

XLVII. LITERARY SOCIETIES.

Since its organization seventy-five years ago Plymouth has had several what were called "Literary Societies," none of which, however, survived any great length of time, or accomplished anything of importance during their existence. The first that gained any particular attention was what was called "The Shakespearean Literary Society", organized in the early eighties. Those who took part in the organization were readers and students of literature who believed that in numbers and concert of action the members would be brought closer together and a new impetus would be given which would result in a more through study of literature in all its various phases. Those who became members and perfected the organization, if memory is not at fault, were M.A.O. Packard, Mr. and Mrs. O.M. Packard, Miss Stella Packard, Miss Kittie McDonald, Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Bray, Louis McDonald, Judge and Mrs. Isaih Connor, of Rochester, Bert J. Gilmore, Miss Hattie Boeckling, Daniel McDonald, O.P. Klinger and Will Funk the humorist. The object of the society was particularly to read, discuss and analyze the plays of Shakespeare, but other famous authors were considered at almost every meeting. At each meeting a member was selected to write a report of the proceedings, to be read and considered at the next meeting. This proved to be a very interesting feature of the proceedings. Some of them were considered sufficiently meritorious for publication in the local paper. From the report of the first meeting, as showing the trend of the program, the following extracts are herewith reproduced:

"The meeting of the Shakespearean Literary Society, though the initial one, with the machinery so new and untried that there was necessarily a good deal of friction to overcome, was nevertheless full of interest. One

important feature of the society was by no means neglected, and that was the social amenities. If men and women would only understand that the highest and most satisfying conditions of happiness that leaves no sting behind that enlarges and ennobles our common nature, that quickens our sensibilities and inspires our better thoughts and impulses is the cultivation of our social faculties, there would certainly be more attention paid to it. It would become more of a business than an incident of our lives.

"The literary exercises of the evening, though not as extensive as it is hoped they will be when we get into better training, were full of interest. One of our members recited that wonderful piece of human philosophy, 'The Soliloquy of Hamlet.' It can never be read or studied too much. Like a grand painting, each new study and inspection disclosed some brilliant part before concealed. Nowhere penned by man can be found in the same number of words such a boundless sweep of thought, or such a rich coinage of language. It is not too infrequently criticized as presenting a too morbid and melancholy view of life. It would not be Hamlet if it were less so. And after all, though I speak it sadly, is it not a pretty fair average type of life's voyage, with its boisterous billows to encounter, its adverse winds, its counter currents, its rayless nights, its shoals and dangerous reefs.

" Who would fardels bear
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death
The undiscovered country from whose bourne
No traveler returns puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others we know not of.

"He also read a choice selection from Richard III, in which are depicted the terrors of a horrid nightmare-the fruit of a guilty conscience. So vivid and startling is the wonderfully wrought vision that the recital of it

"Makes each particular hair stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.

" And then with what easy grace and exquisite tact he drops into moralizing over the condition of princes. It were as if liquid thought had been modeled in vessels fashioned from gems of the Golconda! Mark it :

'Sorrow breaks seasons and reposing hours,
Makes the night morning and the noontide night;
Princes have but their titles for their glories,
An outward honor for an inward toil,
And, for unfelt imaginations,"
They often feel a world of restless cares,
So that, between their titles and low name,
There's nothing differs but the outward fame!

" All hail Shakespeare, prince of bards! He stands as preeminently above all others who ever wrote a thought as Mont Blanc towers above the little hills in the quiet vale of the Chamouni.

Having compassed all the range of thought, there is no new world for a second Columbus to discover or a second Alexander to conquer."

This club, owing to the removal of several of the members and for one cause or another, lasted only about two years. But its influence resulted in infusing into the minds of those of a literary turn of mind a desire to know more of the hidden mysteries of literature lying dormant here and there and everywhere. And so shortly afterwards several ladies of Plymouth organized a literary society which is now known as

The Saturday Club.

Thirteen ladies constituted the membership at its first organization This was in the year 1886. On her return from Germany during th(summer of that year, Miss Mary Arnold, a cousin of the late Senator Reeve and formerly a teacher in the Plymouth schools, organized two classes for the purpose of studying English literature, Taine's English, Literature being used as a text in both classes. The following named ladies composed the two classes: In the first were Mesdames Katherine Corbin, Harriet E. Blain, Olive Blain, Ella M. Veits, Carrie Reeve, Sarah R. Toan, Mary E. Thayer, Mary Buck, Mary L. M. Thayer and Miss Celesta Simons. In the second, Misses Charlotte Armstrong, Lou Ella K. Houghton, Jeanne Oglesbee and Katherine McDonald. In February, 1887, the two classes united, the joint meeting being held at the home of Miss Jeanne Oglesbee, at which meeting Miss Phebe Thompson joined the class. During this year two delightful open evenings were held. The work under Miss Arnold's instruction had been so profitable and enjoyable that at her urgent request the members decided to form a permanent class. At the last meeting of the class, held at the home of Mrs. Carrie Reeve, it was decided to organize a literary society as the most efficient means of continuing the work. The society was named the "Mary Arnold Literary Society ," the first officers being: President, Mrs. Katharine Corbin; vice- president, Miss Phebe Thompson, and secretary, Mrs. Harriet E. Blain. The charter members were thirteen in number, to which two more were added at the beginning of the work in the fall of 1887. "Miss Maertz' Outlines" were adopted as a foundation for study and followed for three years. During these years the whole realm of literature was traversed, from the highways of the great masters to the by-ways of our own local contributors. The same officers were retained and the work pursued in the same quiet way until 1890-91, when a number of ladies became interested and desired to take up the work. The membership was enlarged to twenty-eight, the year being devoted to a special study of Milton, Pope, Dryden and other respective periods as treated in Taine's literature. With the increase in membership several new features were introduced, among which was a series of evening entertainments in which the active members were assisted by fifteen associate members. These ladies were privileged to attend the regular meetings, but were not required to take part in the program and did not vote. The first of these openings was held at the home of Mrs. Mary Marble, December 9, 1890, to celebrate Milton's birthday. A paper was read by Phebe Thompson, and the Hymn of the Nativity recited by Anna Combs. About 100 guests were present. The second open evening was held with Mrs. Ellen Simons. Mrs. Eva L. Underwood gave a resume of the Augustan period in literature. It being St. Valentine's day, the remainder of the evening was devoted to the reading and distribution of original valentines, in which the guests had been invited to

participate. Miss L. A. Borton became secretary in 1891. During June of this year Rev. Mr. Smith, of Evanston, Illinois, gave a most delightful course of six lectures on early English and Scotch literature. Tickets were sold and the public gave the society generous support. The work closed with but one event to mar the pleasure of the year. Death had entered the ranks for the first time, taking from our midst Mrs. Mary Buck, one of the thirteen charter members. She was a lovable character, whose sweetness of disposition and unselfishness endeared her to all who knew her. She was followed a year later by the death of Mrs. Olive Blain, another charter member, whose quiet, gentle ways had endeared her to every member. The season of 1892 and 1893 was crowded with good things. A new feature was added. "A Tourist Social," by means of which the ladies gave pleasure to themselves and friends by a series of addresses from their fellow townsmen who had journeyed abroad in the more remote parts of our country. The first of these was held at the home of Mrs. Marble, where H. G. Thayer delivered an address on "The Environment of London." The next was at the home of Mrs. Lattimore, at which Daniel McDonald gave a very interesting description of "Yellowstone Park." At the third "Tourist Social," which was held at the home of Mrs. Eva Underwood, Rev. W. W. Raymond read a most charming paper on "Hawthorn and His Works." In 1891 the society reorganized under the name of the "Ladies' Literary Society," with Mrs. Katharine Corbin, president; Mrs. Elizabeth Lattimore, vice-president; Miss Lou A. Borton, secretary. The study of American and continental literature was pursued until May, when the study of Shakespeare's plays was taken up for the summer work. October 22, 1892, Mrs. Elizabeth Lattimore was elected president; Mrs. Sarah R. Toan, vice-president; Miss Borton, secretary. At this time a new office was created, by which Miss Phebe Thompson became leader and general director of the program. During March, 1893, the society was fortunate in securing the services of Prof. Boon, who delighted everyone with his lecture on Richard Raelf, the soldier-poet. In October, 1893, Mrs. Lattimore was reelected president; Mrs. Sarah R. Toan, vice-president, and Estelle Chase, secretary. A series of ten open meetings was arranged for the year 1893-94, which were held at the home of the several members, at which time the following subjects were presented: "An Evening in the White City," by Mrs. Mary Thayer, hostess; "One of My Favorite Books," Mrs. Bessie Baker, hostess; "An Evening With Dickens," Mrs. Corbin, hostess. The program consisted of a pantomime procession of characters taken from Dickens. "Our Hoosier Poet, Riley," Mrs. H. E. Blain, hostess. Phebe Thompson and Florence Agnew gave a critical analysis of Riley's work, the former taking a favorable view, the latter an unfavorable view of his output. A spirited discussion followed, in which extempore battle of wit Judge Corbin took the lead in behalf of the poet, while H. G. Thayer led the opposition. The next open meeting was held at the home of Mrs. Estella Drummond, at which Judge Corbin read a paper on "Westminster Abbey," which was followed by fifty literary conundrums which were distributed among the people. The answers were to be the names of noted authors, which furnished Senator Reeve, who presided over this part of the program, opportunity to show his readiness in repartee. Miss Celeste Simons was hostess March 6th. The entertainment consisted

of stereopticon views of "The Twelve Great World Pictures," shown by D. Frank Redd and Jacob Martin. One hundred and fifty were present at this meeting. It brings back pleasant memories to those present on account of the spontaneous song service at the close, in which "Auld Lang Syne," "Old Oaken Bucket," and other songs of yesterday were participated in by all present. In April, 1894, an evening was devoted to Indiana authors, in which all the numbers were original productions of the members. In February, 1893, the society joined the "Indiana Union of Literary Clubs." The officers for 1894-95 were Mrs. Corbin, president; Miss Phebe Thompson, leader and vice-president; Mrs. Mary Kinsey, secretary. Two of the valued members of the society, Mrs. Jennie Borton and Mrs. Fannie Portmess-Work, died this year. The year 1895-96 was memorable for the society. Miss Celeste Simons was able to realize a dream of years in being able to furnish the society with a convenient and beautifully furnished clubroom which was used by the society for several years. The officers for 1895-96 were: Mrs. Mary W. Kinsey, president; Miss Angelica Thayer, vice-president; Miss Florence Agnew, secretary. The first meeting was held for the first time October 5, 1895, in the new clubroom. At this meeting the name was changed to "Saturday Club," which name it still retains. This year Mrs. Julia Blain became secretary. Printed programs were given out for the year's work, the subject being, "Primitive American Races and Early American History." The social events of this year were a lecture by Mrs. Ford, of Chicago, on "Shakespeare's Women," followed by a reception; and a reception given in honor of Mrs. Virginia Meredith, of Connorsville, president of the Indiana Union of Literary Clubs. For the year 1896-97, Mrs. Julia Blain, president; Mrs. Ida E. R. Smith, vice-president; Miss Alice C. Klinger, secretary. The study for the year was confined to South America, Central America and Mexico. The social events of the year were confined to a club tea at the clubroom and a banquet on Washington's birthday. Colonial costumes were worn and each lady took her own supply of dishes. Old-fashioned souvenir dishware taken and a description of them and the historical events with which they were connected proved of great interest. January 16, 1897, Mrs. Elizabeth Lattimore, former member and president of the club, died at Crown Point, Indiana. Memorial services were held in her honor on the day of her burial. Officers 1897-98: Miss Simons, president; Mrs. Corbin, vice-president; Mrs. Mary Morrison, secretary. Program for the year, American History, etc. In February, 1898, occurred one of the most enjoyable evenings the club had experienced. Mrs. Elizabeth Armstrong Reed, of Chicago, delivered her famous lecture on "Mythology." The lecture was followed by a reception and supper given in her honor, to which a large number of guests had been invited. During the year 1898-99 Miss Simons, owing to failing health, resigned, and Mrs. Toan presided the remainder of the year. The social events of this year were the usual celebration of Washington's birthday, a lecture by Mrs. Ford, entitled "Eugene Field and James Whitcomb Riley," and a farewell party at the close of the year. At this party Mr. Rotzein took a picture of the club seated at the table. The officers for 1900 were: Mrs. Toan, president; Mrs. Underwood, vice-president; Mary L. M. Thayer, secretary, and Miss Thompson, leader. The club was plunged in gloom September 16th of this year by the death

of Mrs. Katharine Corbin, the first president of the club. She had been one of the most active and devoted members from the beginning. This year was devoted to Bible study, as literature and history. The first meeting of the year 1900 was held in October, with Mrs. Underwood, president; Mrs. M. L. M. Thayer, vice-president; Mrs. Ada B. Butler, secretary, and Miss Klinger, leader. The study of the Bible was continued and several social meetings for the members held. A called meeting was held August 16th at the home of Mrs. Thayer in honor of Mrs. Phebe Thompson- Willey on her return from Australia. Mrs. Mary L. M. Thayer, president ; Mrs. Ida E. R. Smith, vice-president; Alice C. Klinger, secretary. The year was devoted to the consideration of current events, banquets, sleigh- ride parties, etc. No change of officers was made in 1905. England, Shakespeare and American History furnished the theme for the year. A special meeting was held January 12th at Mrs. Underwood's, for the study of the art collection of the Union Literary Clubs. The carnation was adopted as the club flower. The year closed with a social afternoon and supper with Miss Olive Thompson. Mrs. Butler became president; Mrs. Winnings, vice-president, and Annie Morrill, secretary. The chief feature of the gala day was a burlesque exhibit of works of art. The attempts of the ladies at sculpture in the form of clay modeling were very classic in results. The officers at the close of 1907 are: President, Mrs. Phebe Thompson- Wiley ; vice-president, Mrs. Jesse Toan- Brooks; secretary, Mrs. Mary K. Hitchcock.

The club began "A Journey Through the United States" last September, starting from Plymouth, and to arrive at the national capitol in May, 1908. There have always been the strongest ties of friendship and affection between the members of the club. Very few have resigned except from sickness and absence from town. All feel that the influence of the Saturday Club is for good only. The members have not desired to place themselves conspicuously before the public. Their aim has been to broaden their own lives by this close contact with others of like tastes and aspirations. They feel that their influence has been more far-reaching than had they been less conservative. While the membership is at present limited to thirty-five for convenience in management, it is not the intention to exclude any who may wish to take up active work. The club is a most remarkable one. It is composed entirely of women and has been in existence continuously without interruption for well on towards a quarter of a century. In the sphere of its work it has accomplished great good in elevating the standard of knowledge and right thinking, and generally in cultivating the ethics of right living.