

## WHERE CARDS ARE PLAYED

### CLUBS ORGANIZED FOR GAMING PURPOSES.

#### THEIR MEMBERSHIP LIMITED TO A FEW WEALTHY MEN—THE TROUBLE "KITTY" CAUSED—MISCELLANEOUS GOSSIP.

There is scarcely a prominent Wall-street coterie or local corporation that does not include a little private card club that meets up town in the evening. These clubs are as numerous as the various ward political organizations. Usually these gaming clubs are strictly private—that is, no outsiders are ever admitted to the circle, and the membership is generally confined to a certain set or coterie of gentlemen affiliated in business or society whose financial responsibility is well established. It is not to play faro or roulette or any of the games of the regular gambling houses that these private card clubs are organized, but for the purpose of indulging in the popular American game of poker, which is prohibited in the majority of the social clubs as a source of trouble and scandal. High play is permitted in the Union, the Manhattan, the Knickerbocker, and the Blossom Club, but in all the other clubs poker is prohibited, particularly heavy play. There is, indeed, a "card" annex to nearly all the clubs, where those who wish to indulge in poker and heavy play do so outside the club, so that any trouble at the card table cannot involve the club or become a scandal within its walls. Nearly all the clubs that have got into financial trouble can trace their downfall to permitting "gambling" in their rooms. The private clubs generally occupy the parlor floor in some private house, and usually have no distinctive name, not being incorporated. One of the members, satisfied of the responsibility of the rest, is security for the rent, and, while there is a series of by-laws, there is generally only an informal organization. Each member is provided with a latch-key, and as a rule the rooms are never used excepting in the evening, unless on Sundays (the truth must be told) or holidays. The rooms are in charge of a colored porter, who dispenses liquors from a buffet at a nominal price. The expenses of running the rooms are generally defrayed by the "kitty," and, apropos, a good story may be told of a prominent manufacturer "from the rural districts." On one of his visits to the city the manufacturer was initiated into the club, and being a man of the strictest business principles, was in the habit of making a memorandum of his every expenditure. He entered his losses at cards under the title of "Kitty." Looking over his papers one morning after his return from a protracted sojourn in the city his wife was horrified to find in his memorandum book so many entries of expenditures under the head of "Kitty," and the green-eyed monster soon took complete possession of her. Until fully decided what course to adopt, she resolved not to say anything to her husband about the discovery of his supposed infidelity, but still she could not help manifesting a change of manner that of course attracted his attention. Imagine his surprise and amusement when informed by his worthy spouse of her dreadful discovery and intention of immediately taking steps to procure a legal separation, as she did not believe in a divorce; and imagine also, if possible, her chagrin and delight on learning the true facts of the case, that "Kitty" was the money he had lost at poker, which, of course, he fully explained. When the "kitty" does not suffice to pay for the expense of the rooms and gas there is an assessment of the members. In some of these clubs there is an initiation fee and dues and no "kitty," and consequently some of these clubs are in a prosperous financial condition. One of them is the Phoenix, which has a fine floor on Fifth-avenue, not far from Madison-square, and which has been in existence about eight years. The membership is limited to 75, and now numbers 60, chiefly members of the Manhattan, Union, and New-York Clubs. The Phoenix has a surplus of \$7,000, held in trust by three Trustees. Occasionally this fund is drawn upon by general consent for a contribution to some charity, which is usually made in the name of the club. The Standard Oil "crowd" have a little club of their own, also not far from the Worth Monument. Scarcely a night passes, and especially Saturday night, that one or more clubs of this kind do not occupy the private rooms in the fashionable cafés. Sometimes the play runs very high, especially among the political element; but generally there is not much risked, and the privacy is sought merely to avoid the talk that would inevitably ensue in a clubhouse or in circles where it would become known outside. As the redoubtable Col. Bungstarter declared "poker" is a gentleman's game, and gentlemen naturally prefer to be associated in privacy when playing it. Consequently it is not by any means correct or just to classify these private clubs among gambling clubs. Many of the professional "games" obtain immunity from the police by being dealt in so-called "clubs," but such are not to be confounded with these private card clubs organized for the purpose of privacy and security. Nor should the recently organized and prosperous Whist Club be wrongly rated. This card club was organized that all the whist players in the city, and especially of the other clubs, might meet together and indulge in their favorite game under the same conditions that they could in their own clubs. Since the organization of the Whist Club it is said that it is impossible to get up a game in any of the other clubs, as all the whist-playing members have joined and frequent the new club. It occupies the entire top floor of the Carlton Club. In passing it may be stated that when the Carlton Club was organized the wonderful correspondents of the rural papers stated that it was a gaming house on a new plan, but such is not the case, and there is probably less card playing here than in any other club in the city. Card playing is the principal pastime in all the clubs excepting the Century, the Authors, the Lambs, and the Union League. Indeed club frequenters may be divided into two classes—the card players and the billiard players, (for the loungers are in a small minority,) but the playing in both cases is such as would be permitted in the family circle, and all the stories of the provincial correspondents about the heavy play in the clubs were evolved from the imaginations of the writers. It is generally understood that the proprietary London Club is a card club. It is said there is a proprietary club up-town which is exclusive in that it is only open to the members of other clubs, who are admitted without initiation fee or dues on producing the "book" containing their names in the membership.

The Twilight at its semi-monthly dinner this week will discuss the subject of the "Boycott," criminally, historically, and argumentatively. The club will soon be able to resume its *al fresco* open-air dinners if the Spring weather continues.

It is a little singular that some other club has not extended the "courtesies" to the houseless members of the Calumet pending the completion of its new quarters on Fifth-avenue, as it is the custom in London to do this sort of thing, and what is English club law is proper here, because, as Dixey sings, "It's English, you know." When the Lotos was crowded out of its house by the carpenters a year or two since, they received the courtesies from the Madison Club, and it is only probably because there is a good general attendance at all the clubs that the youthful Calumet has not been invited to some other door. The Calumet will hold forth in the Gilsey House until its new house is completed.

The officials at the Manhattan still hold over pending an election by the Directors, though there will probably be a choice this month. The gilded halls here attract the attention, and, it may be added, admiration, of all who enter. On a rough gold ground there is an embossed leafwork, with fine effect. It is said there is more dining at this club than any other in the city.

At the Athletic the decoration is progressing so methodically that no inconvenience is occasioned thereby, only one or two rooms being done at a time. The magnificent bathing arrangement is proving an attraction, and the mugwumps have all disappeared; but whether they will again "bob up serenely" remains to be seen.

It is customary in the leading clubs for the doorman to check off on a list in his possession the members as they enter or leave. This list might prove a very valuable reference in a lawsuit as establishing an alibi, and has been sought in a divorce suit, but will probably not be given under the laws of privacy that govern clubs. A gentleman once got into quite a serious misunderstanding with his wife through his being reported to be at a club reception when he was supposed by her to be in another city. The daily sheet showed that he had not been at the club, and consequently it was concluded his name had got into the papers by mistake.

A member of the Union Club regales his fellow window occupants with a story of over-hearing the other night a "confidence man" tell a victim in passing that his pa wanted him to join their club, but that he did not fancy the fast set composing the membership. The lists of the Union, the Century, and the Union League are full, and it is only by death or resignation that a vacancy occurs, and generally the candidates have to wait several years. The impudence as well as the ignorance of the confidence man passes even the credulity of his victim in the opinion of the Union men, who know how difficult it is to get into their club under the circumstances. In the names mentioned several fathers have put the names of their adolescent sons up for membership, knowing that they will be of age before they can be elected members.

The annual report of the Union League has just been published and issued to the members, from which it appears that there are 1,292 active members, 300 non-resident; that the amount of bonds outstanding has been reduced to \$46,000, of which \$6,000 is held by the Finance Committee; that during the year \$271,616 80 was received and disbursed, the running expenses amounting to \$250,070 77, the remainder being for dues, refunded bonds bought and canceled, surplus paid over to Finance Committee, balance, and that the convenience of members of the club seems to require a new catalogue of the library in the immediate future.

The Authors' Club will have a social reunion on Thursday evening, May 20, closing with the usual cold supper. During the Summer there will be an informal "smoke" of the pipes on the first and third Thursday of the month. The historian, George Bancroft, has been selected as the candidate for the annual honorary member.

The Canadian Club talks of a reception as soon as it becomes settled in its new quarters on East Twenty-eighth-street—the old St. Nich-

olas Club house. Sir Roderick Cameron is the leading spirit in the Canadian and takes an active interest in its prosperity.

The Blossom Club finds its Saturday nights more effective in bringing its members together than even a political sensation. The reunion is informal and there is an impromptu entertainment by the volunteer talent present.