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PEOPLE'S OWN CLUBS OF HAVANA

Remarkable Institutions On A Vast Scale Suggested As Model For War Memorial Social Centres In This Country

(By Mrs. W. W. Hubbard, from the New York Times.)

One does not usually go to Cuba for object lessons in modern progress. And yet that supposedly backward island seems to have got hold of one thing, or a form of a thing, which promises so much toward the solution of serious problems with which the world is now faced that we might do much worse than copy it in this country. It is a peculiar Cuban institution about which comparatively little is known outside of the island, or at least outside of Latin America.

Several years ago I was in Havana. I was walking down the Prado, and stopped to admire a handsome marble building just completed—a building of monumental proportions and imposing architecture. I went into it. Fine marble columns extended along a corridor leading to a broad stairway forming the approach to the second floor, where a French artist of some reputation was decorating the ceiling of an L-shaped room. There seemed to be endless other rooms, and a workman whom I questioned told me that it was a clubhouse.

I remember expressing surprise that Havana had wealth enough to support a club on such a magnificent scale as this one appeared to be. There is nothing of the sort in New York comparable to it in size or outward and inward splendor. The answer was that it was not a rich man's club at all. On the contrary, it was a people's club—a club of cooks, housemaids, chauffers and the working classes generally. Subsequently we learned that the club actually had 50,000 members, each of whom paid into the treasury $1.50 a month. A very simple calculation shows that the dues alone, therefore, amounted to $75,000 a month, or $900,000 annually.

The range of the activities of the organization is wide. Educational features are provided, which include both day and night schools for children 6 years old and upward, as well as for adults. In these schools are taught vocal and instrumental music, drawing, painting, elocution, elementary manual training work, Spanish grammar, arithmetic, bookkeeping, shorthand, and typewriting. Lectures are given besides on commercial, industrial, financial and social subjects. In a general way the day classes parallel the work of the public schools.

Providing amusement is, of course, another function of the club. Balls are a conspicuous feature of the program. The club members and the children in the schools give plays, and there are banquets, card parties, chess and domino contests, billiards and pool. There is a gymnasium, and the club has teams for the principal popular sports. In the club library the daily newspapers from all over the world are to be found on file. Moreover, poor and meritorious students receive scholarships from the club and pay nothing for the schooling which is provided.

Even this is only the beginning of the organization's beneficent activities. A hospital accommodating 1,000 patients is maintained for the members of the club, and attendance of doctors and nurses and cost of medicine and surgical operations in this hospital are included in the privileges covered by the $1.50 monthly dues.

In addition to this hospital care, physicians are retained by the club to furnish medical attention to club members all over the island, and certain hours are set aside for this purpose. Dental care is given in the hospital. It is also provided that after a member has been in good standing for five years, if he becomes ill and is unable to support himself, the club undertakes to pay his transportation home and $75 besides. A member dying without funds is buried by the club. A hearse drawn by four horses is expressly stipulated.

Other useful features of the club are free notary service for wills and similar instruments and a free service of legal advice for the members.

The method of collecting the dues of the scattered membership is interesting. Agents are appointed throughout the island to make the collections, and failure to pay for three months is followed by expulsion. As this means the loss of many privileges, however, the dues are usually paid with promptness.

The City of Havana has four clubs of the type just outlined. One of the most prosperous is the Association of Clerks, which has 30,000 members, but the largest is the Centro Gallego, or Galician Club, for the lower laboring classes. It is this club the activities and establishment of which I have been more particularly describing, and its membership is 50,000. There is also a woman's club, "La Balear"—a name taken from the Balearic Islands.

These institutions are peculiar to Havana, and have no counterpart in any other city in the world. They have eight hospitals connected with them, upon which they spend a half million a year. In 1919, when the membership of the Gallego Club was 40,000, there were 11,026 patients treated at the club hospital during the year. This did not include 2,240 dental patients.

This Centro Gallego was founded in 1880 with 730 members. In 1881 the membership had actually decreased, but there was a gain in 1882, and since that time the membership has been growing steadily to the 50,000 figure already mentioned. The ballroom of this club is a whole block long and 70 feet wide, with room for 8,000 people. It may be noted that it is the custom of the Havana Clubs to give all their dances on the same nights, so as to divide the attendance. Even with this arrangement it would be impossible to handle the crowds if the majority of the members did not live out of the city. The fact that these members are unable to attend leaves space enough for the rest. The Clerks' Club has the largest ballroom in the world, it is said, and I have been told that the National Theatre, purchased by the Galacian Club, is larger than the Metropolitan Opera House in New York and seats something like 10,000 persons.

To sum up, the clubs seem to represent a remarkably successful and a remarkably inclusive experiment in co-operation with a view to covering the practical needs of town life—education, health protection, social service of various sorts, and amusement. There have been many suggestions from persons interested in particular good causes all looking toward making the endowment of those good causes a sort of war memorial to take the place of the conventional figures in bronze and marble which have been the aftergrowth of other wars. Some want hospitals as memorials to our soldier dead. Some favor art institutes or conservatories of music, or libraries, or schools, or stadia for sports. The trouble with practically all these plans is that they are too narrow in scope to command the support of all the people—the tremendous sentiment for paying honor to the men who have died for their country cannot be got solidly behind what are in a sense special interests—contributory as all are to the common good.

The Havana experiment which goes so far toward assembling in one institution all these interests may, therefore, furnish a valuable suggestion. Perhaps memorial sentiment might be mobilized behind such an undertaking—the more especially as they are institutions by and of as well as for the people.

Many nations have tried co-operative schemes with very limited success. We in the United States have had various attempts at model communities which soon vanished. Usually some wealthy citizen with laudable zeal has started the movement and financed it as a proud father, while his adopted dear children wanted independence and would not be made good or educated or amused his way.

But it is Hava[illegible] that has made a consi[illegible] of co-operation, and for forty years this laboring people's club has been growing bigger and stronger until the club membership is enormous, and yet they are equipped to handle their numbers.

Can we not take these clubs as guides, in these reconstruction days and adapt them to American problems? Take, for example, a county containing thirty or forty thousand people. Suppose we could get 5,000 to join a county club at $1.50 per month. This would mean a revenue of $7,500 monthly, with a yearly income of $90,000.

With this sum we could support a hospital of thirty or thirty-five beds, with the County Commissioners paying certain sums for free beds. We could have a list of physicians over the county who would give free medical attention to club members. This would help the physicians to keep the people well, instead of trying to cure them after they are sick. Dental care could also be given. This hospital, with a list of consulting physicians, might be maintained for $40,000; this will leave us $50,000 for our club. A large building would be required to contain a library, a gymnasium, possibly a swimming pool, a bowling alley, etc. An auditorium with a capacity of from five to eight thousand people would be necessary. This same auditorium might be used for dancing and moving pictures.

Among the social problems that might be handled are those of child welfare, clean sports, good, decent amusements, general health, co-ordination of the schools with the home education, etc.

Particularly the back-to-the-farm movement could be materially advanced through such a club, as it is the dearth of amusements and the lack of opportunity to keep in touch with the world that drive our boys and girls to the city. A system of clubs like the Centro Gallego would, in fact, do away with nearly all charity organizations and change our entire hospital system, thus greatly relieving the State Treasury and giving the people concerned medical care and attention never before thought possible.

Commencement at Washington College

Chestertown has begun to fill with college students of the past, who are here to enjoy the annual commencement exercises next week. Many will be here who, while here at College, were actively connected with the athletic, social and intellectual life of the institution and community. Stars of the past on gridiron and diamond will again mingle with our people and revive the happenings of many years past. We welcome them to Chestertown.

The commencement exercises of Washington College will begin tomorrow, Sunday, with the baccalaureate sermon in William Smith Hall by Rev. Joseph Wilson Sutton, of New York. The Y. M. C. A. exercises will be held in the M. E. Church on the evening of the same day, Dr. G. T. Alderson delivering the sermon. On Monday evening the Blundermakers' Club of W. C. will give the drama, "Won by Wireless"; On Tuesday morning the declamation contest for the Simpers medal will be held, while the annual debate for the Rogers prizes will be held on the same evening at 8 o'clock. The commencement proper will be held in William Smith Hall Wednesday morning at 10 o'clock, the sermon to the graduates being delivered by Dr. Murray P. Brush.

The graduates at Washington College this year will be as follows: Carroll Edward Bounds, of Allen, Md.; Clyde Everett Bounds, of Snow Hill, Md.; Charles Budd Ford, of Chestertown; Ruby Josephine Graham, Chestertown; Milton Lecompte Hubbard, of Carroll County; Merrill Donaldson Knight, of Rockville, Md.; Harry Brewington Lankford, of White Haven, Md.; Edwin Clyde Walls, of Church Hill, Md.; Page Gibbons Young, Aquasco, Md.; Francisco de Paula Carral, of Mexico City, Mexico; Harriette Staples Welch, of Chestertown; Harry Derrickson West, of Chestertown.

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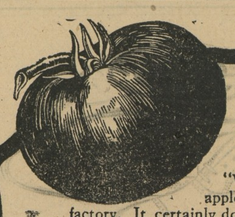

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