

"Not much If," muttered Macpherson, "about your wurrk on the green!"

"But I'm afraid I'm busy to-night. Are you free Monday? Come and dine with me at the Hemlock Club. Seven thirty. Don't dress!"

Macpherson was enchanted. The Hemlock Club! He had a vision of Paradise. It was the most exclusive club in London. Only one scandal marred its fame; early in the eighteenth century, a struggling painter of portraits, who had been rejected by the Academy, was blackballed by mistake for an Archbishop of York, whom nobody wanted. They made it up to the painter, but there was no getting rid of the Archbishop. So the committee of the club had dismissed all its servants, and filled their places with drunken parsons who had gone to the bad; in a month the Archbishop withdrew with what dignity remained to him. They had then hung his portrait in the least respected room in the club. To consolidate their position, and arm themselves against counter-attack, they passed a rule that no man should be eligible for membership unless he had done something "notorious and heretical," and it had been amusing and instructive to watch bishops attacking cardinal points of their faith, judges delivering sarcastic comments on the law, artists upsetting all the conventions of the period, physicists criticising the doctrine of the conservation of energy, all to put themselves right with the famous Rule Forty-Nine. Most of these people had no real originality, of course, but at least it forced them to appear to defy convention; and this exercised a salutary influence on the general tone of Society.

On the walls were portraits and caricatures of most of the club worthies, with their heresies inscribed. Wellington was there, with his "Publish and be damned to you!" So was a great judge with that great speech on the divorce law which begins, "In this country there is not one law for the rich, and another for the poor," and goes on to tell the applicant, a working tailor, that to secure a divorce he need only arrange to have a private act of Parliament passed on his behalf. Geikie was there with "I don't believe that God has written a lie upon the rocks"; Shelley with "I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus;" Byron with "Besides, they always smell of bread and butter," Sir Richard Burton, with a stanza from the *Kasidah*: "There is no God, no man made God; a bigger, stronger, crueller man; Black phantom of our baby-fears, ere thought, the life of Life, began." Swinburne was there too, with "Come down and redeem us from virtue;" and a host of others. There was even a memorial room in which candles were kept constantly burning. It commemorated the heretics whom the club had failed to annex. There was William Blake, with "Everything that lives is holy;" there was James Thomson, with "If you would not this poor life fulfil, then you are free to end it when you will, without the fear of waking after death;" there was Keats, with "Beauty is Truth, Truth, Beauty;" John Davidson, with a passage from the *Ballad of a true-born poet*: "We are the scum

Of matter: fill the bowl!

And scathe to him and death to him

Who dreams he has a soul!"

Aubrey Beardsley, Ernest Dowson, Beddoes, Crackenthorpe, were all represented. They had

even Victor Neuburg, with "Sex is one; go now, be free."

There was in this room a votive tablet with the names of those who had been invited to join the club, and refused; notably Whistler, below whose portrait of himself was his letter of refusal, which he had sent with it; "I could not possibly consent to meet people of my own kind; my friends tell me it is very painful."

King Edward VII, also, was in this group, with the letter from his secretary: "His Majesty commands me to inform you that greatly as he appreciates the good wishes and loyalty of the president and members of the Hemlock Club, he cannot possibly take an oath declaring himself a Republican, or a Jacobite, as he understands it necessary to comply with Rule Forty-nine."

There were many other curious rules in the Club; for example, a fine of a guinea for failing to eat mustard with mutton; another of Five Pounds for quoting Shakespeare within the precincts of the Club. The wearing of a white rose or a plaid necktie was punishable with expulsion; this dated from the period when it was heretical to be a Jacobite but dangerous to display it.

Many other customs of the Club were similarly memorial; the Head Porter was always dressed in moleskin, in honor of the mole whose hill tripped the horse of William The Third; members whose Christian names happened to be George had to pay double the usual subscription, in memory of the Club's long hatred of the Four Georges; and at the annual banquet a bowl of hemlock was passed round in the great hall, decorated for the occasion as a funeral chamber; for it was always claimed that Socrates was the real founder of the Club. There was a solemn pretence, every year, of a search for the "missing archives of the Club." On November the Fifth there was a feast in honor of Guy Fawkes; and on the eleventh of the same month the Lord Mayor of London of the year was burnt in effigy.

Such is the club to which Macpherson suddenly found himself invited. He felt that now he could marry; he would have something to boast of to his grandchildren!

II

But, as things chanced, Macpherson nearly missed the dinner after all. He would have called off anything else in the world. But he couldn't give up that! However, it was a very sorry Scotsman who appeared at the door of the Club. In keeping with the general eccentricity of the place, the entrance to the Club was mean and small, almost squalid; a narrow oaken door, studded with iron. And no sooner had he reached the great open space within than the Head Porter called him aside, saying in a whisper, "Excuse me, Sir, but the Hanoverian spies are everywhere. Allow me to relieve you of your necktie!" For Macpherson had worn the Tartan of his clan all day. He was accommodated with a selection of the latest neckwear. This trifling matter subdued him most effectively; he felt himself transported to a new strange world. It did him good; for to the very steps of the Club he had been obsessed by the calamity of the day.

Simon Iff received him with affability and dignity, offered him a cigarette, and proceeded to show him the Club. Macpherson was intensely awed; he was in a kind of private edition de luxe of Westminster