

GOSSIP

AND



SWIFT as the gay sleighs dash down the white, hilly high-ways, glistening as the diamond-dusted buildings, and crisp as the frosty atmosphere, the social hours

of Ottawa sessional life fly by, until it is no more day and night, neither morning nor evening, but one perpetual noontide of functions,—in dinners, dances and drives, in five o'clocks and endless minor coteries, in a whirl of pretty surface excitements and a world of petty under intrigues. The little city is captured by a merry nomad throng, who, during the sessional weeks—be they many or few—hold it in gay possession, rippling all the air into a stimulating social breeze.

This social phase of life at the Capital has its uses; it is an indispensable adjunct of the life political, since the latter would assume an attitude far too bitter and strained, lacking the genialities of gentle social courtesies and the *entente cordiale* established thereby.

To discover that the strongest or the most tiresome, the blatant or the most satirical, of one's foes in the House, is yet a man of many social and domestic virtues, is worth while, since it gives a better and truer point of view from which to judge him; and this is the function of sessional social life at the Capital.

Nay, more; that politician whose wife realizes the potency of fine social diplomacies has in her the ablest lieutenant, the truest advocate and staunchest henchman.

Men occasionally achieve high political honors in spite of their wives; yet, possibly, if the real epitaphs upon many political gravestones could be read, they would run, "Here lieth the husband of a witless woman."

So it is not all profitless—this whirl of frivolities,—although it appears much like it to the philosopher who is caught in the social maelstrom that centers at the Russell House.

For here, at this bright, homelike hotel, are to be found the coteries of members, Senators and officials who come from all

parts of the Dominion for the session, bringing bright, ambitious wives and pretty daughters to make their bow before her Excellency and enter into the full flood of social functions. Life at the Russell during the session is worth studying, since it reflects, not simply an Ottawa phase, but rather that of all Canada—the stirring, ambitious, kindly life of a people not yet refined from all the crudities of a young nation; but not too far removed from the sturdy pioneer days to be either artificial or effeminate.

The rotunda of the Russell is the place of political entr'actes. Here, upon the marble-tiled floor, the members gather between the



RUSSELL HOUSE ROTUNDA.

House sittings to discuss the debates; here they knot themselves in informal caucus; here, too, may be found the lobbyist, the office-seeker and the man who knows.

The dining-room of the Russell House presents an interesting sight when the electric lights flash out, the tables are filled and dinner is fully under way.

Here we find assembled representative Canadian men from every province in the Dominion, whose names are familiar as household words throughout the country.

The courtly leader of the Opposition chats lightly over his walnuts with the newspaper woman beside him. The genial Deputy-Speaker is laughing at a good story in process of telling by the Reform member who has paused at his table. A group of Nova Scotia representatives are discussing some provincial interest. Here is a clever leading Reformer from Prince Edward Island indulg-

ing in badinage across his table with the pretty wife of a handsome North-west Senator; and there sits one of Canada's famous lawyers absorbed in the latest newspaper article devoted to his abuse.

Members of the Cabinet, judges, Senators, members, well-known clericals, lawyers and officials, gather from the far East and the farther West, with the pretty brightness of wives and daughters about them; the tinkle of porcelain mingled with the low laughter and hum of speech, the brightness, glow and warmth of it all make a scene worth looking upon.

Yet again comes the drawing-room aspect—not by any means the least important factor in the hotel life.

The Russell House drawing-room is a large, cosily appointed apartment, with a wealth of magnificent view from its great windows, which look over bridge, canal and river to the hills and sunset horizon. There are a score of pretty private parlors also, and about these circles the social life in gay gossips and plannings, and the many happy devices which go to make up the courtesies of the session.

How gayly the days dance by! To-day it is an outdoor reception at Government House, and merry parties wend their way down to the skating rinks and toboggan slides at Rideau, where their Excellencies give cordial welcome; the elder people group in their furs, while the younger ones indulge in the exhilarating sports.

To-night it is an "at home" at the residence of a Cabinet Minister, and the gay folks reappear, divested of their furs and in the shimmer of evening dress.

To-morrow it is a breakfast party and a half-dozen five o'clocks, with a round up in the Speaker's cosy chambers in that dear House on the Hill. The members leave the prosy Chamber and slip across the corridors to greet the Speaker's popular wife, Mrs. White, as she stands amid her bevy of guests, and

presently it is again *au revoir* until evening brings us together once more in detachments for dinners, or perhaps *en masse* for a reception at Rideau Hall.

When Sunday comes there is silence—a general sleepiness and deserted corridors. Church service for some, little suppers for others, and at last, when evening grows late, our musician strikes a few grave, rich chords from the piano and plays some well-known hymn.

The response is instant. One by one they are drawn in by the magic of sound until all are singing;—heavy-cannon Reformer, light-shot Conservative, bitter satirist, broad humorist, the man who hits with sledgehammer blows, and he who never strikes, the member from Prince Edward and the member from Vancouver,—all are gathered about the instrument, party differences forgotten, or falling into their real insignificance before the sentiment of the grand old hymns.