

## CLUBS WHICH ENTERTAIN

## THEY REAP A REWARD IN INCREASED MEMBERSHIPS.

THE INNOVATION ENJOYED BY ALL BUT A SELECT FEW—ACTORS ROYALLY TREATED—STRAY NOTES.

The "innovations" of the theory and spirit of club life that have become popular within the past few years are often the subject of discussion, and it may be added, of dissension, among members. By innovations is meant "ladies' receptions," "Saturday nights," "art receptions," "musicales," and dinners to celebrities, permitting members to entertain personal guests. The spirit and theory of a club as derived from London, where the club is even more than here a social institution only ranking second to the home, is that of privacy and exclusiveness—a resort only for the members and for such solely and none others. With the exception possibly of the Savage, where some entertainments and dinners are given to which members can bring outsiders, and where members of the Lotos are admitted on a three months' interchange card, and a swell club called the Marlborough, at which during specified hours the members can entertain ladies in the restaurant—the fundamental and time-honored idea of privacy and exclusiveness is as religiously observed as in the more prominent and stable clubs of this city, like the ancient Union or the younger, but not less dignified, Knickerbocker. In neither of these clubs can residents not members obtain admission except as guests to dinner in the private rooms, and where the card system for foreigners is charily extended. So rigorously observed is the rule regarding the introduction of residents except as guests at a private dinner—when they pass immediately from the reception room into the private room without a glimpse of the other apartments—that those members who recently engaged several of their friends in the Lotos Club in a friendly game of billiards cannot return the compliment in their own house without a special and unprecedented suspension of the rules by the Governing Committee or the placing of a billiard table in a private dining room, while not long since in the Union League a member was suspended for 15 days for thoughtlessly taking in a friend to get a drink while passing on his way up town.

While it is true that the innovations mentioned—approved by some as a good feature of club life and condemned by others as unclublike—can be attended alike by all the members able to go, (excepting, indeed, in the recent unprecedented case of the Union League charging members a subscription for the tickets to the ladies' reception, unnecessarily excluding on the occasion in question those members who did not thereby secure admission,) these entertainments interfere more or less seriously with the domestic arrangements and routine of the club, disturbing the serenity and accommodations therein to the extent that the members do not find that privacy and personal comfort insured by the spirit and theory of their institution. Of course, those clubs organized for special purposes of giving these entertainments do not belong in this category, and there are many such in the numerous catalogue of the clubs in this city.

On the other hand, it has been found that the Saturday nights and art reunions are a very successful secret of recruiting or increasing the membership; in other words, of building up the club. Though the Century had been giving its monthly art receptions for years, and the now defunct but very jolly—so long as it lasted—Athenæum Club gave social reunions, permitting members to introduce guests, the credit or onus of all the modern innovations of club life belongs unquestionably to the Lotos Club and its offshoot, and for a time formidable rival, the Arcadian, which dissolved into the Palette, and finally disbanded, after an unsuccessful but brave struggle to eclipse the Lotos. The latter club attained its prominence and prosperity through the influence of its ladies' receptions, Saturday nights, dinners to foreign and domestic celebrities, and art reunions, and the Athletic undoubtedly owes much of its popularity and growth to the entertainments given in its parlors and its splendid gymnasium, (the finest, probably, in the world,) while unquestionably the frequent afternoon ladies' receptions and art displays of the Union League have contributed much toward the social success and stability of that institution. It cannot be denied that all these entertainments and receptions are innovations of the fundamental idea of the organization of a club, but such have now become so general in this city that each new club adopts the curriculum as a speedy means of obtaining recognition, and consequently there are now comparatively only a few clubs that do not entertain in this way. It is not likely that the Union or the Knickerbocker or the New-York or the University Club will ever adopt the system; their membership is full, or there are numerous applications, and the sentiment in each is opposed to the innovation.

It is not correct, however, to ascribe the chief motive of the various entertainments given to a desire to attract new members as much as to promote the enjoyment of those who have already joined, many of them because of these frequently recurring and pleasant affairs. In none of the clubs is the regular attendance more than 25 per cent. of the membership, and in many it probably would not average 15 per cent.; but on the occasions of these entertainments there is a general rally and festivity, and the inconveniences and domestic derangement incidental to the affair are for the moment forgotten even by the mugwump element. And that these entertainments always occasion a general disturbance in the serenity of the routine privacy and comfort any housewife can readily understand. The departure from the routine of the well-regulated household of the club, generally conducted on man-o'-war principles, affects the domestics as well as the habitués, and continues for several days.

The opponents of the innovation are especially severe in condemning the ladies' receptions, claiming that a clubhouse is a resort designed for gentlemen, and is no place for ladies, their attendance being an interruption, indeed a violation, of the customs and comforts of the club, as on these occasions the members who wish to enjoy themselves in their usual ways are restricted to several rooms, the rest being thrown open to the fair visitors, who, in their natural desire to inspect the lion's lair, never miss the opportunity. It must be admitted that the habitués of the club, who are really its minority, are much put about by the ladies and the art receptions for several days, but they are in the minority, and the rights of the more numerous class, who pay their dues but never come excepting on these occasions, are also to be considered. There is, however, a consistent regard for the fundamental idea of club life, and probably if a vote were taken in the several clubs regarding the giving of entertainments that disturb its domestic routine the majority would be against the innovation, although the system has become a recognized characteristic of the said club. It would at all events be an interesting question to test by a popular vote, as the sentiment of all properly governed clubs is always to justly regard the minority views, especially as in this case the minority would constitute the frequenting element, the daily patrons. The expenses of these entertainments are generally defrayed from the treasury of the club. The custom of the bar and restaurant is largely increased on the occasions of these entertainments by the augmented attendance of members with their guests, who are generally royally entertained, but this accrues to the benefit of the speculating steward and not to the club, and the expenditure is therefore to be charged to the profit and loss account, the theory being that it is wise and advisable because attracting new members besides pleasing those participating. In the clubs which do not conduct their own bar and restaurant, billiard and card room through a salaried man a speculating steward assumes all the risks and pockets all the profits, charging higher average prices than in the others, generally receiving a subsidy of from \$1,500 to \$5,000 to secure him against loss in consequence of the limited and fluctuating patronage, which is never reliable because of dining out or absence from the city, even among those classed as habitués. No one ever knows, it may be remarked *en passant*, how much the speculating steward of a club makes; it is the standing joke in the clubs employing such that a loser is generally persistently claimed by him.

So frequently are these Saturday nights and musicales given in the several clubs that it is beginning to be found difficult to secure volunteer professional talent. In the New-York Athletic Club, the Athletic, and the Lotos there is sufficient amateur talent to give their entertainments if it was called upon, as on the occasion the other night at the initial musicale of the New-York Yacht Club in their cozy Winter quarters on Madison-avenue, when the dangerous precedent of a costly *petit souper* of terrapin stew and other delicacies *ad lib.* was established. The numerous professional membership of the Lambs' Club could, if arranged, give an entertainment that would be a memorable constellation of stars, but this club will not contemplate any festivity beyond its regular nocturnal rally around the round tables in its comfortable parlors and its dinner in the third Sunday of the month.

The professional talent that appears at these entertainments is always gratuitous if not volunteer, and it is generally considered a feather in the cap of those who are invited or afforded an opportunity. The artists are always handsomely entertained by the House Committee, and often carriages are sent to convey them to and fro. In order to enlist their interest and loyalty actors are required by the Lambs only to pay the annual dues, while the Washington Club, which frequently has a Saturday night, throws open its doors to them, and now the Lotos has adopted a rule authorizing the Election Committee to remit the initiation of professionals in its discretion. At the Athletic and the New-York Yacht Club professionals, especially the male members of "The Mikado" company, are always royally treated. The entertainment and care of the contributing talent is not the only expense occasioned to the club by these various entertainments, but there are numerous incidental disbursements that often make them rather costly in the opinion of the opposing class. The Lotos for the past two years has shown a tendency to restrict its entertainments, whether from motives of economy or because a foreign or home celebrity could not be selected for them to dine is not known, but now announces an art reception for the 27th Inst., and the first ladies' reception of the season

for the ensuing Monday, which will upset their domestic routine for four days. It is whispered that the Governing Committee of the Athletic is finding their regular Saturday nights proving too expensive, and it is intimated that unless the fund for the purpose is recruited by volunteer contributions these entertainments may be less frequent. The numerous membership of this club crowds the house on the occasions of the entertainments in the parlors or the gymnasium. There is no truth that the staid and aspiring Manhattan will indulge in a Saturday night rally or two before the season closes. The extent of their dissipation is the regular reception to the successful Democratic candidate for Governor or President. It is true it has so far fallen into the line of modern innovation as to allow members the privilege of introducing a resident twice during the fiscal year which is enjoyed now by those in nearly all the clubs excepting the Union, New-York, Knickerbocker, University, Union League, Calumet, and Century.

There is little news in club circles this week. There has been a lively accession to the St. Nicholas since the announcement of the removal to the avenue, and the Calumet, with the same intention, is also increasing its membership.

It is said that the now passing away tight-money period occasioned many suspensions and resignations in the clubs, especially the younger, and the disposition in all is to be lenient, and let the unfortunates re-enter on the payment of dues to date. It is a mystery in some of the clubs, especially the swell ones, how some of the members "hold on," as it is claimed that the delinquents are regularly posted without any personal favoritism, and also that many of the delinquents have been able to get "off the list." The election at the New-York Yacht Club on Thursday evening is regarded as a signal defeat of the Union Club influence, and may be significant of a change in the policy of the organization.

The Twilight Club will hereafter give its semi-monthly dinner at an up-town instead of a down-town restaurant.