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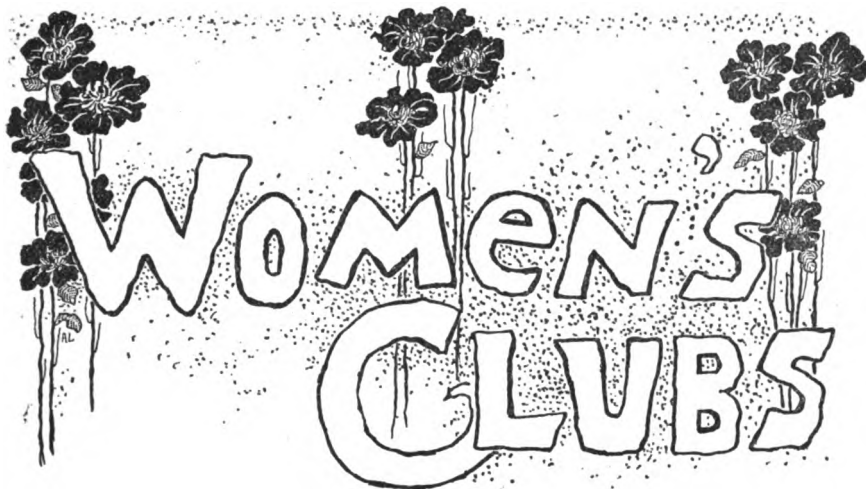
AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY MAGAZINE.



Vol. III October 1895-March 1896



BOSTON, MASS.
THE BOSTONIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
83 NEWBURY STREET

The title 'WOMEN'S CLUBS' is rendered in a large, stylized, hand-drawn font. The letters are white with black outlines and are set against a background of a dense stippled pattern. The text is flanked by three clusters of flowers, each with several blossoms on thin stems. The overall style is reminiscent of early 20th-century decorative arts.

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE NEW ENGLAND WOMAN'S CLUB

BY MRS. ABBY MORTON DIAZ

“BIRDS of a feather flock together,” Hawthorne somewhere suggests, classifying the community on grounds quite different from our present ones of wealth, birth, and other “society” distinctions. He supposes a classification according to qualities, thus bringing together the true, the brave, the loving, the unselfish, the kind, the wise, and in the same way their opposites. The conception of the resulting condition of things is at least interesting. It would just about correspond to the heaven and hell of theology. The one a state of blessedness, the other of torment; though it is doubtful if even in this earthly world the blessed would enjoy as exultingly the sight of those in torment, and sing so rapturously the hallelujahs inspired by their own blessedness, as “the redeemed” portrayed in the sermons of Edwards and others of the old-time divines.

It is evident enough that by a character classification some of those now dwelling in palaces and mansions,

whether good or bad, would find themselves in close companionship with some in the “low classes,” and that some occupants of our jails and almshouses would stand side by side with some of the millionaires; and, indeed, that Hawthorne’s re-arrangement would efface many of our present social boundary lines. Curiously enough—and it will seem more so as advancement goes on—these are drawn largely on an upholstery basis, together with that of location, both these being determined by money. Those who can afford a residence in certain streets of high degree, in expensive houses having furnishings in every way of the first quality, may associate, and may help to constitute “society.” This is, of course, absurd, since none of these belongings can associate with each other. Still, wherever such limitations exist they are indestructible. Not even the supposed unifying influence of “religion” can destroy them. For while worshippers may gather around a common altar, and mingle

their petitions to a common Father, yet outside the building this transient oneness dissolves, and the component parts fall naturally into the same old lines, and intercourse is again resumed on "society" limitations, especially among women.

Where "society" limits are less marked, the social intercourse is often shaped by religious beliefs. This comes naturally from the fairs and church festivities, and the various social means depended upon for what is called supporting religion. Indeed, the preparation for all these bring the same people so continually together that some towns are to some degree socially mapped out on denominational lines. And though the spirit of toleration more and more abounds, yet it cannot be denied that in many places people do have a realizing sense of difference, according as beliefs differ in regard, we will say, to the Trinity, the Atonement, or other doctrines considered by some to be fundamental.

Now the social side of women's club life recognizes none of these distinctions. The members meet on a common human basis. If some are more considered or better liked, their companionship more sought, it is because of their intrinsic qualities or of their richer acquirements; in other words, because they are brighter or kinder, or wittier or more courteous, or better informed than others. So far as there is any aristocracy it is that of mind, of thought, genius, talent. They have a common desire for advancement in wisdom and knowledge, and for human welfare. A grand idea is enthusiastically received, even if not uttered with the "society" intonation. Wit and humor create a general merriment, and we all know that laughter is a wonderfully unifying influence. This continued intercourse of people who would not otherwise come together does of itself bring about a genuine togetherness. The various human angles and sharp corners become rounded off. Differences melt away. The "liberals" may find there is a spiritual significance in certain doctrines they had considered unmitigably narrow, and

the "conservatives" may find true godliness among those whom they had regarded as hopelessly in error. Thus the more extended and intimate the companionship, the wider would be the significance and fewer the limitations of our proverb, "Birds of a feather."

The founders of the New England Women's Club of Boston considered "rest, comfort, and social enjoyment important elements in its life." The importance of sociability in promoting union was fully recognized, and as the prevailing idea of sociability seems indissolubly connected with the partaking of nourishment, it instituted club teas. It was ordained that on the third Monday of each month the customary gathering should continue far into the evening; moreover, that at the close of the afternoon session the club should instantly drop from its intellectual and altruistic heights, and simply be funny, and if not as funny as it could, at least entertaining and amusing. The delightful presiding of its long-honored president unites all desirable qualities, and to these are added the shrewdness and penetration which has *fathomed pockets*, and thus compelled suspected individuals to stand and deliver concealed gems of poetry or prose. Such as had neither were often compelled to yield up stories, anecdotes, incidents, personal experiences; perhaps opinions were suddenly demanded on this or that perplexing question. On one occasion there was a pre-arranged debate on the proposition: Shall there be legislation regulating the height of hats worn at public entertainments? The affirmative side sustained itself with so many good reasons, presented so forcibly and with a mock seriousness so convincing, that some present were "almost persuaded" of the actual need of such legislation. The other side was equally eloquent, and to its forcible arguments added an *object-lesson* consisting of a row of tall young women wearing hats in the utmost *height* of the fashion, and sitting in front of a row of meek-looking short girls in hats of low degree. The entertainment was not always so farcical, and the aforesaid pockets have

often yielded up poems and prose of rare merit. Music, too, has added its charms, by way of cheer and inspiration.

There have also been, at divers times, tableaux, charades, acted ballads, scenes from Dickens. The simplicity of the early teas seems now almost beyond belief, it being stated on official authority that the regular course was "bread and butter, salt fish or dried beef, and tea." The company was not excessively large at the beginning, but it was a case of quality far exceeding quantity, and the feast of unreason and flow of merriment were all the more exhilarating. One of the most enjoyable festivals of the club has been the lunch following its annual meeting in May, when the members and guests make a company requiring the spacious banquet-room of some one of Boston's grand hotels.

An enjoyable feature in the earlier period was the springtime *Poetical Picnic*. (*French, pique-nique. To select delicate contributions for the table. Usually, excursions in the open air.*) But those of the club were excursions into the open-air regions of the ideal. The "delicate" (round-table) "contributions" were those of mind, heart, and soul, and were seasoned with infinite variety of fancy, wit, humor, and sentiment. For some reason—probably from embarrassment of riches caused by the overflowing membership—these yearly festivities have for some time been discontinued. The following lines from a lively versified "reminiscence" given on some special social occasion, allude to them and other features of the earlier gatherings:—

I remember, I remember,
 How I was wont to muse,
 And wonder where the wings were
 fledged,
 They knew so well to use.
 My heart was full of envy then,
 And still I question now,
 Where did they find Castalian springs
 To bathe each noble brow?

Recognizing the divine principle of oneness as authoritative guidance, too much cannot be said of the social opportunities whereby can be united so many who, by differing conditions, habits of thought, life purposes, or local habitation, are so far removed from each other, for by such union all profit.

I remember, I remember,
 When I first began to Club!
 And from my modest corner peeped
 At Wise ones of the "Hub."

I remember, I remember,
 Those leaders grand and high;
 I used to think their mighty thought
 Was far beyond my sky.

— the race is not yet done,
 And I'll hope I'm nearer to their heaven
 Than when I first begun.

Besides entertaining its own members, and aiding their advancement in various directions, the club affords to many women visiting the city, or sojourning therein, just the opportunities they desire of meeting personally Boston women known to them by reputation. Members of other clubs, and especially of distant ones, covet such acquaintance. On the other hand, the Bostonians—exalted as they are "in point of privilege" by simply being Bostonians—rejoice to come face to face with members of sister clubs, and particularly to learn the experiences of those in distant localities, as likely to have adopted original and, very possibly, improved methods and lines of work.

The extremes of our population can so easily be brought together by the present travelling facilities, and these are so extensively used, it would seem that every city and town should have some such social centre for making glad the heart of the pilgrim and the stranger.