

## MONTREAL GIRLS' CLUB.

"Girls' Club"—I caught the words painted upon a window in Bleury street.

"What is it?" I enquired. "Montreal Girls' Club and Lunch Room," answered the little madam.

"What is its purpose?" "Well, chiefly to supply hot lunches to girls employed down in the city at the lowest possible rates."

"That's good," I said. "We need just such an institution in Toronto. Under what auspices is it?"

"The lady graduates of McGill University. But, suppose we arrange to take lunch there to-morrow; then you can meet some of the club members, ask all the questions you choose, and see for yourself the manner in which it is conducted."

I gave cordial assent, and at noon on the following day we were seated at a little table in the lunch room, chatting with a sweet-faced High School teacher—one of the "mothers" of the institution—and watching the scene.

To a casual onlooker it would seem much like an ordinary restaurant of the inexpensive class, with an absence of mirror, plate glass and gilding, and only the simplest kind of table service.

But a closer observer would detect a difference. True, there were the usual furnishings of small tables and chairs, a few plants in the big window and a kindly-faced cashier at her desk by the door. But the girl customers moved about with a companionable little at-home air; they went quietly up to the serving counter, asked for what they wanted and carried it to their chosen table; afterward they lifted their empty dishes and returned them to the counter before leaving.

"You have no waiters," I said.

"No," answered the teacher, smiling, "we work on economical lines, you perceive."

"And do the girls not object to waiting upon themselves?"

"Not at all, since we all take a turn. Come up to the counter and see."

The serving counter separates the lunch room from the kitchen. Behind it stood two or three sweet, refined, prettily gowned women, ladies in the best sense of the term. As each customer gave her order, these pretty waitresses turned to the big range, on which stood pans of meat and vegetables, filled the plate with meat, potatoes and whatever else might be ordered, and passed it across the counter, with the check. The girl customer carried it to her table and sat down to enjoy it.

It was really nice to see this little kitchen and watch the serving. The one woman cook was busy at a table, while a man near at hand washed the dishes as fast as they were returned. And the young servitors—these well-dressed, refined girls—served so quietly, in a manner so different from the slap and bang of the ordinary waitress.

"Now, what will you have?" commented the little madam. "Let us order our lunch, and talk as we eat." She handed me the little bill of fare for the day, which I reproduce in full:

### MENU.

Soup—Vermicelli .....	3c.
Meat and Potatoes—Roast Beef, Corned Beef in potatoes .....	6c.
Vegetables—Cabbage .....	2c.
Pudding—Queen of Pudding—Fice Pudding ..	3c.
Bread and Butter (two slices, 3c.) .....	2c.
Tea, Coffee, Milk (Buttermilk, 1c.) .....	2c.
Pickles—Mixed .....	1c.
Fruit—Figs, Peaches, Prunes .....	3c.
Apples .....	1c.

We gave our order, carried it back to our table and resumed the discussion.

"Who are those sweet-faced waitresses?" I queried.

"University girl graduates," answered my informant, laconically. I laid down my fork and looked at her.

"Do you mean to tell me——?"

"I'll tell you all about it from the beginning," said the lady—and this is the substance of her telling:

Four years ago, a group of the first girl graduates of McGill University, having come to the end of four years' happy companionship, decided that they wanted some tie that would hold them still together in friendly relations after their dispersion from college halls, and for this purpose they formed themselves into an association called the McGill Alumnae Society.

Now, a society, if it is to remain alive, must have some purpose and active work; so looking about them, this band of cultured girls decided that they would endeavor to make and keep a place—were it ever so humble—where their busy down-town companions in shops, stores, offices and elsewhere should be able to get a hot, mid-day lunch for the most modest possible cost.

First they hired a small cottage in a central district at \$12 per month, and two or three went guarantee for the rent. Then by private notes written to a few friends they received sufficient contributions to form a little furnishing fund. Dishes, furniture and kitchen utensils were supplied.

Next the girls found a middle-aged married woman to be cook and caretaker all in one, and then they each in turn undertook to become responsible for the buying.

"We were each caterers for our new family a month at a time," my informant said, laughing; "and we also arranged to take it in turn to come down between twelve and two each day and attend to the serving—to which rule we still adhere."

"Then that accounts for those young ladies in the kitchen," I said.

"Yes; the alumnae members of the society undertake it in turn, two each week. It means two hours in the middle of each day; but they give it willingly."

"On the opening day we began with three customers," continued our informant. "As we only provided hot tea and coffee, with sandwiches and buns, neither the marketing nor serving was very onerous at first. But soon we found that the girls preferred hot soup, and afterward they asked for meat and potatoes. The sandwiches were expensive, troublesome to prepare and not very satisfactory. We found that our girl customers really desired meat and vegetables; so that, step by step, we extended our bill of fare, until now we can give them a meal equal to a simple dinner, as you see, if they desire it."

"Two years ago, we found our accommodation too limited, and after some anxious thought decided to rent this place."

"During the past year we have been able to furnish the four upstairs rooms, and they are rented to a few of our girls at low rates."

"The lunch room has been just four years in existence, you say, and you began with three customers. How many have you now?"

"We average one hundred girl customers a day," answered Miss Armstrong from the desk.

"You'll have to enlarge your premises soon," commented the little madam, "or move again."

"It is really wonderful the manner in which our little beginning has developed," said the High School teacher.

"But the girls we least expected, and

would hardly have dared to cater for, came. The girls in offices and stores—stenographers, clerks and teachers. Our customers consist altogether of this class, and they are so nice and take such interest in the success of the work, that they don't mind waiting on themselves at all."

"In the first place," I said, "there are no down-town workers who need a place of this kind so much as girls in offices, where all day long they are in the company of the opposite sex. They are glad to get away for an hour. They are equally glad of the hot dinner at a cost commensurate with their modest purses. And, chiefest of all, they realize that this is neither a cheap restaurant nor a place of patronage; for where university girls come to serve, and often to take their own lunch, the girl customers rather enjoy lending a helping hand and waiting upon themselves."

"Yes, and then the girls themselves may be members of the society. We have graduate members—those are the university girls; regular members—any self-supporting girls who choose to join us; and honorary members—you may become an honorary member by paying us five dollars. We have regular meetings, and the girls have a voice in all that is decided upon; we get many of our best ideas from our girl customers."

"And lately we have started little evening classes in music and physical culture. We hold them here in this room. Quite a number of the girls come; and we are making such pleasant little friendships with each other."

"But it is all very simple and plain; we are only moving very slowly and feeling our way," she added, half apologetic.

"Only very simple—yes. Yet the fact remains that one hundred nice girls are getting a warm dinner every day, while a little world of young women of various social grades are being brought together in a straightforward, friendly, common sense way, without question of patronage or position."

"One other question," I whispered, confidentially. "Are you paying expenses?"

"Yes, and we have fifty dollars in the bank," answered this earliest member. "Only, remember, we work very economically."

"Fifty dollars in the bank, such a price-list on the bill of fare, and one hundred girls supplied daily. Think of it, Toronto women! Is it not splendid to see what a few whole-souled girls who are not afraid of work can accomplish. And the secret of their success is in their simple, unconscious earnestness and singleness of purpose."

It was nearly two o'clock and only one or two late customers lingered. We carried our dishes back to the counter and looked over our checks.

Roast beef and potatoes, six cents; queen of pudding, three cents; bread and butter, two cents; cup of coffee, two cents—total, thirteen cents; the cost of a very substantial and satisfactory meal.

