

CUS 417/6.45

"LITERARY CLUBS."

AUTHORS' CLUB DISCUSSION.

DINNER TO MR. ALGERNON ROSE.

In its object and its matter a special dinner of the Authors' Club, held last night at No. 2, Whitehall-court, was of exceptional interest. The fact that in less than two years the membership of the club has increased from twenty-seven to over 700 suggests the working of powerful influences. Two at least have been apparent—the selection of topics of real value and interest for discussion at the periodical dinners, and the unceasing activity of an able and courteous honorary secretary, Mr. Algernon S. Rose. To the latter cause more than any other the present prosperity is attributable. It was therefore a graceful act to devote last night's dinner to a recognition of the great services rendered by Mr. Rose during the last nineteen months, and to make the honorary secretary the club guest. Moreover, the choice of "Literary Clubs" as the topic for conversation was apt in that it is a subject of which Mr. Rose has peculiar historical and practical knowledge. As is usual at these dinners, the frontispiece of the menu card was designed to illustrate the cause of the gathering. It was a clever depiction by Mr. Charles Ince of Mr. Rose displaying a long roll of members, with an ink-pot at his feet labelled "House Full"—a reference to the fact that although the club not many months ago enlarged its premises, further extension is now necessary. The gathering was presided over by Sir Edward Brabrook, Mr. Charles Garvice occupied the vice-chair, and amongst those present were:

Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, Sir Robert Hamilton Lang, Captain Garvice, Rev. A. Carr, Rev. Eyre Hussey, Dr. P. W. Ames, Dr. A. Charpentier, Dr. Bernard Hollander, Dr. H. Lambert Lack, Mr. Percy Allen, Mr. Reginald Bennett, Mr. C. O. Burge, Mr. James Baker, Mr. Arnold L. Barron, Mr. C. H. Cautley, Mr. E. Wake Cook, Mr. John S. Dane, Mr. Henry Davey, Mr. W. F. Downing, Mr. Walter Emanuel, Mr. Banister Fletcher, Mr. J. Mackenzie Fairfax, Mr. Francis Gribble, Mr. Wirt Gerrare, Mr. Emanuel Green, Mr. A. L. Haydon, Mr. W. Hunter, Mr. F. M. Hornsby, Mr. C. W. F. Harrison, Mr. Edgar J. Harper, Mr. Frank Hird, Mr. Harold Hartley, Mr. Charles Ince, Mr. Charles Igglesden, Mr. Paul H. King, Mr. M. J. Keane, Mr. E. B. Kennedy, Mr. J. W. Knipe, Mr. H. H. Levey, Mr. J. M. Levien, Mr. Gordon Leicester, Mr. Henry Longman, Mr. B. Franklin Lieber, Mr. Edward Morton, Mr. Max Montesole, Mr. Mowbray Marras, Mr. Arthur Maquarie, Mr. H. A. Morrah, Mr. Vyvyan Marr, Mr. F. W. Mitchell, Mr. Michael Morton, Mr. A. T. Norton, C.B., Mr. Seymour Obermer, Mr. Sutton Palmer, Mr. R. R. Pusey, Mr. L. Owen Pike, Mr. T. W. Rolleston, Mr. Charles E. Shea, Mr. Francis H. Skrine, Mr. Leslie Stuart, Mr. Harry J. Shepard, Mr. J. C. Snaith, Mr. William Simpson, Mr. G. Herbert Thring, Mr. Harry Vandervall, Mr. Horace Vachell, Mr. Dudley Wright, Mr. J. Evans Williams, Mr. Percy White, Mr. C. R. Wylie, Mr. E. H. Lacon Watson, Mr. Louis Zangwill, and Mr. Reginald H. B. Giller (financial secretary).

INTERESTING PRESENTATION.

Sir EDWARD BRABROOK, before the subject for discussion was introduced, presented to Mr. Rose an illuminated address, in which the president, executive committee, and members expressed their thanks to him for the invaluable services which he has rendered to the club as honorary secretary. It stated: "Mr. Rose came to the rescue of the club at a crisis of its fortunes, when the membership had fallen to twenty-seven. Working with an energy which never flagged, and a tact which never failed, he has advanced it, within little more than a twelvemonth, to its present position of prosperity, and enrolled more than 700 members. This testimonial is offered to him by his fellow members as a record of that remarkable achievement, and as a demonstration of their affection and esteem."

The CHAIRMAN said that he had also, on behalf of the members to present Mr. Rose with a cheque. (Cheers.) He esteemed it a great compliment, as one of the survivors of that board of directors whose management of the club ended in the condition referred to in the address—(laughter)—to be asked to preside on that occasion, and to be the mouthpiece of the club in congratulating Mr. Rose on the wonderful success that had attended his labours. (Hear, hear.) He expressed his hearty concurrence with every word which had been stated with reference to Mr. Rose, and he did not wish to conceal from the members that he had been ably supported by the committee in all that he had undertaken. To them great credit was due. (Hear, hear.) He then proposed the health of Mr. Rose, and the toast was received with musical honours.

Mr. ROSE, who was loudly cheered on rising, thanked the members for the token of their regard and affection.

ORIGINS OF LITERARY CLUBS.

Introducing the subject for discussion, he said to trace literary clubs to their sources one must refer to the most ancient of all literary nations—the Chinese. The influence of the East permeated to the

the Yorick, the Press, and the Whitefriars, consisting of the best men in Fleet-street. In a sense, of course, University clubs were all literary.

SPREAD TO THE COLONIES.

As regards the Colonies, he could speak with some personal experience, having received the hospitality of the Athenæum at Sydney, the Yorick at Melbourne, the Johnsonian at Brisbane, the Athenæum at Hobart, the Athenæum at Johannesburg, and the Durban in Natal. In Canada there were a fair number of good literary clubs. Favourite literary resorts in the United States of America were, at New York, the Salmagundi and the Players' Clubs; in Boston there is the Athenæum; in Washington, the Lotus; at Chicago, the Athletic, which, although started as a sporting institution, had developed into a literary club; and at San Francisco the Bohemian, which was akin to our Savage; and the Rainer Club at Seattle, Washington, must not be forgotten.

It was a great thing to think that they were affiliated in sentiment to all other English-speaking literary clubs, since amongst their members there were those who belonged to almost all such existing institutions. The mission of literature had never been greater than it was to-day. When the Authors' Club attained a strength of 1,000 members it should represent a battalion in the literary army of the world. But in military organisations a battalion was linked with a brigade, and brigades combined with divisions until a complete army corps was constituted. Were it possible thus to unite all literary clubs and societies, each retaining its distinctive features, but the whole animated by a determination to preserve the peace of the world, the millennium would then be within the range of practical politics. (Cheers.)

Mr. FRANCIS GRIBBLE, pursuing the subject, observed, with regard to the clubs of Athens, that the officials and, he supposed, the secretaries, were selected by lot. That was an example of the wisdom of the Greeks which they should be very reluctant to adopt. (Hear, hear.)

AUTHORS' MISTAKES.

Mr. HENRY DAVEY spoke of the great value of such clubs to the novelists as a means of preventing them, by association with others, from making ridiculous mistakes. Charles Read was an amateur of music, and would talk at great length about it, but he made extraordinary mistakes, even about such a hackneyed subject as "Faust." For instance, he spoke of the soprano and the contralto singing in the first act, whereas not a single female voice sang in that act. When he touched upon technicalities he nearly always blundered. So it also was with Shakespeare and with Ouida. He apprehended that all novelists, even when writing the veriest pot-boiler, would like to avoid making silly blunders, and that was where clubs such as this proved valuable. One danger the author ran was that of losing sight of the outlook of the average reader. There were three things the author, and especially the English author, had to guard against—first, the use of too many pronouns; second, the assuming of too much knowledge on the part of the reader—the average reader knew that Paris was in France, but he did not know whether Vienna was in Russia or Prussia—(laughter)—and, third, not to use irony unless he plainly said it was irony. He had known authors of high rank pass into irony, and yet it was so obscure that no one could penetrate its meaning. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. J. C. SNAITH said the difference between authors' clubs in England and America was that in the English clubs they never talked about literature, whereas in the American clubs they never talked about anything else. (Laughter.) Yet it was rather odd that the literary men of America rather resented being called literary men. Mrs. Scott, the mother of Henry Seaton Merriman, said that nobody knew for years that her son wrote novels, and the fact did not come out until "With Edg'd Tools" was published. When the truth did become public property, the maid said to Mrs. Scott, "Lor', m'am, I knew master wrote novels. I used to see his proofs lying about; but I didn't think the family liked it mentioned." (Laughter.)

Mr. PAUL KING remarked that there were many clubs in China of a more or less literary character, because it was perfectly impossible for educated Chinese to meet together in any numbers without the subject dearest to their heart, the literature of their country, coming to the front. Speaking as an over-seas member of the Authors' Club, sitting in some very remote up-country place, far away from there, the thought of what had been going on in Whitehall Court, suggested by the printed word that their secretary sent forth, had immensely cheered them. (Hear, hear.) He would like to return thanks for the kindness shown to the over-seas members. (Hear, hear.)

Other speakers were Mr. E. Morton, Mr. Percy White, Mr. James Baker, and Mr. Walter Emanuel. Mr. CHARLES GARVICE testified to the organising ability of Mr. Rose, and proposed the "Health of the Chairman."

West, first through Assyria, and then Egypt. That the old Athenians had their clubs was well known. They were of long standing there. To such gatherings every one sent his portion of the feast, bore a proportion of the expense, or gave a pledge at fixed price. The Sophists enjoyed themselves thoroughly on such occasions. As masters of rhetoric and the art of conduct, they could hold forth on any subject. Fancy Plato or Aristotle being decorated with a wreath and entertained as the club guest! The Romans had similar institutions referred to by Cicero and Livy. The craft guilds of Rome were in reality clubs. On being elected to membership, all took an oath that they would observe the constitution and laws of the body. The reward of officers, when they retired, was the ceremony of proclaiming the services they had rendered, and the engraving of their names on a conspicuous spot at the place of meeting. A rarer honour to a retiring officer was a portrait or statue of himself being presented to his club. Only once among Greek inscriptions belonging to Athenian clubs was there any record of an old-age pension being awarded to a secretary. (Laughter.) Even in that instance the zealous secretary declined the proffered reward. Thereupon the club voted him a golden crown. This, again, he gave up for the decoration of the temple wherein his club met. Leaving ancient Rome, the oldest English club was that which existed in the Temple in the reign of Henry IV., in the fourteenth century. It was called "La Court de Bone Compaignie." A distinguished member of that club was the English poet, Thomas Occleve, who was clerk of the Privy Seal for thirty-five years. Next in point of time to Occleve's Club was the famous "clubbe" which met at the Mermaid Tavern in Bread, or Friday, street, established in the sixteenth century. It was interesting to picture Sir Walter Raleigh presiding, with Shakespeare, Marlowe, Peel, Green, and rare Ben Jonson. When the viands were cleared and the sack was put on the table, did Raleigh say, "Varlets, you may smoke"? Beaumont, Fletcher, the great scholar, John Selden, and Charles Cotton, friend of Izaak Walton, became members of the "Mermaid" later.

ENGLISH CLUBMEN.

But Ben Jonson, the poet-laureate, set up a club of his own called the Apollo, at the Devil Tavern, between Temple Bar and Temple-gate. The sign of the tavern depicted St. Dunstan pulling the devil's nose. Inside the door was a bust of Apollo, and a blackboard bearing the word "Welcome." John Milton, about this period, was a member of the Rota Club, but that was political rather than literary. Addison, Steele, and others met at Button's Coffee House. In 1700 the Kitcat Club was established. This famous institution was founded by the bookseller, Jacob Jonson. Thirty-nine nobles and gentry met at a pie-house in Shire-lane, Temple Bar, kept by Christopher Katt. Amongst those were the Earl of Halifax, a Westminster scholar and friend of Newton; Lord Somers, a lawyer and man of letters; Addison Congreve, who left when he died £10,000 to the Duchess of Marlborough; Sir John Vanbrugh, the architect of Blenheim; and the great surgeon, Garth. This club subscribed 400 guineas as prizes for the best comedies written. The Tatlers Club met in Shoe-lane, or Roger-lane. There was a full account of it by Steele in "The Tatler."

"The" club was founded in 1764, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, as the outcome of his gatherings at Leicester-square. It was modelled on Johnson's Club, in Ivy-lane, Paternoster-row. Amongst the first members were Dr. Johnson, Sir John Hawkins, the musical historian, Topham Beauclerk, the bibliophile, Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, and Bennet Langton, the Greek scholar, who was so tall and thin that, having a small head, he looked like a stork. The opinion formed of a new work at such meetings speedily became known all over London, and had great influence. Garrick was not elected immediately. There was some rivalry between Johnson and Burke, and Boswell came in through Johnson's influence. The club existed long without a name, but at Garrick's funeral it was distinguished by the title of the Literary Club. Its meeting-place was at the Turk's Head, Gerrard-street, Soho, every Monday evening, at seven of the clock—a tradition to-day maintained by the authors. The Liverpool Athenæum was opened in 1799. In 1808 the Alfred Club was established in Albemarle-street, and it lasted till 1855. It was in a sense the precursor of the London Athenæum. Byron called it the most recherche and tiresome of any London club, and the bishops were said to have resigned when a billiard table was introduced. In 1823 an association of persons of known scientific and literary attainments and distinguished patrons was formed to found the Athenæum Club. The house was erected in 1829, on the site of the late Carlton Palace. In style it was Grecian, the frieze being a copy of that on the Parthenon. To-day it contained a magnificent library of some 50,000 volumes. In London, besides the Athenæum, of literary or partly literary clubs, we had the Arts, established in 1863, of which Swinburne was a member; the Garrick, which was at one time a resort of Dickens and Thackeray; the Savage, established in 1857, of which Gladstone was a member;