

# Old-Time Club Rooms.

A Contrast Between Then and Now.

(By H. F. SHORTY'S.)

Once more Christmas is upon us—the panorama of time is about to be rolled upon the events of another year. This is essentially the season of retrospect, and my present purpose will be briefly to glance into some interesting circumstances in connection with the past. If there is one advantage greater than another that the Christmas Journal can claim as its own, it is that of keeping alive the events of the past; it is, in all climates and countries, nothing more than a record of the past told in more or less amusing manner. The rising generation have very little conception of how Christmas was spent in even not the far away past. In days gone by Christmas meant joy and contentment to all—want and penury were things unheard of then among our people; no family was so poor as not to be able to afford the proverbial goose, a roast joint and all the other et ceteras which go to make up the Christmas dinner.

In writing this little sketch I intend to confine myself to events which transpired in the outports, for it is there that real happiness was to be realized during the festive season of Christmas, and in fact, all through the winter, to such an extent as to be beyond the conception of the denizens of the city proper. There were various reasons to make this so. Those were the seasons of remunerative seal and cod fisheries, and the people, during the winter months, had very little to do beyond the enjoyment of the fruits of the spring and summer's toil. Then was the time when the planter, now an obsolete being, reigned supreme in the outport village. He was looked up to with the same respect and deference as the country squire is in England and Ireland to-day. His house was open to receive all, his hospitality was unbounded, and he was a genial and whole-hearted host. Looking back at the past causes a feeling of sadness and depression when contrasting the bounteous and plentiful times as compared with those of the present day. I have vividly before my mind an old-time entertainment held at this season of the year in a well-to-do planter's house. They all were welcome. No distinction was known. Each vied with the other to extract the most pleasure out of the entertainment. The host himself, a stalwart and typical Newfoundlander, was there to receive them, and endeavoured by every means in his power to render his guests happy. The hostess, in new cap and real silk gown, was also at hand to do the honours of the house. The guests would be supplied with all sorts of edibles, both solid and liquid, the male portion of the company doing ample justice to the latter with systematic regularity and

conscientious scrupulosity. The guests being all assembled, the main business of the evening would be proceeded with by the host and hostesses leading off in one of those popular dances, such as Sir Roger de Coverly or Cover the Buckle, which would require far more real agility than is necessary in any of the dances of the present day. To show that this entertainment would partake of a general nature, it was almost a regular thing to see the priest of the parish, usually a burly, good-natured "six-footer," drop in in the height of the entertainment, and signify his approbation by a twirl of his well polished blackthorn, accompanied by the familiar expression in his stentorian voice: "God save all here; more power to ye my hearties." Having signified his approval by remaining among the company for a short time, he was invited to withdraw by the host into a private apartment or the best room where he was entertained with special honors. However, my purpose is not to write the events of those times gone by, and still dear to my heart, but to contrast a club-room fifty years ago with those of to-day. I shall now proceed with my task.

My readers need not expect that the club-room of which I write will, in any respect, bear comparison with the clubs of this city at the present day. The Benevolent Irish Society, Church Institute, City Club, Total Abstinence Club, etc., are all up to date in modern appliances and conveniences, and, I believe, some of them could compare favourably with the first class club houses to be found elsewhere. The object of writing the particulars of my particular club is to show up the vicissitudes and hardships which fell to the lot of club organizers in outport districts some fifty years ago. The way was not made smooth before them, and to form a club in those days required indomitable energy, perseverance and tact. To understand my subject properly my readers must be careful to follow the characters, and make themselves acquainted with all the traits in their dispositions, and by those means they will have a better appreciation of the various members of the club and their surroundings.

In a place known as the Point of Beach, in my old home, congregated nightly, in a large cooper's shop, ten or a dozen persons who were looked upon as a confraternity in themselves. Their president was Ned Knight (cooper), George W., Larry Shea (Kerryman), Jim Sparkes and others, not forgetting Jim H., who, as mechanics, had few equals in the Island of Newfoundland. When a particular job was required to be put out of hand, and they were unoccupied with their meetings, they were sent for, and the money obtain-

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ed was handed in to the general fund. They were epicurians in their tastes, and seldom failed to have a good supply of eatables and drinkables. When the larder was depleted, they played off at five-and-forties to see who would replenish it. As a result the hen-coop of an old Peninsular veteran, with a wooden leg, suffered most. On one occasion Larry Shea was on a foraging expedition, and having secured a couple of geese, was proceeding to the club. He heard footsteps, and hid behind the fence of the old graveyard, and hid behind a large vault. The other marauders also became frightened, thinking they were followed, and also entered the cemetery and hid on the opposite side of it. The worthies belonging to another club, and Larry, emitting a loud groan, compelled them to drop all and scatter in all directions. The find consisted of bottles of rum, porter, etc., and it came in just in time for Larry and his associates. On one occasion Jimmy G. was playing off to see who would have to go on the next foraging expedition. They marked the games on a scrubbing brush with a piece of chalk, he found that a notch had been cut in it, and it always marked two instead of one. "Bad scan! Ye've great eyes!" said Jimmy, and he took his opponent between the two eyes, enabling him to discover a constellation not mentioned in astronomy by Herschel or Father Seel. Ten minutes afterwards they were as good friends as ever.

Upon another occasion they were terribly hard up, and it was then the true ingenuity of the leaders of the club bloomed forth in all its splendor. They filled big Jim H. to the chin, sewed him up in a canvas sack, and sold him for five pounds to the late energetic member for St. John's East, Dr. Dearn. When Jim recovered himself, the doctor made his appearance, but Jim was provided with a knife, and cut himself loose, to the great terror of the worthy disciple of Esculapius. This is strictly true, and the five pounds were spent to the best advantage for the benefit of the club.

Old Dickey Power (who, by the way, made half dozen coffins for himself, and sold them in emergencies except the last one), had a fine Newfoundland dog named Busker. This noble beast had nothing of the supernatural about him, like Marie Corelli's invention of a dog in her Romance of Two Worlds—not a bit of it. He was looked upon as a most important and useful member of the club. When nothing was to be done he reclined in luxurious indolence and majestic placidity amongst a pile of shavings; but when his time came to forage he was always ready. Near the club lived an enthusiastic Irishman named Neddy Aylward. He was a patriot of the advanced type and was never happy except when discussion upon the passing of the Miltia Bill in Ireland, or the movements of the great tribune Daniel O'Connell, as how he drove a coach and four through the tyrannical penal laws of those days. He was a butcher by trade, and was in very comfortable circumstances. One of the club would be drafted off to hold arguments on his favorite topics, and selecting the best piece of meat, would point it out to Busker, who would seize it in his mouth, and disappear to the club. Busker was taught several other tricks which came in useful. He would take charge of anything pointed out to him.

At the proper season they went in search of muskels and eels which were in abundance at the Riverhead. A large amount of smuggling was performed in those days, and an English captain gave the president a cask of brandy to hide and sell for him. There was a high time in the club for two or three weeks, and the captain upon presenting himself for his money, was told in the most serious manner possible, that the president

had not all his bills in yet. I know that twenty-five years after they had not been collected, so I suppose the poor captain had to suffer the loss.

George Volsey was another member. He was a Devonshire man, and made quite a lot of money in lighting matches for the edification of the public, and, of course, charged so much for each match. At this time the flint and steel were all the go, and the lighting of a match was looked upon as the work of a magician or Lucifer. He was the story teller of the club, and the nearest to a teetotaler. Once he was travelling in England and was benighted—suddenly he heard the rumbling of wheels and he got out of view. He followed the horse and carriage which stopped at a place with a fence and large gate. The temptation was too much for him and he entered the car, which was constructed something like a bread car. The two men who had entered the gate returned, carrying something heavy between them, which they deposited in the car, close to George. What was his surprise and disgust to discover that it was a corpse. The fellows were what is known as burkers or body-grabbers. George was in a terrible pickle. They travelled on until they came to a road-side inn or public house, when one of the wretches exclaimed to the other, "It's hard work and anything but pleasant; let us go in and have a good drink." "I don't care if I do," said a voice from the inside of the car. The fellows, thinking it was the dead man spoke, and afraid of being detected, ran for their lives, leaving horse, car and the gruesome contents on the road. George was a cute one and heading for the nearest doctor, sold the corpse for a good amount and also sold the horse and carriage. I have often thought that it was this money that enabled him to come to Newfoundland. They were nearly all bachelors and took the world as it came. They looked upon a wife as an incumbrance to the domestic fit-out, and the majority often pitied the poor people cooped up in church during a broiling summer day. It was evident that they who, upon a Sunday morning invariably visited the Point, were, at least, in keeping with the ideas of the medical fraternity of the present day—they believed in pure air. It is true they might be seen at early morn studying the heavens with some object near their eye; but, that is no reason why they were not better Christians than we are at the present day, nor any reason why any insinuation might be made that they were sun-worshippers. They had their own rules and regulations—their escutcheon, viz., the president's beaver hat (brushed against the grain), underneath which were a cooper's adze and drawing knife, crosswise. Their seats were fish drums, and they had an improvised portable table. From the ceilings dropped a beautiful, delicate and artistic drapery and festoons, almost transparent in its texture—natural products of that industrious little insect, the house spider. They were a happy lot, able to compete, in their own sphere, with that immortal club of London, of which Sam Johnson, Garrick, Goldsmith, Thrale, Paoli and the rest of those great literary lights, whose many exploits and sayings have been chronicled so carefully and elaborately by Boswell.

If this short sketch of the Old Times will be the means of amusing your readers, it will amply recompense me for any little time and trouble, I may have undergone in writing it. In fact, during this time of the year, it is a source of pleasure for me to sum up reminiscences, which will, in a slight degree, at any rate, enable my fellow-countrymen and women to pass "A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year."

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