

Ladies' Night

INTIMATIONS of the fondness for ladies of members of the Chicago Literary Club appeared early in its history, for on June 15, 1874, the first annual dinner, although attended only by men, was laid on at the Sherman House in the Ladies Ordinary. Only a few years later, on October 29, 1877, ladies were invited to a meeting. (See also Chapter IV.) Refreshments were served after the exercises and this custom persisted until the late twenties or early thirties when gradually it became usual to serve refreshments to the ladies beforehand. At a later date one club member, unknown but with a sense of humor, gave deep thought to this change in our way of acting. Did "we feed the ladies after the paper as a solace for their boredom, and before the paper as a fortification against it?" Payson Wild in the second volume of the History of the Club makes the simple statement "that serving a dinner to our ladies before the exercises, as latterly we have done, has increased the popularity and enjoyment of Ladies' Night to a very marked degree". And he adds that "as these words are being written the Ladies are demanding more frequent *Noctes Mulierum*."¹

At Ladies' Night on March 30, 1880 Edward Mason gave up his objections to the lady guests and welcomed them to "the sacred precincts of the club rooms".

An event that caused much amusement took place at Ladies' Night, December 1, 1884. Franklin Mac Veagh gave the paper on Mathew Arnold in which he used the phrase "nature, ever abundant, is never superfluous." "Edward Isham who was afflicted with a distressingly large and heavy paunch, and was standing and leaning on his chair as he listened, could not resist making the forcible comment, 'A damned lie!' These words were uttered *sotto*

1. Passages enclosed in quotation marks are from the two volumes of the History of the Chicago Literary Club.

voce but in such clear tones that they were plainly heard by all the assembled members and guests, much to their delight." A second Ladies' Night was held in the same season on March 23, 1885, at which a loan collection of paintings by both professional and amateur artists was hung upon the walls of the club room. Portraits of two of our former Presidents, Judge Charles Burrall Lawrence and Edwin Channing Larned, were given to the club and the exercises consisted of presentation speeches. The custom of having Ladies' Night was now no longer protested and as the years passed *Nox dominarum uxorum virginum* became familiar to the members of the Club. There have been brilliant Ladies' Nights and dull ones. The essayist in 1887, James Norton, had a deserved reputation as a flashing wit. This and his title, "The Rise and Fall of the Devil", brought out a large audience. The eager expectation of an amusing and, for most, a pertinent paper dissolved in a scholarly dissertation on the Demon myth. One member who had joined the club ten years before and had come for the first time, never returned again although he remained on the active list for 39 years.

The ladies truly came into their own during the season of 1887-1888 for that year there were three Ladies' Nights! But there must have been second thoughts about such lavish entertainment for never again do the histories record such goings on.

In these early years some noteworthy papers were given on a number of Ladies' Nights. "A paper by Frederic W. Root entitled 'The Real American Music' gave so much pleasure when he first read it that by special request he repeated it at Ladies' Night a month later (October 25, 1897 and November 29, 1897). On April 29, 1901, Clarence Augustus Burley read "An Essay in Aesthetic Culture", illustrated with lantern slides from pictures drawn by two members of the Club caricaturing the titles of all the papers read or still to be read during the season. An illustrated catalogue was printed and the pictures were exhibited in the club rooms." The year 1904 was the year of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in Saint Louis. On Ladies' Night the Japanese Commissioner for the exposition read a paper, "The Japanese Exhibits". This, as far as can be determined, is the only time a guest speaker has addressed the ladies, but things were quickly set to rights by having another Ladies' Night that season on Jan-

uary 30, 1905, when William Rainey Harper read "Semitic Legal Literature as Illustrated by the Code of Hammurabi".

The Club has entertained the ladies at many places—its own rooms, the Old Art Institute, the Fine Arts Building, the Chicago Woman's Club, the University Club, the Arts Club, and the Saddle and Cycle Club. The ladies of the Fortnightly, Chicago Woman's Club and the members of the Caxton Club and their ladies have all joined our own beloved ladies on more than one occasion. As far as can be discovered in the records the custom of having dinner on Ladies' Nights most likely started with that held at the University Club, March 29, 1943.

In 1961, at the ladies' request, Ladies' Night concluded the season as it has continued to do. Previously, the occasions had been held at different times of the year, in autumn, winter and spring, in good weather and in bad. The record for January 30, 1939 reads in part, "Early that morning a violent blizzard visited Chicago and continued unabated until midafternoon. Fifteen inches of snow fell accompanied by a high wind. Traffic was badly jammed, streets and walks were impassible for hours. The meeting, however, was *not* cancelled. A hardy few, members and their ladies, braved the storm, enjoyed a good dinner, and listened with delight to *The Story of a Good Boy* by James Bryan Herrick."

Sometimes the meeting room has been hot and stuffy. On one such occasion our former president Puttkammer, gently overcome by the warmth of the room, was quietly carried from the table, still sitting upright in his chair, while his wife sitting nearby as quietly awaited his eventual return. At the meeting on May 22, 1967, the recording secretary notes that there were "exceptionally good flower arrangements", in addition to which he found the paper interesting and well received.

Three of the papers read at Ladies' Nights have been published by the Club: "God's Country" by Earle A. Shilton, March 31, 1941; "A Golden Vessel of Great Song" (Edna St. Vincent Millay) by Douglass Pillinger, May 18, 1964; "He" (Alexander Pope) by Cyril O. Houle, May 25, 1970. A baker's dozen of club members have read papers at more than one Ladies' Night. The record was set by Paul Shorey who was called upon on three occasions, 1910, 1928, 1933. Those who have read two papers are: Paul McC. Angle, 1948, 1963; Walker B. Davis, 1957, 1968; Carl A. Drag-

sted, 1959, 1966; Morris Fishbein, 1930, 1971; Willard King, 1947, 1974; Edward G. Mason, 1880, 1888; Thomas C. McConnell, 1946, 1951; Stanley Pargellis, 1949, 1962; E. W. Puttkammer, 1943, 1955; Charles B. Reed, 1910, 1911; Frederic W. Root, 1880, 1897; and Payson S. Wild, 1917, 1935.

Thus far the Club has never had a lady speaker for its Ladies' Night. After all, the Club is a company of men. But on two occasions ladies have had a small part in the proceedings. The first was on April Fool's Day, 1907 when Mrs. Rossiter G. Cole, at the piano, accompanied her husband's singing of his own composition, *Count Robert of Sicily*, to illustrate his paper, "The Melodrama of a Modern Music Form". On May 13, 1968 President Wartman read this poem:

TO THE BRAVE FROM THE FAIR

Most Monday nights from October to May
We ladies at home alone do stay
While you with an extra brush and a scrub
Hurry off to the you-know-what Club.
How you love that weekly spree
With the boys of the CLC.
And now you men have been told,
To implore, yea be bold,
Your lady to invite
To join you for ladies' night.
Don't you know that we've waited all year
Just to answer—yes dear
When you say loud and clear
Ladies' night is here.
So, begone with beseeching and begging
We need no special urging
To join in this gala evening
Of wining and dining and learned reading.
To each host
Here's a toast—
Enjoy your Monday nights,
Of our loneliness have no fear,
We exact just one right
And that's—once a year to be here.

Which his wife, Mary, had written specially for the occasion.

WILLIAM B. WARTMAN