

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CLUBS

STRICT LIMITATIONS IN THE MORE EXCLUSIVE.

THE CENTURY AND THE MANSION WHICH IT OCCUPIES—GOSSIP FROM THE DIFFERENT CLUBS.

There is much enterprise at this season in the clubs whose membership is not complete to fill up the list. Clubs with completed membership, insuring the maximum income and a more numerous patronage, are regarded as more "solid," and consequently enduring, than those whose limit is unsatisfied. Membership is regarded as more desirable because more difficult to achieve in the completed clubs, and it is more faithfully maintained for the same reason. In such clubs as the Century, the Union, and the Union League the membership has been complete for years, and there is always a numerous list of candidates awaiting the vacancy that is only occasional by death or resignation. It is seldom, comparatively, that there is a resignation in any of the completed clubs for the reason that the membership is considered valuable on account of its difficult attainment. In times of depression these clubs do not suffer from loss of members by resignation, because every effort is made to maintain his membership by the unfortunate, as he is aware that the vacancy will be immediately filled, and he can hope for no chance of reinstatement except by re-election after weary waiting for a vacancy to occur.

Those clubs, however, in which the membership is not complete always suffer from a loss by resignation in times of business depression, because, unless habitually frequented as a social retreat, a club is a luxury which a man can readily dispense with in a course of economy and retrenchment, especially if he knows that he can secure reinstatement on returning prosperity by paying the back dues, or even a fresh initiation, which is often the cheaper. All the clubs with open membership suffered a loss in consequence of the dull times of the past three or four years of from 15 to 25 per cent. of their enrollment; but the improvement in business of the last year has either brought back many of the retired or produced an increased application for membership generally. It is said that more members were elected to the uncompleted clubs during last year than during the five preceding years combined, and all such naturally hope and expect to fill their lists this season.

Indeed, there is not a meeting of the Trustees of the unfilled clubs but that one or more new members are elected. In the completed clubs there are candidates who have been up for membership for several years. It is needless to say that in the latter class, where there is opportunity for selection and favoritism, considerable influence is often exerted to secure an admission on the comparatively rare occasions of a vacancy. In the Union League by the petition of members a candidate can be "jumped" forward, while in the Century every now and then when the list becomes too numerous it is chopped off, a number being unceremoniously taken out.

Least the idea may gain that care is not exercised in regard to the admission of members in the uncompleted clubs, it is to be said that generally the Election Committee endeavors to faithfully discharge its not always pleasant duties, while not unmindful of the needs of the organization to fill its ranks—a consideration which does not influence those in the completed clubs, who generally have to admit only one new member at a time. It often happens, therefore, that there are members of clubs who for various reasons should never have been admitted, and would never have been had there not been an uncompleted membership. They are vulgar, loud in manner and speech, or they are naturally disputatious, or they are men who by their outside carryings on may reflect discredit on the organization. It will surprise the reader to learn that many allow themselves to be proposed and elected in new or the unfilled clubs and never qualify, and a still larger number develop carelessness in paying their bills after initiation that cuts their membership short. Time, however, generally weeds a club out, the delinquent debtors being expelled, while the boisterous, disputatious, and the vulgar, if they pass the ordeal of discipline, generally ultimately betake themselves to the more congenial frequenting of a barroom with whose proprietor they are on intimate terms. No more surely does water find its level than a man is properly judged and rated in a club, and he subsides as naturally into his little place.

A club usually experiences in its chrysalis state three epochs—its start, its settling, its career. The start is achieved by those of congenial affiliations and sympathetic pursuits. "Birds of a feather flock together." The settling down, after the furor of the start, if the mistakes of the preliminary organization are not remedied, the end is either dissolution or bankruptcy or a split and a new club. The career that follows the settling down will be characteristic of the predominating element, and the quicker the membership is filled the better for its prosperity and permanency; though unless proper care is exercised regarding the admissions there will always be trouble between the unaffiliated membership, which, in accord with the principle and theory of club life should be as one large family. There will always be a division between the conservative and progressive elements, but such good-natured contention or competition between the younger and more elderly portions is rather stimulating to the prosperity of the club than harmful. There is, of course, seldom any such discord in the younger clubs, but there is apt to be, and is now in the Union, Century, and Union League, between the progressive and conservative members. It is not likely, however, that any dissent between the conservative and progressive elements will ever change the policy of the orthodox clubs of exclusiveness and self-contentment, while the tendency of the more liberal clubs seems to be toward conservatism as soon as their list is filled.

It is to be noted that the younger the club and the more aspiring to complete its lists the more inclined is the tendency to entertainments and displays, which are considered "unclublike" by the exclusive, orthodox clubs, studiously maintaining the strict social retirement that the clubhouse doors afford. The Century Club, or as it was incorporated "Association," is sui generis. It is a model club, combining the better features of the orthodox club in its exclusiveness with those of the more modern progressive club, in giving art exhibitions, ladies' days, and entertainments. Originally, as indicated by the name, the limit of membership was 100; but for years it has been 600, and the originating source, a little sketch club founded way back in the forties by the prominent artists of the day and their associates in literature, like Bryant and Verplanck, has always been affectionately remembered by the care of the artists and their pictures. While the highest toned social club in the city, a very nestor in fact of the kind, there is a numerous and untiring art, literary, and theatrical element, and without any pretensions the club, through its art patronizing and affiliating members, has done more to foster the polite professions than any of the so-called specialty or professional clubs, which simply secure the bohemianism without the esprit de corps.

And yet the Century Club in its good-fellowship and informal fraternity is thoroughly bohemian in the better and true sense of a much abused term which by its American misuse has become the synonym of irresponsibility and reckless disregard of the proprieties. The monthly social reunion and art exhibition is a bohemian Arcadia in its informality and good-fellowship. These gatherings are really notable because of the fraternal commingling of men who are celebrated in their respective walks of life, and the display of character as evinced by their maintien, faces, and style is alone interesting. Some come from a dinner in dress suits, some in the studio garb, others in the conventional frock of the American gentleman, but each bears the impress of individuality, and nowhere else is such a gathering of types of the nobler order—not all specimens of the tailors' and barbers' art—to be seen. The old furniture, the old-fashioned fireplaces, the old-style portraits and pictures impart dignity and solidity and character to the old style, home-like rooms, and once the portal is passed one imagines himself quite separated and distant from the busy and bustling world outside.

The present mansion, in the retired and unfashionable neighborhood of East Fifteenth-street, has been enlarged to meet the requirements of the club, until it is now one of the most cozy and comfortable. There is a legend that a gentleman who was blackballed in the club built a livery stable next door in the hope that it would prove a nuisance, but the club closed its windows on that side, and the old resort, which has grown from a humble frame building to a stone mansion, is regarded with almost veneration by the members, who have enjoyed for going on 30 years so many pleasant reunions there. Except on special occasions there is not a numerous regular attendance, though there is a choice coterie always to be found there in the evenings, and especially on Saturday nights. There is no restaurant, but whenever the individual members are so inclined they order oysters or terrapin or cheese, and cook in chafin dishes on the table in the dining room, a noble room in the centre, illumined by an old-fashioned fireplace, and hung with a rare collection of portraits, including those of Commodore MacDonough, by Stewart; Madison and Adams, by Durand; De Witt Clinton, by Ingham; Durand, by Huntington; Monroe, by Elliott; Everts, by Hicks; Cozens, by Leutze, and also of Gourley, Kensett, Curtis, Bryant, Colden, and others.

The exterior of the club gives no idea of the size and accommodations afforded by its depth, and there is an unexpected variety of rooms. In the basement is a billiard room, with three tables. Gunninger's caricatures of prominent members illustrative of the seven ages of man executed on the occasion of a Twelfth Night celebration are exhibited here. On the sides of the baronial entrance and hallway, which are decorated with classical bas-reliefs, are the reception room and café. All about the house, it may be said here, the walls are decorated with bas-reliefs, paintings or prints, in the convenient disposition of a household, and the quiet and atmosphere of a household prevails rather than the hotel bustle and activity of other and more pretentious clubs, which, with their numerous membership, are after all little else than private hotels, so far as the do-

mesticity is concerned at all events. A conversation room on the side is adorned with very valuable works owned by the club—the Slosson donation and works by Mount, Bierstadt, Kensett, Gifford, and other members, including bronze busts of Edwin Booth and Gifford by Launt Thompson, ordered by the club, which is, by the way, always ready to do honor to its members. The picture by Mount is his chef d'œuvre, "The Power of Music," which the club secured at an auction.

An appropriation is annually made by the club under the constitution to the Art Committee for the purchase of works of art, as well as the preparation for the exhibitions. This conversation room leads to a gallery, which is the favorite retreat in Summer—a place where the sun never reaches and the grateful coolness of shade always prevails. The picture galleries, above and below, are an extension. On the occasions of exhibitions the pictures of the club in the lower gallery are covered by the new works on screens and ordinarily the gallery is frequented as a reading room and is richly stored with the papers and magazines of the day, foreign as well as national. An interesting feature of this room is a stand holding several large albums, which contain the portraits of the members, with their names, in many cases their autographs, and the year of their admission. It is safe to say that there are few distinguished citizens of the past 40 years whose photographs are not to be found in these volumes; you can look back and see a man in his early manhood, wearing his hair and garb in the style of the period, and then if the occasion be a social reunion, regard him in propria persona, gray, wrinkled, probably bearded, and altogether different appearing, except the individuality and the genius of the eye. The development of the photographic art, too, can be traced in this collection, which now fills three volumes. There is a space for each member, with his name and entrance year written underneath, but many of the earlier members neglected to supply their photographs, and consequently the collection is not complete. All the more distinguished actors have belonged to the club, and their photographs are an interesting feature of the collection, which contains also all the more prominent artists, editors, and litterateurs.

Up stairs there are three rooms. The library, which is the pride of the club, overflows the two rooms across the front and fills the side walls of the large or gallery room in the rear, corresponding with the picture gallery below, and which on occasion of the art exhibitions is also used as a picture gallery, being likewise provided with reflectors for the proper display of the works on the screens hiding the book cases and pictures of the club. The library contains several thousand volumes of books of reference, history, and standard literature, each case being numbered and indexed. A sum is annually appropriated for the increase of the library, which is probably one of the best in the city. Then the club takes ten or more memberships in the Mercantile Library, and always secures a copy therefrom of the latest novels and such like. An employe is in charge of the library, whose duty it is to see that the books are returned to their proper places, and the index correctly kept. In the smaller library room there is a collection of crayon portraits of the earlier members of the club executed by Paul Duggan while it was still the Sketch Club, and as a frieze in the picture gallery adjoining is a series of panels for more of the original and prominent members, the portraits from which have never been supplied. In this room there is quite a collection of statuary, including the marble for the larger bust of William Cullen Bryant by Launt Thompson, Dr. Bellows by Powers, and a bronze life-size bust of Lawrence Barrett by Hartley. These two rooms, containing the new pictures of the exhibition, are those that are thrown open to the ladies accompanied by or bearing cards of members on the Sunday afternoon and Monday following the monthly art exhibition on the first Saturday of the month. In years gone by the club used to appropriately celebrate the Twelfth Night, but has lately left this to the St. Nicholas Club. The strawberry festival is still held in June, and closes the monthly receptions for the season. As in the Union League, the servants are colored, under the superintendence of a white steward, who since time immemorial has been a portly, dignified type of the jovial Boniface. The club values its property at about \$200,000, and has nearly \$75,000 judiciously invested. It owns the house, valued at \$50,000. The works of art owned by the club are valued at \$41,000.

The management is entirely vested in the committees, the House Committee meeting all the purposes. The business, however, of the club is comparatively light, averaging about \$8,000 per annum. The club has always been in its progressive way very conservative. For years Mr. Verplanck was its President, and with a brief interregnum of Mr. Bancroft, called away by his mission abroad, and Mr. Bryant, whom death removed, the veteran artist, Daniel Huntington, has for years presided. The other officers are Judge Speir and Henry C. Potter, Vice-Presidents; Henry G. Howland, Secretary, and George L. Rives, Treasurer. Among the Trustees are John Bigelow, William G. Choate, Cornelius Bliss, John L. Fitch, R. G. Gilder, Nicholas Fish, Stephen B. Olin. There was an active contest at the election the other night between the elder and the younger element, but the former achieved a brilliant triumph in electing its leading men, while the latter got in several valuable committeemen and Trustees. The terms conservative and progressive hardly indicate the division in the club, as it is really the most progressive of all the clubs, the contest rather being between the elder and the younger element in regard to the perpetuity of the offices. There is a decided tendency in the club to increase the membership 100, and also the dues and initiation. Absentees for one year are exempt from dues, while in other clubs they are placed on half dues. There are only two honorary members—Bancroft, who resigned when he went abroad and was elected an honorary member immediately on his return, and Mr. A. R. Macdonough, who was the Secretary for 22 years until his resignation year before last.

It is announced at the Lotos that the Mayor's dinner is indefinitely postponed in consequence of the continued indisposition of Mayor Hewitt, and in compliance with a request from him to that effect. An art exhibition is in preparation for the latter part of the month.

The Racquet Club announces its annual ladies' day for the 17th, when it is needless to say the presence of the genial President, Mr. W. R. Travers, will be missed in consequence of his absence on a health tour.

The Lambs are divided on the subject of admitting reporters to their monthly Sunday dinner. These dinners are as well worth reporting as those of any of the clubs which extend courtesies to the press, and the progressive element that is gaining control is in favor of rendering the boast of the conservatives that "no literary fellers" are admitted untrue. The real reason of this sought-for privacy in regard to these dinners is that, for the accommodation of the numerous professionals belonging to the club, and who are the excuse for its existence, they are given on Sunday evening, and many of those who attend would not care to see their names reported as attending a banquet on the Sabbath. There is rivalry between the dudish element, admitted originally on sufferance, and the professionals, who are prominently represented in the management by Mr. Lester Wallack and Mr. Steele Mackaye. The new "boy," Mr. Steele Mackaye, is not in the least in his virile energy in sympathy with the dudes, and threatens annihilation with his Wild West Indians, who from filial affection ever stand ready to do his bidding.

It is said that there will be a second ticket in the field at the New-York Yacht Club before the election on the 3d prox. There is an effort on the part of the old Union Club element to regain control, while the preponderating non-yacht-owning membership would like to make a demonstration. The conservative element is, however, quite satisfied with the present ticket and would have been equally satisfied if the old committee had consented to run again.

The annual election of the Calumet comes off on the 19th.

The New-York Club has not yet decided on the Stewart mansion or the old University Club house, and will probably take neither. An uptown real estate agent reports that as soon as an occupant dies in one of the old mansions club committees get to work to see about a lease before the undertaker has done his work. The truth is, that good locations for clubhouses are not numerous, considering the demand for corners, accommodations, and a central, easily accessible location.

The Twilight Club finds that the assessment of \$1 per annum is not adequate to meet the expenses of the increased membership, and will levy \$2. The subject of "Where Shall We Go to Church in 1987?" was discussed in the free-and-easy style of the gathering at its last meeting.

There was more scratching this year than ever before at the Union League, because it is all over of the tendency of the governing powers to a rigid enforcement of the rules. The rule most commonly violated is that in regard to the introduction of visitors, and the recent notices issued calls attention to House Rule No. 2, which forbids the admission of persons residing within 50 miles of New-York, not being members of the club, except to the reception room and private dining rooms." Some of the most prominent members have been from time to time suspended for 30 days for violating this geographical rule.

The Press Club has decided on a series of monthly entertainments.

The first dinner of the Manhattan Athletic Club, on the 22d, will test the capacity of the cuisine and accommodations, there being already 200 subscribers. The table will be placed in the parlor, which is 90 feet deep. The annual boxing and athletic entertainment comes off on the 29th.

The Bachelors' coterie in the Leidenkranz will give a ball on the 21st February.

The Mohican Club gave a "high jinks dinner" last night in its club rooms. Sunday was selected for the accommodation of the numerous professional memberships. Dixey came on from Philadelphia to attend. The announcement read: "An old-fashioned Bohemian dinner will take place in the club rooms. Squaws and papooses are rigidly excluded, yet there will be an abundance of firewater on the reservation. War dances and tomtom music will be furnished by the Mohican tribe.

"Come one, come all,
The ambulance call
Is placed in the hall—
Divided we stand, united we fall,
That's all."

The Republican Club takes a more active interest in politics than the Union League, in permitting the Cregan investigating committee to meet in its rooms, and proposes to devote itself to local affairs, leaving national discussion to the older organization.