization, the black fellow of Australia, the cannibals of New Guinea and Central Africa, there is practically no social life. Even their dances, the only habit that we share with them, are mostly ceremonial and sacrificial. It is only as civilization progresses that education thru companionship with our fellow men comes in, and I think it is the most advanced and complex education of all. Emerson said "Every man I meet is my master in some point, and in that I learn of him," and if a great mind like Emerson could acknowledge that, the rest of us may do so without feeling over-humble. It is a common mistake, I think, to limit one's self to the companionship of people who are like ourselves. Social life in the country is often monotonous for that reason. There is a tendency to resent anything unusual in any one. We are inclined to say, "I have nothing in common with So-and-So, she's not my sort," and we do not realize that for that very reason she is of much greater value to us educationally than a more congenial person just like ourselves. It is as if at school we said "Arithmetic doesn't appeal to me and because it doesn't I have no use for it," and in consequence we go thru life handicapped for lack of the knowledge that two and two makes four. We do not learn much from the people who are like us. They are useful and companionable; as we say, easy to get on with; but they cannot teach us as much as the less congenial people who have standards different from our own and who see the problems of life from a different standpoint. If I express some opinion and am met by a smiling "Yes, that is so," it may be friendly and amiable, but it doesn't help me either socially or mentally, but if I am met by a thoughtful "No, I don't see it that way," my brain becomes alert to meet the other brain and my education progresses. At least, it is my own fault if it doesn't. What men find in business relationships, we women should find in social companionship. We never have found it, for it is only in recent years that women have felt the need of education, and nowadays this need is broadening and changing social life for women as it has changed almost every other outlook of theirs. It used to be said that a woman's chief subjects of conversation were dress, and the iniquities of her servants. Nowadays, women still have the difficulties of hired help, but it is as a problem to solve, not as a subject for grumbling.

An interest in society now means an interest in humanity. For the first time in the history of the world, I believe women are becoming clubable creatures and are learning that the personalities of their fellow women are really much more fascinating than their clothes. This desire for companionship, for co-operation, for understanding each other better, means that socially women are becoming better educated.

It is a common accusation that women

are narrow, over-critical and that their over-sensitive feelings always over-ride their common sense. I daresay it is true. I know that as a rule women do not deal with each other in the sensible, sportsmanlike spirit that men do. But a child has to be taught fair play, and the point of view of the other child; women have never been taught to give and take as men have. That is part of the new social order, and I believe it is the basis of successful social education. It is very hard to remember that the person I find dull, very probably finds me an empty-headed chatterbox, that my personality and opinions are likely to irritate other people, as their peculiarities are likely to irritate me; but until I do learn this and order my intercourse with the world accordingly, I am a socially uneducated person. It is possible to know every rule of etiquette and social observance by heart and still be socially ignorant; but if one starts with an interest in one's fellow beings and in time learns sympathy and tolerance and the charity that believes in many forms of goodness, I think that one has gained a very fair social education.

It is often contended that society is insincere; out of politeness we say much that we do not mean, and our smile goes no further than our lips. I like sincerity very much myself, but it would be very painful to live always with absolutely sincere people. It would be like an old play I saw once, called "The Palace of Truth," in which everyone who entered this magic palace found themselves speaking the entire truth whether they wanted to or not. None of the characters in the play were on speaking terms after the first act. No doubt the man of the stone age who, if he met an acquaintance he did not care for, promptly brained him with his stone axe, was a very sincere person, but he must have been a most uncomfortable neighbor, and his sincerity probably ended in an equally sincere acquaintance braining him. There is always a suggestion of the stone age man about a new country, anyway. Pioneers are so grounded in the necessity for independence that they find it hard to realize that every human being is in some measure dependent upon every other human being, and that an education in social life is as necessary to progress as an education in business methods and good farming. Very often if farm parents wish to educate their children socially, they think it necessary to send them to a city. Probably it is necessary, but it shouldn't be—it should be possible for a girl to receive as good a social education on the prairie as in the city; in fact, it should be a much more complete one, for I believe anyone who could be a social success on the prairie needn't fear the courts of Europe. I don't think that it is as difficult for an ambassador's wife to entertain successfully as it is for a prairie hostess. The one has every possible aid from trained servants, beautiful surroundings, paid entertainers; the other has only herself and her unaided desire to please her friends. Our subjects of conversation are limited and monotonous, our surroundings have little variety, our outward lives are too much alike; it is only by ourselves that we and our surroundings can be made entertaining and stimulating. I once knew a most learned Professor of Entomology, who probably knew everything there is to know about insect life. His home was a museum of curious insects, dead and alive, and he knew the names and the habits of them all intimately; but his fellow men might as well have lived on the planet Mars for all the interest he took in them. In spite of half a dozen letters after his name and a membership in every learned society, he was a very imperfectly educated man.

I think if we can reverse the professor's case and at the end of our lives can say: "I knew little of the sciences, and have no degree of chemistry or physics, but I have studied and tried to understand my fellow beings," we shall at least have earned the right to be called socially well educated.

MRS. HUTCHINSON,
Idaleen, Sask.

Read before the Idaleen Women Grain Growers.

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