

## AN EPICENE CLUB.

One would think we had clubs enough already, with all those that are afloat, but still more are projected to supply what is vaguely called a pressing social need. The shouting, singing, free-and-easy club of artists and Bohemians; the grave dialectical club of politicians and scholars; the silent business-like club, where whist is treated as one of the important occupations of life, and substantial sums of money change hands over the rubber as methodically as on settling-day in the House; the bustling, noisy, betting club where turfites discuss the merits of the favourite in language of strange construction, and where each member is in exclusive possession of the "straight tip" which will "bring him home" and warrant his "putting on the pot;" the mere club which is nothing but a club—a place for convenient dinners, for the newspapers and magazines, a good address for the miserable bachelor, and a safe retreat for the harassed Benedict—all these are as nothing compared to the last new thing proposed, namely, the epicene club, where men and women may meet and receive their private letters, make appointments of which no one knows but themselves, eat their mutton-chops, and discuss the affairs of Europe together without fear of Mrs. Grundy or submission to the ordinary restraints of the drawing-room. The proposers of this new fusion are about to make a bold experiment—if, indeed, they get a sufficiently large following to be able to make it at all, for we fancy that more besides ourselves are doubtful of its success; and it may be that those who desire it most are just those whose support is least desired by the promoters. It is of course possible that it may succeed when put into working order, and experience alone can determine how much vitality and feasibility it possesses. But, viewing it from a distance, and as impartial spectators weighing dangers and measuring chances, it seems to us a matter bristling with difficulties of all kinds. At the very outset the details of membership will be hard to arrange, and the work of the committee will be, we should think, as pleasant as walking over burning ploughshares or dancing among eggs; for the conditions of ineligibility must either be so elastic as to include many doubtful elements, or so rigid as to peril the commercial success of the scheme by exclusiveness. In either case will the majority of women care to submit themselves to the chances of rejection, with the slur that will be assumed to be implied in that rejection? Men are accustomed to this kind of thing, and are not hurt by it, but women are not accustomed to it, and are sensitive; and it is scarcely probable that the lady candidate for admission into the epicene club who has been blackballed by an overwhelming majority will accept her denial with as good a grace as the ordinary man in the same position. She will feel that it is somehow a disgrace, an imputation, a slight, and her friends will feel so too, and will resent her rejection as an insult. The explanation that she is not considered a clubbable sort of person will carry no weight with it, and no one will be able to fall back on the impersonal objection of her profession and its already redundant representation in the club. And this being so, we question whether the nicest women will care to subject themselves to the various processes of canvassing, discussion, enquiry, and possible rejection incident to club membership. Those who are not so nice are not so desirable. Then, are unmarried women to be admitted? If so, what is to be the lowest age of membership? It seems scarcely fair to allow the married coquette of nineteen a right which she is sure to abuse, and forbid the staid spinster of twice her age a privilege which she would have neither the wish nor the temptation to turn to evil uses. But if unmarried women are to be members at all we cannot see how it would work to make a distinction between them and the wives, either in age or personal appearance. Yet again, if girls of twenty-one or so, young, pretty, and engaging, are to be members there will be little peace left in the homes of those lady members who own light-minded lords, also members; and the door which will be opened to jealousy, prying, scandal, and suspicion will be very wide indeed. Even if a definite age, sounding safe enough, is to be set, we still do not quite see that absolute security which of itself would disarm all suspicion and put an end to doubt. The mature siren is as dangerous, all things considered, as the youthful one; and a handsome, clever, well-constituted woman of forty might do even more damage than a girl of eighteen, because knowing better the weight of her metal and how far it carries. It would scarcely do, however, to make the qualification for spinster membership consist in confessed homeliness for the sake of keeping the peace among the wives, or to enact that part of the ceremony of admission should be a solemn oath taken against flirting. Yet where pretty women and pleasant men are mixed up together in the *sans façon* of a club there will be flirting as surely as there is flirting now under more difficult conditions. Sex is a great fact, let the new school which wants to create a third gender say what it will; and we cannot believe that an epicene club, where Don Juan may meet Dona Julia without the trouble of arranging an assignation beforehand, and lively spinsters may have unrestricted association with discursive Benedicts, will be the safest kind of thing, looked at all round. It would be very pleasant, no doubt; it would save the expenditure of both wits and falsehood; the old trick of calling at the pastry-cook's for letters would be rendered unnecessary; and meeting, that came, as it were, of themselves, and in the natural order of events, would excite less suspicion and afford more freedom than if they had to be planned for and precautions taken against discovery. Still, other interests have to be considered besides these, and perhaps those are the interests which would be most endangered under the proposed arrangement. Setting aside the obvious uses to which an epicene club might be turned, and to which there is no kind of doubt it would be turned in many instances, the question remains, are women for the most part clubbable? We think not. Nervous and irritable, full of strange fancies, given to unfounded dislikes and rootless friendships, impatient of small annoyances, most women have little real command over themselves, and are apt to show their feelings with what would be a savage simplicity and directness but for the finery of mind and body to which they are given. When they dislike each other—and where there are a dozen women there will be a dozen enmities—they have an infinite variety of ways of manifesting their spite; ways unknown to men, and impossible in a society of men, but which would destroy the peace of a community where there was no recognized head to keep order and settle difficulties. Even in boarding-houses, family hotels, and the like, the feminine warfare, always more or less raging, makes quiet

walking a service of doubt and danger, and in an epicene club enmities and rivalries would be as certain to exist on one side of the corridor as flirting and jealousy on the other. The very dress of women is a non-clubbable element. Men may have the ugliest clothing in the world, but their costume is so far democratic that it brings us all on the same level, and prevents the frantic rivalry which distracts the other sex. With them the badly-dressed are despised by the well-dressed as poor creatures without taste, sense, or soul; and the well-dressed are either passionately envied or set down as sinners very little better than they should be by those who have a desire for fine clothes but have no money to buy them with, or who have no taste in millinery and no respect for ornament. If one woman thinks a proper disposition of lace and silk next door to be cardinal virtues, another holds her highest self degraded if she is anything less than a fright tied up in a bundle anyhow and throwing the graces to the winds. The two sects never have agreed and never will; while the poor and envious stand on one side lamenting, either aggrieved by the sight of a splendour which they cannot imitate, or spending strength and means in the vain endeavour to reach a mark set too high for them. There have been more friendships broken by the weaver's shuttle than by any other simply material cause, and the millinery of the epicene club would be a lion in the way formidable to the peace of all concerned. Two classes of ladies are said to need this institution—namely, ladies who live in the country and want to come up to town for a day's shopping or an evening's amusement, and who therefore want a place where they can dine, rest, dress, and have their parcels sent; and unmarried ladies who live in London—single women with no home rightly so called, who are alone and want companionship, who are poor and want better accommodation than they can afford without the co-operation of a society. And as it has been proved by experience that a woman's club—or something like it—where the male element was excluded, was horribly dull and unsatisfactory and the very hot-bed of strife, they wish now to try one which will admit men, and so give the homeless fair ones society without the need of *chaperons* or drawing-room observances. As for the ladies living in the country who want a place for their parcels their case is simple enough. Whether it is worth while to try such an experiment as an epicene club in order to supply their demand and fulfil their need is another matter. These, then, are the two classes of women for whose advantage the new club is mainly proposed. It seems hard to say a word of denial to either, and yet we would be cruel enough to deny both. If women want a club and a club-house let them arrange the matter for themselves as men have done. But a place where flirting can be carried on under cover of "going to my club" is not a thing that we wish to see established as among the recognized conditions of modern society. It is the thin edge of the wedge; and the wedge when driven home will destroy all that we hold to be valuable and beautiful in our English life. The truth is, this desire for an epicene club is only one among many manifestations showing the revolt against privacy and domesticity in which some of our women are engaged. For some reason, the economic root of which is at present hidden, many modern women find home the most tiresome place, and home duties the most irksome occupations in the world. They prefer almost anything to domestic life as it used to be in simpler times—that life so full of tender associations, of strong affections, of powerful ties, of honourable activities. After having helped to ruin the old-fashioned servant and to destroy the old-fashioned system, they turn round on their own work and plead the servants and the tradespeople as the reason why they hate housekeeping and why they prefer club life, hotel life, any kind of life that can be named to home life. But it is neither the cook nor the grocer that makes home life unpleasant to the discontented woman; it is her own failing in domestic qualities and domestic affections; it is the love of dress, the passion for amusement, the frenzy for notoriety, for excitement, for change, which have possessed her of late. This proposed epicene club is only a further development of the new phase under which she is passing, a further and stronger protest against the natural order of her being. We cannot say that we wish it success: for we regard it as a dangerous experiment in which more is involved than appears on the surface.—*Saturday Review*.

## FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND YEARS AGO.

The *Nation* condenses from an English scientific periodical some interesting speculations of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace of the probable antiquity of the human species. They may well startle, it says, even those who have long since come to the conclusion that 6,000 years carry us but a small way back to the original home. In fact Dr. Wallace's 6,000 years are but as a day. He reviews the various attempts to determine the antiquity of human remains or works of art, and finds the bronze age in Europe to have been pretty accurately fixed at 3,000 or 4,000 years ago, the stone age of the Swiss lake dwellings at 5,000 to 7,000 years, "and an indefinite anterior period." The burnt brick found sixty feet deep in the flint alluvium indicates an antiquity of 20,000 years; another fragment at seventy-two feet gives 30,000 years. "A human skeleton found at the depth of sixteen feet below four hundred buried forests superposed upon each other has been calculated by Dr. Dowler to have an antiquity of 50,000 years." But all these estimates pale before those which Kent's Cavern at Torquay legitimates. Here the drip of the stalagmite is the chief factor of our computations, giving us an upper floor which divides the relics of the last two or three thousand years from a deposit full of the bones of an extinct mammalia and glutton indicating an arctic climate. Names cut in the stalagmite more than 2,000 years ago are legible—in other words, where the stalagmite is twelve inches thick and the drip still very copious, not more than a hundredth of a foot has been deposited in two centuries—a rate of five feet in 10,000 years. Below this, however, we have a thick, much older, and crystalline (i.e., more slowly formed) stalagmite, beneath which again, "in a solid breccia very different from the cave-earth, undoubted works of art have been found." Mr. Wallace assumes only 100,000 years for the upper floor, and 250,000 for the lower, and adds 150,000 for the immediate cave-earth, by which he arrives at the "sum of half a million years that have probably elapsed since human workmanships were buried in the depths of Kent's Cavern."

## DRAMATIC GOSSIP.

A London critic calls for a visit from Theodore Thomas and his band.  
Death scenes à la *Croizette* are the latest in London stage achievements.  
Madame Theo is to appear at the Princess's, London, in "La Jolie Parfumeuse."  
Monsieur Scholl's *New Mysteries of Paris* has been dramatised for the Théâtre Cluny.  
Gounod, the composer, is so ill that he has been removed from London to his native country.  
Mrs. Fairfax has made her *début* in London, and is said to have acquitted herself with ease and elegance.  
Miss Susan E. Dickinson, a sister of the famous lecturer, is about to try her fortunes on the lecture platform.  
Miss Minnie Walton has arrived in San Francisco to support Sothern during his approaching engagement.  
Miss Bessie Darling has played *Julia* in Newark, and it appears from the papers that her success was complete.  
A very fascinating actress has appeared at the French plays, Madame Pasca, who made her *début* there in *La Fiammina*.  
Louise Henderson, who is engaged for next season at the Union Square Theatre, N. Y., is acting in "Lady Jane Grey" in London.  
A new tenor, named Emmanuel, has been announced to appear in Paris. He sings à la Capoul, and has created a *furor* among the ladies in the provinces.  
Mme. Titlens puts up with playing *Edith Plantagenet* in the "Talismano" throughout the provinces, while Nilsson carries all before her in the rôle in London.  
Campanini has, as *Sir Kenneth* in Balfe's "Il Talismano," the prettiest and certainly the favourite air in the opera. But the great hit has been made by Nilsson.  
The Emperor of Austria has directed a sum of 600 florins to be devoted to the erection of a monument to Beethoven in the garden opposite the Gymnasium at Vienna.  
Miss Violetta Colville, the "coming" *prima donna*, has arrived from England. An English paper says that in appearance she is a charming blonde with a *petite* figure.  
"To the Green Isles Direct" is the title of a successful adaptation of that hazardous piece "Les Cent Vierge" which has just been brought out at the Britannia, London.  
A German correspondent pronounces the opera of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" "the most enchanting thing ever put on the stage," and suggests that Miss Kellogg study *Puck* and appear in it.  
A Cleveland paper says that no small share of the honours of the Saengerfest matinee was carried off by Mr. A. Sohst, "a manly young German singer from the Old Trinity Church choir of New York."  
F. C. Burnand has written a slight but lively sketch illustrative of the humours of a country railway station, where, through some mistake, the Prince of Wales is momentarily expected. It is entitled "He's Coming."  
All the unmarried *artistes* wish to sing Ophelia, for it is remarked that the only three *artistes* who have sung the rôle of Ophelia in Thomas's *Hamlet* at the Paris Opéra—Miles, Nilsson, Sessi, and Devries—have got married.  
Mrs. Fairfax, the recent London *débutante*, is described as a married gentlewoman, moving in very good society, whose "at homes" are attended by poets, baronets and others, and whose husband is a well-known authority on Indian affairs.  
Robert Buchanan's poetical play is called "The Madcap Prince," deals with adventures of Charles II. after the battle of Worcester, and will employ Mr. and Mrs. Kendal (Madge Robertson) in the leading rôles upon its approaching production at the Haymarket, London.  
An Indiana person has recently published "a dramatic composition," in three acts, entitled "Argo and Irene." It breathes that freedom of sentiment and grammar which is in consonance with the broad prairies of the West. The story is full of pathos. Irene, the heroine, is forced by circumstances and her family to marry an objectionable old man, remarking:  
Why were I not a boy  
That I might tease the pretty girls, nor mate,  
With rheumatis and wrinkles, gout and age,  
Due at the graveyard any day 'n the week!  
The lover, Argo, is of course disgusted with her conduct, and determined upon suicide, to be preceded by an effort to rid himself of all love for Irene. This plan ought to attract the attention of all believers in phrenology. Calling to the servants:  
Bring me a chisel and a mallet, quick!  
That I may pummel off these amorous bumps,  
The bane of all my life.  
Before he has time to carry out this plan, however, Irene, now the *Widow Magoon*, enters to tell him that her husband is dead and that she still loves him. Whereupon he leaves his bumps alone, and decides to live happily with his own Irene Magoon. The head physician of the Oshkosh lunatic asylum is anxiously waiting for the author's death. He thinks that by examining his brain with a microscope he can determine the origin and nature of his disease.  
WATCHING FOR A VOICE—A writer in the *Galaxy* says: "One night last winter, in Paris, I went to hear a light opera which had been running six months. The *prima donna* of the evening was a young woman who, when the piece began its run, was one of the chorus singers in that very opera and on that very stage. There is more earnest search after singing voices than there is for pearls and oysters. In every nook and cranny of every land the *prima donna* hunt is going on; for while a singer may do without an impresario, the latter cannot possibly do without singers. The Strakosch brothers and their agents attend divine service in churches of every denomination, on the look-out for promising vocalists; they visit theatres and meeting-rooms where public speaking is going on, with ears sharpened to detect musical possibilities in a speaking organ whose owner has not suspected them; they haunt low singing halls where beer is sold and tobacco smoked, ready, if a voice be found, to transport it to the Italian opera or cultivate it at their own expense until it is fit to warble the world of music-lovers to its feet?"