

## A Winter Night College

By W. A. Platt

For two seasons we have had in Colorado Springs an institution the plan and the practical working of which are so admirable that perhaps if it were more widely known it would be of use to other cities. This institution is called the Winter Night College. The originator, organizer, President, and engineer of it is the Rev. Livingston L. Taylor, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, and the sessions are held in that building. It is in no sense, however, a denominational institution. The membership is from many churches, and more than half the Faculty are not Presbyterians.

Perhaps the easiest and clearest way to describe the institution is to give a short account of the way in which its work is begun. The initiative lies with the President or organizer, who invites to meet him a few persons—from six to ten—most of whom he regards as probable leaders or teachers of "circles." These persons constitute the Council. They decide what topics shall be taken up and who shall lead the circle in each topic. The consent of the appointed leaders having been obtained, announcement is made in the newspapers that there will be a preliminary meeting for enrollment, and that circles will be formed for the study of certain topics. This year in our College the courses offered were Current Topics, Civics, Social Science, Geology, Sanitary Science, Shakespeare, Classic Myths in English Literature, and a "Journey Club" to make the "grand tour" of Great Britain and the Continent. At the preliminary meeting—which was held nearly a month before the first regular session—and during the time intervening between that and the first session, all the circles enrolled a satisfactory number (from seven to twenty-one), except that in Sanitary Science, which was then dropped. The work of the circles has now been going on for two months, and there has been an average attendance of about one hundred and fifty in all, and four of the circles have averaged over twenty members at each meeting.

The circles in Shakespeare, Myths, Civics, and Geology use a text-book, and the Social Science circle for four meetings used Dr. Strong's "New Era" as a basis for their discussions. The circle in Current Topics and the Journey Club use no text-books, but make free use of books of reference.

The method of conducting the work of each circle is necessarily left largely to the discretion of the leader. In Current Topics the leader announces each evening the topic for the next, the members reading up meantime whatever they can. This circle has occupied itself thus far largely with the discussion of the recent elections, the Hawaiian question, and the tariff, but is now proceeding to discuss immigration, Socialism, and other topics of the day. In Geology, Le Conte's book is used as a basis for study, and the leader delivers lectures upon which the members of the circle take notes and ask questions. In Civics the text-book is Cocker's "Government of the United States," and the Constitution is the basis of study. Topics are sometimes assigned for outside investigation and short reports, and the leader conducts the circle by means of question and answer. In the Journey Club topics are also assigned for reports, but the leader does most of the work, illustrating his ciceronian discourse with photographs and maps. In Classic Myths the question and answer method is used to some extent, supplemented by the fuller information of the leader. In the Social Science circle there is a free discussion, based upon the book in hand.

The leaders of the circles are of varied professions. Two are ministers (Social Science and Shakespeare), two are teachers (Current Topics and Myths), one is a professor in college (Geology), two are newspaper men (Civics and Journey Club). One of the leaders (Myths) is a woman, and her circle is one of the largest and most enthusiastic.

The finances are in charge of a Secretary-treasurer, who

keeps the minutes, receives fees, disburses money upon authorization of the Council, and makes a record of attendance. The fee for the whole course is one dollar. This money pays for lighting and heating the church during sessions. Text-books are obtained at special rates from the publishers, and sold at cost to members.

Last season the enrollment was something over one hundred, and the average attendance, including visitors, about the same. This season the enrollment and average attendance are about one hundred and fifty.

The plan has proved a most practical one, elastic enough to be adapted easily to new or changing conditions, but firm enough to insure some real work and intellectual improvement on the part of those who attend. The sessions are held every Friday evening from 7:30 to 9 o'clock. The opening exercises consist of a hymn, reading of Scripture, and prayer. Circle work begins at 7:45 and ends at 8:30. A fifteen-minute report follows, before the whole assembly, by one of the leaders, on the work of his particular circle, so that members of all the circles are kept somewhat informed as to what each of the others is doing. Such reports have been made on the Hawaiian question, the formation of the Constitution, the tariff, classic myths, Macbeth's character, and the formation of metalliferous veins in granite. Following the report, if there is time, there may be miscellaneous exercises.

Colorado Springs, Colo.



## The Writer as a Wage-Earner

By Charles Howard Shinn

The other day several young writers were discussing the "bread and butter problem." "We write," they said, "and some of our articles are accepted, but we cannot earn as much as if we were teaching country schools or hoeing corn. We are heedful of the good advice given us by older and better-known writers, though much of what they say consists of platitudes—and priggish, exasperating platitudes at that. As we know very well, there is 'room at the top,' but that does not seem to improve our tempers any. What we want is a safe and modest income that we can depend upon, and then we can perhaps bring out what is in us."

If one reads even a tenth part of the articles that are printed in these days about "literary compensation," it becomes evident that a great cloud of witnesses have agreed upon its inadequacy. Let us for a moment consider both sides, and see if some working suggestions cannot be evolved.

The editorial side of the matter has been stated with great force and clearness in the Easy Chair of "Harper's Monthly;" in a delightful essay by Mr. James E. Learned, of the New York "Evening Post," entitled "The Worm Turns," and printed several years ago in the "Forum;" and in various articles that have appeared in the leading publications of the country. To be frank, some of the most brilliant writing of the times has gone into bits of pleading and argument with that troublesome personage, the "Young Writer." Whatever else in a magazine goes unread, a calm, judicial article upon such a subject as "Why Strephon's Verses were Returned with Regrets" is certain to strike a hidden chord in many an unsuspected place. So universal in these days is this sort of warning that every well-equipped editorial office might easily contain a scrap-book entitled "The Discourager of Authorship," in which should be placed every obtainable magazine article, editorial, and newspaper clipping that is calculated to warn young writers of the difficulties of the literary path. This should be given to every one who brings a manuscript, or calls to ask about the fate of one.

There are a few geniuses among writers who take everything by storm, command their own rewards, and need only the warning that from him to whom much has been given much shall be required. There is also a whole army of hopeful, patient workers, full of every-day talents, and much in earnest. These "stand in the market-place,"

waiting for a call; these bear the heat and burden of the day, and make up the host of the toilers of literature. It must be their highest praise and greatest consolation that, in the aggregate, they are "the interpreters to the people." Like the "minor poets" of the land, they come and go; but the succession endures, and keeps the undercurrent continually fresh and sweet. It is only when the minor poets claim to be great poets that they lose their place and value; it is only when these writers forget the law of usefulness to their fellow-man that they sink towards the class of "incapables," of which more anon.

The supply of "fairly passable" literary work far exceeds the demand. Waste effort and futile struggle, under these conditions, are inevitable. No man may number the host of "rejected addresses" that vainly woo busy editors. The worst of it is that many a writer picks up his waif when it returns disconsolate, and sends it to another editor, and another, and yet another, until it seems like a water-logged, barnacle-covered hulk, drifting heedlessly about the ocean, the terror of every voyager. The "old editor" may be forgiven if he shrugs his shoulders when such manuscripts drift his way, and sends them back unread. "Passable literary work," all of it, but there is no room in these days for the hundredth part. When a magazine has fifty bright short stories accepted, the aspirant must bring to its relentless critic a new story that is better than any of them. By that law of competition the standard is being raised every year. Many a writer who does work that would have been good enough for the best magazines of a quarter of a century ago is now barely able to keep his place in the second rate or third-rate publications.

Again, as we all agree, nothing can be done for the "incapables." Those men and women who cannot do effective writing, and cannot teach themselves how to do it, cannot be taught how by any one else. They cannot be helped by social aids, by personal friendships, or by the tin trumpets of "mutual admiration societies." No one else can write them into a permanent literary reputation. If they have money and publish their own books, those books will fall flat on the market; and if they start their own periodicals, those periodicals will not obtain subscribers.

Among the incapables are all kinds of interesting personages; but the editor who allows his sympathies to run away with him is doomed to sorrow and failure. Ah, the pity of the struggle that one sees and cannot possibly help! Sad mothers write out their girlhood experiences, their shattered dreams, their pretty pet phrases—for the sake of bread for their hungry children. The daughter of some old and stately family—some brilliant, luxurious Lady Serena, full of dainty ways and graceful refinements, but suddenly left poor, helpless, and without a salable talent, flies to the inkstand for refuge, remembering how often she has been told that she "ought to write a novel." These, and such as these, may stand for illustrations of the pitiful, ineffectual struggle of which every editor is aware. All about the charmed gates the incapables crowd, fascinated beyond recall by the basilisk eyes of the demon of *cacoths scribendi*, and nothing can be done except to hand them back their articles. Sometimes I doubt if there be a more hopeless, horrible sight on earth than this, of the army of men and women writing day and night, neglecting home duties, besieging their friends and every editorial office, watching the mail with feverish eagerness, and never meeting with any success worth the name.

The editor of a monthly magazine once told me of his experience with one of the "incapables." The would-be writer had published much verse for glory in the country newspapers. He called on the editor with letters of introduction, stayed a long time, and left an assorted lot of poems, which were all found to be inconceivably bad, and were returned as "unavailable." The next day the indignant poet appeared, and wanted the subject reopened. He said there was certainly a mistake somewhere, and offered in evidence of the value of his poetry a number of testimonial letters from individuals who had said nice things about it, and had called him the "rising young poet of Ophir Gulch," the "Shakespeare of the Sierras," and

similarly convincing names. "Was the editor prepared to impugn the good faith and judgment of the Honorable Patrick Malony, ex-Assemblyman from Mount Shasta District, and the candidate of the county for Governor?"

"But," said the editor, "these admirable letters are entirely irrelevant. I had the honor to read some of your poems, and they did not make me feel that way. There is no opinion to be consulted in this matter except my own. Bring me poetry that I want to use, and I will print it."

The poet then stated that he and his friends thought that his poetry was much better than any that was appearing in the magazine, and he asked, with fine scorn, whether such autocratic decisions were justifiable by any editorial code of morals.

The editor felt that the case was hopeless, but he made another effort: "Why should you not get an unbiased opinion on your poetry, since you doubt mine? Make a list of ten of the leading publications of the United States, and send the same poems that I have returned, to these publications, one after another, inclosing stamps for return if not 'available.' The only test you can trust is the test of market value."

The poet went away without another word, and, after some years of vain battering at the doors, began to publish his verses in pamphlets and give them away to all his acquaintances, with the declaration that the whole country was run by literary cliques who were the enemies of genius.

Successful writing, like any other kind of success, is the result of long training and first-rate mechanical skill. The same faithful attention to details that is necessary to success in a trade or profession is necessary to success in literature. A young lawyer or physician expects to work hard and earn little for years while he is "becoming known;" the young writer must pay the same price for success. He must study "all the side issues," the newspapers that pay, the pamphlet-writing, report-making, and specialist work of a thousand sorts. The greater part of many a well-equipped writer's income is from sources of whose very existence the amateur is ignorant. I remember one case where the prospectus of a great vineyard company had to be prepared to go to England. A writer who knew outdoor California thoroughly was sent for, and the maps and experts' reports were laid before him.

"We want two thousand words in the best of English. What will it cost, and when can we have it?"

"It will cost fifty dollars; and you can have it to-morrow at nine o'clock."

Just as soon as a writer is known to be honest, capable, reliable, and "as professional as a lawyer," his services are in demand. He can do a great many things that pay at least as well as the ordinary work for the periodicals does, and much of it can be made more or less educational. A fellow-worker of mine used to say that a man ought to get a newspaper sketch, a story, and a magazine article out of every investigation he takes up.

"Take your coat off," was his phrase, "jump in, and seize the bottom facts, whether the subject is yacht-racing or custom-house frauds. When you know all about it, utilize the material in as many ways as possible, then drop it out of sight and out of mind."

He justified his own theory, for he was certainly one of the most successful of writers. He wrote for "bread and butter," but he took solid comfort in the business. Yet I am sure that he had no especial talent as a writer except a really remarkable lack of worry. He never "talked shop;" he never "fussed," or wasted time, or sent his "stuff" to impossible markets. Editors soon discovered that he was safe, straightforward, and always turning out work of a high average. One editor was heard to say of him that he "lacked all the ordinary vanities of writers, and was therefore the most delightful of men." He once said of himself that his land grew potatoes, which he could always sell in one market or another, and he "never cared a continental which boarding-house took them." He added that he had many consolations out of his work as he went along; that he greatly admired the orchid-houses