THE HIGH SCHOOL BOTANICAL CLUB.

BY WILLARD N. CLUTE.

Joliet, Ill.

It is not to be expected that every subject taught in the high school can be made so attractive that pupils will be inclined to continue it after the course has been completed, but among those that do occasionally command this interest in adult life, none has a more prominent place than botany. Indeed, the objects with which it deals are so attractive in themselves and the pursuit of these objects is so fraught with pleasurable experiences in field, wood, and garden that many who have never studied the subject in school have taken it up by themselves and became accomplished botanists. It is therefore to be expected that when properly taught it will appeal very strongly to the young student who, if normal, may be assumed to have a lively interest in all sorts of outdoor activities. With a little encouragement his interest in plants may be made permanent and the student started on a course that will afford him a pleasant pastime for his leisure hours and bring him much enjoyment and profit throughout his life.

It is a matter of common experience that students enjoy their work more and get better results when several are working together on the same problem than they would if working alone and this principle is often made use of in the laboratory by giving a group of students an experiment to perform or a problem to solve. In the same way a botanical club may serve to develop any latent interest in the subject of botany and to stimulate good students to increased activity. This may result in good to the whole community by inspiring a greater interest in parks and public playgrounds, the preservation of spots of historic interest or scenic beauty, and the general improvement of the locality. The writer knows of several clubs of this kind that have existed long enough to prove their worth and confidently expects to see a great increase in their numbers when their value is better known. Nor need the teacher conclude that in forming such a club he is working solely for the good of others. He may not be benefited botanically by such a course but his reward is none the less certain and comes with the development about him of a group of young people interested in the things in which he is interested and capable of discussing intelligently with him his special problems.

The wise teacher will probably let the organization of such a club depend largely upon the efforts of the pupils themselves. If there are not enough students to push the project through to a successful issue after it has been explained to them, it had better be abandoned until there are a sufficient number. This difficulty, however, is seldom encountered since a large society at the start is not desirable; in fact it is seldom worth while to strive for mere numbers. Better half a dozen members thoroughly interested than five times as many that must constantly be urged to do their part. A club can profitably be organized if there promises to be a membership large enough to fill all the offices.

Experience would also indicate that the club should be officered and run by the pupils themselves, the teacher acting simply in an advisory and judicial capacity. It also seems advisable to restrict the membership to those who have shown some proficiency in botany instead of throwing it open to all who may apply. This is upon the supposition that a pupil who does not have a mark of at least 85 for one semester's work in the subject is not sufficiently interested to make a desirable member. For similar reasons it is usual to adopt a rule that members absent from three regular meetings without good excuse shall be dropped from the rolls. Without some such rule the club is likely to find itself burdened with a large number of pleasure-loving members especially if it is active in promoting field trips, camping parties, and the like. In most cases the dues are quite low—not more than 25 or 50 cents a year—the necessary funds for special occasions such as banquets or excursions being raised by special assessments upon the members taking part. In some clubs the treasury is depended upon for a certain per cent of such expenses.

It is usual to have stated meetings once or twice a month for the reading and discussion of papers. These are usually held after school but may be held in the evening if circumstances warrant. In addition to the regular meetings, extra meetings for the celebration of special events may be held. At least one banquet should be held annually for the rounding up of the year's work and perhaps a reception to the new members if these are elected to membership at stated times, say at the beginning of the term.

The program at regular meetings is usually based upon one of two distinct types. In the one, members purchase the book agreed upon by the club and discuss it, chapter by chapter, after the manner of the well-known Chautauqua Circle. In the second, and

much better plan when it can be carried out successfully, the students write and present the papers, being helped thereto by the suggestions and advice of the teacher. A variety of subjects for papers will at once present themselves to the mind of the latter. Students who have visited distant lands may speak of the curious plants seen, the rare fruits of the markets may be discussed, while the spices, dyes, drugs, fibers, oils, gums, perfumes, etc., found in store and market and museum will form an endless list of subjects for investigation in the library. The botanists of the region may be called upon for instructive talks while the teacher of botany should be depended upon to fill any gaps in the program that may occur. As much as possible, however, the papers should be based upon the original observations of the pupils. Those with a taste for field work may take up a plant family for careful study, and the rare plants of the region may be exhibited and their peculiarities dwelt upon. Those who have a taste for microscopic work may take up such subjects as the shape of cells, forms of pollen grains, plant hairs, structures found in cells, and the like, illustrating their remarks by drawings of the objects described. The rock upon which many clubs split is the difficulty of getting enough good papers for the programs. As a means to this end it is often required that each new officer present a paper before the other members of the club are called upon to do so.

Botany being largely an out-of-door study the club will make no mistake in promoting all sorts of activities in the open air such as picnics, skating parties, straw rides, nutting parties, field trips, and camping parties. On pleasant Saturdays in the milder parts of the year, excursions may be made to points of local botanical interest, while in winter the city greenhouses and museums may be visited. Many of the trips suggested can scarcely be classed as botanical but are warranted by the interest in the main subject which their association with it stirs up. The club will be found to exert a wholesome effect upon the study of botany in the school, most pupils being not only willing but anxious to do good work in order to secure an election to the club. A botany class interested in the subject practically teaches itself and while the object of getting into the botanical club may not be the highest motive that might actuate the student, one may take advantage of it, trusting to a greater familiarity with this delightful science to inspire a more worthy interest.