

**THE TRUTH
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The Green Carnation.

Café Royal: Ninety Years of Bohemia.
Guy Deghy and Keith Waterhouse.
(Hutchinson. 21s)

'This loneliness was hell when I was young: it gets worse as one ages'—so lamented a Café Royalist in conversation recently. The popularity of the old Café Royal, as chronicled in this book, depended, I am convinced, on its ability to reduce, or rather, to give the illusion of reducing, the terrible isolation of its patrons, a thesis easily maintained in the case of the writers and painters who frequented this Parisian outpost in the West End of London; but the others, too, were lonely folk, seeking comfort in the proximity of fellow solitaries—the French anarchists, for instance, with their extraordinary handbook, replete with English equivalents of the more anarchic French curses, and its suggestion that Willy Morris, though not politically sound, was almost always good for a meal.

Then there were those other social pariahs, the chorus-girls of the *Alhambra* and the *Empire*, perched coyly upon the edges of the red plush sofas, beneath the gilded glances of the caryatids, affecting indifference to the lecherous appraisals of the bookies, and the bibulous pleasantries of the cogenors, the yellow-press journalists—for it was not yet fashionable for the peerage to seek connubial felicity in the arms of the chorus.

Even from among the most peculiar of Bohemia's natives, the regular Royalists were distinguished by their oddities—of thought, behavior, or appearance. The *Five Customers* of an early chapter are themselves sufficient evidence of this—Oscar Wilde, whose cult of the sunflower, averred Arthur Symons, another erstwhile Royalist, was a poor imitation of that of the hortensia by Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac (what an embarrassment the long-lived and extremely knowledgeable Symons was to more than one poseur of the Wilde genre!); Whistler, a gentle enemy—to his friends; Beardsley, genius of the *Yellow Book*; Dowson, faithful to the last, less to Cynara than to the maddest musics and the strongest wines; Leonard

Smithers, publisher of the most esoteric pornographies. Each was, in his several ways, an isolated and unhappy figure; and so were many successive Royalists of fame—Frank Harris, who beneath the layers of bombast and conceit concealed some excellent good sense—‘a critic’—he said, ‘should be not a fault-finder, but a star-finder’; Aleister Crowley, a mild necromancer and minor poet, driven to ever more rabid excesses by the stupid public misrepresentations of his cherished adolescent notions; Peter Warlock, parading his miseries and his prejudices in a neurotic fandango, until the finale in the gas-filled room, the cat humanely shut out before the everlasting nightfall.

I have perhaps given the impression that *Café Royal* is a gloomy, perverse book. This is not so. On the contrary, it is gay and lively and full of laughter. Nevertheless, the laughter is sometimes a shade frenzied, the gaiety betimes hysterical, the conviviality more in the spirit of a wake than of a carnival; and it is so because the ninety years of Bohemia was a sustained effort to forget, for a short while, at least, that no man is other than alone, and that each bears within him his own particular splendours and miseries.