

The Ontario and Experimental Union.



THE Experimental Union is an association which has the best wishes of all the students, and when any one of them questions the working of this society, it must be understood that it is in kindness that it is criticized.

Now, one question which every student of the College, and especially every member of the Union, should ask himself is whether the Union is doing the work which was intended by its promoters. In order to find out what these intentions were it will be necessary to look up the constitution which we find gives the objects of the institution as follows:

"The objects of the Association are to form a bond of union among the officers and students, past and present, of the Ontario Agricultural College and Experimental Farm, to promote their intercourse with the view to mutual information, to discuss subjects bearing on the wide field of agriculture, with its allied sciences and arts, to hear papers and addresses delivered by competent parties, and to meet at least once annually for these purposes."

Later reports insert after "allied sciences and arts" the following clause: "To conduct experiments in this field in union as far as possible or by individual efforts; to secure the co-operation of the agriculturists of the Province in this work."

This I think shows conclusively that the idea of a reunion of ex-students was uppermost in the minds of the promoters of the scheme, and that they added the clause in regard to experiments later as an afterthought.

Surely no one will complain of the noble work which has been done in this respect. Having been started in 1886 with twelve experiments the work has steadily increased until in 1894 there were thirteen hundred and forty.

This organization has been the means of introducing the best varieties of grain, roots, etc., into all parts of the country, and it enjoys the confidence of not only the ex-students but also of the farmers generally. This success has been in a large measure due to the painstaking efforts of the efficient director, Mr. C. A. Zavitz.

With this clause we have nothing to complain, but in regard to the first and main clause we take issue, and state without fear of contradiction that the Union is not doing the work it was designed for. We claim that it does not act as a reunion of students at all, but has degenerated into a large experimental association,—a good one I grant, but still it does not take the place of a reunion. And the members have been blinded by the success of the experimental department that we have not noticed that it was not doing its proper work.

In the first place let us ask ourselves why there are not more ex-students at the meetings. Many reasons may be given, such as hard times, which will affect even a College graduate; lack of time; long distances to travel. But to me the chief reason seems to be that they do not feel that bond of fellowship which the Union is supposed to create. When an ex-student returns to his Alma Mater after an elapse of several years he feels that there is something lacking which he cannot explain, but he feels lost and out of place in the very place where he should feel most at home. When asked how he liked the meeting he will not complain, for he knows that the staff and all concerned have done all in their power to make the meeting pleasant, but

he will also say that he is rather out of touch with the College: met very few of the boys, and that he had not enjoyed the meeting as he had hoped. I have heard students talk like this, and if I asked one of them, Did you meet So and So? many a student who had attended at the same time, he would say, "No; was he there? I am very sorry that I did not see him; but there seemed to be so many strangers that I did not recognize even those that I went to school with."

I really think that one of the most forlorn sights imaginable is to see half a dozen of the old students walking around the halls or sitting on the registers, afraid to speak to each other, and putting you in mind of the first night spent at the O. A. C.

WHAT IS THE REMEDY?

This is a very difficult question to answer, but the first thing to do is to decide that there is something wrong, and then we can look around for the cure. With this object in view I will throw out a few suggestions.

In the first place, I think that some difference should be made between members and non-members. At present a student who belongs either to the Farmer's Institute or some similar organization will receive all the advantages of the Union for nothing, and I really do not think that it is fair to tax the student who is loyal to his College and association fifty cents for his sentiments, and give those who do not pay a cent the same benefits.

Last year while treasurer I got a number of cards printed with the object of increasing the membership. One young man wrote asking what advantages he would receive which he could not get without joining, and I really did not know what answer to give. I sent the letter to Mr. Zavitz, and if he did not make a better attempt than I did I am afraid that the Union has lost one member.

I think that the general feeling among the boys is that there is too large a crowd to enable them to meet old friends. We often have more of a reunion going home on the train than we had at the College, and hear of students who were there and whom we should have liked to have met, but did not know that they were present. Some have suggested that we lessen numbers by confining the gatherings to ourselves. This would give the students more chance to talk, for of late there has been a tendency for the Union to become the debating ground for a few cranks who come simply to hear themselves talk, and thus crowd out the students who are more backward in expressing their opinions. Though this might be an advantage, still I hardly think that it would be advisable, for the farmers are the very class whom we wish to reach, and any action limiting the attendance might have a tendency to cause them to think that we were trying to stand aloof from them.

My own opinion is that the experimental regular meeting has prospered so well that it would be hardly safe to meddle with it, remembering the good old adage "to let well enough alone."

To my mind we want a society inside the other which would carry out the main object which the promoters of the Union apparently had in view. I would suggest that the membership be limited to Associates and those who had attended the College at any time in the past. This would include the third year men at the College and such Professors who could qualify on these grounds, and the President of the College, whom, I think, should be Honorary President. The first