

The Women Returned Students Club



Mrs. H. C. Mei

This is a new association of some two dozen young ladies making a modest beginning in what might be called the discovery of their social mind. In a cosmopolitan and business center like Shanghai where cluster a diversity of organizations, religious, commercial, or social, the only warrant a new association has for being is the distinctive and thoroly useful objective it seeks to attain. Judged by this test the Women's Returned Students Club fills a place all its own in Shanghai's fast growing and fast moving life and that place is defined by its constitution and confirmed by its activities. In this city there are no less than thirty young women who have studied for sometime in America or Europe. About a third of this number have returned to China for from ten to twelve years, another third during the last four or five years, while the remainder are new arrivals. The first group of women have engaged themselves mostly as educators or physicians each carrying on her particular profession with credit to her training and much benefit to her country. The second group of women have generally chosen, perhaps unintentionally, their special field of work in the creating of better homes and of assisting the Y. W. C. A. and similar institutions in their far-reaching activities, especially in a varied and practical program for the reform of modern society within and without the home.

To classify the special interest of the last and new group is not so easy, as they have not yet had time to get adjusted to their present surroundings and are still searching out their particular niche in the scheme of life. But there is a distinct tendency among this new group of women, toward the cultivation of the Muses. Most of them have taken music as their special interest, and one young lady has begun making use of her training as an artist to bring about better understanding of the meaning of form and color among Chinese women. Interesting and distinct as these groups are, yet not until a year ago were steps taken to unite them in an organization so

that the experiences of each could be utilized in making greater headway toward helping the country.

Union came about through a questionnaire sent out by the student secretary of the Y.W.C.A. to find out what part the Women Returned Students were taking in the church life of the community. A meeting was thereafter called and about twenty young women attended. Following this informal beginning a tentative organization was formed with Mrs. C. C. Chen as temporary chairman but with no definite object or program except that each member was to try out work in the churches for a period of six months. That period ended in October, 1919 with some work started in a few churches, such as the leading of Sunday school and Bible classes, the organization and directing of church clubs for women or girls and the training of church choirs. But to continue this work there arose a strong conviction among the members that they should organize with a definite object and the result was another meeting at which officers were elected the purpose of the club defined and a program initiated and about twenty pledged to become members. The general objects adopted by the club were first, to cultivate among the members a spirit of cooperation and friendliness; second, to promote by all lawful and practical means the common welfare of our sister-women, and lastly to endeavor to reform the outstanding social evils and harmful customs of our people. At this writing the club is scarcely a half year old but it might be of interest to know that though so young and small it had accomplished a few worthy results besides the work carried on steadily by some Christian members in their several churches.

During the last Y.W.C.A. campaign, the club, mindful of its purpose to be helpful, organized itself into a team to assist in the securing of funds for the Y.W.C.A. and netted the cause a goodly sum. An urgent call came from the Women's Social Service League of Shanghai for the maintenance of a free school for poor children. The Returned Student's club responded for that cause by voting nearly half of its available funds. During the Christmas season the club remembered the American single women engaged in various work in the city and planned a whole afternoon and evening for their entertainment. Miss Beulah Chang generously opened up her spacious home for the occasion. Similar to the Christmas party was a delightful and picturesque celebration of May Day which took place just recently at the home of Mrs. K. S. Lee. On this occasion the wives of the men returned students were guests of honor. Besides cultivating friendships the club has encouraged its members in educating the public by means of lectures. During the initial stage of the students strike several of the club members spoke to large audiences of girls on "What is Patriotism" and "The Strength of China" and other kindred subjects. Others have chosen "The Home and its Problems" as their theme. Judged by the interest the outside women and girls are taking in such work of the club the writer feels that a good start has been made to show our people that the foreign educated women are no shirkers but are anxious to do their bit for their people and their country. The spirit of service is all there and as the club grows in years as well as in strength it will grasp more and more opportunities to work some concrete good to our time and generation of women by laying the foundation for systematic self-help for and among the women of China.