

THE REAL STORY OF A REAL CLUB WOMAN

IT IS CHARMINGLY AND FRANKLY RELATED AND HAS CREATED A DECIDED SENSATION AT A TIME WHEN CLUB LIFE IS BEING WIDELY DISCUSSED.

The "Confessions of a Club Woman," the author of which has chosen to remain a mystery, even to her publishers, Messrs. Doubleday, Page & Co., has excited some lively discussion in the club society with which she frankly and knowingly deals. Speculation as to her identity is stimulated by the relation in her book of some real occurrences in the life of certain women's clubs, and also because the book appeared at a time when the life of women is under animated discussion, owing to its recent extensive growth.

The club woman who makes these confessions, who was christened "Johnnie" but known as Jackie, comes from a little Kansas town, where "not to have achieved matrimony by the time one was 25 was evidence of some lack of charm in mind or words or person." She has therefore at 31 married Joseph Henning, a young retail grocer, and begins life with him in a five-room flat over his Chicago grocery.

"This life," she seems quite ideal for three or four years, during which time two babies are added to the menage. Then, with the increase of her bustling young husband's business and his greater engagement in it, the "Johnnie" is "shut" in the house, isolated and discontented for the wife, who is beautiful and not yet 35.

Basin of Discontent.

She reads the society columns of the Sunday paper, and in her ignorance finds the account of "a pink tea on the ragged edge of South Chicago as fascinating as that of a dinner dance on the Lake Shore drive."

"Descriptions of gowns worn at these places," she says, "became an entertainment in the woman's room and the fashion plates on the woman's page."

"I began to wonder how I would look in an evening gown. And, shall I confess it? I even went so far as to get an outfit but black silk low on the shoulders, just to gratify this strange longing; and one night, when the children were asleep and the maid was out, I did my hair up very high and put on the outfit, and looked in the mirror and saw there what did not lessen my growing discontent."

The next Sunday her eye falls upon the following in the woman's page: "What does the club do for women? Everything. From the woman who dwells in a Lake Shore palace down to the wife of the corner grocer, it broadens her horizon and enlarges her sympathies. The grocer's wife, provided she is attractive and ambitious, and tactful, may rise to as high a position in the club as does a lady who rides in her carriage, clothed in sables and wearing the costliest jewels."

Shortly after this Mrs. Parsons, the teacher of a Bible class, calls. Mrs. Parsons is a member of leading women's clubs and the wife of a political candidate. She finds Mrs. Henning bright and attractive, and at her naively expressed desire to belong to a club, promises to present her name to the Nona Bene club.

The career of the "Club Woman" begins with her presentation to this one of the largest and most popular women's clubs. A new ready-made gown is bought for the first meeting. "Nature has endowed me with some degree of intellect," she says, "and perhaps I was justified in gazing with complacency at my reflection in the bedroom mirror."

At any rate the "moral support" of a new gown enabled her to "stand around in the room in search of a vacant seat and to conduct herself with aplomb among a room full of strangers. Among the addresses on the program is one by a popular young clergyman who, in the course of a childhood friend of the Club Woman and whose recognition of her after the meeting helped to give her standing. Events follow rapidly after this first meeting.

Mrs. Parsons' ambition is to be club president, and she uses her new friend as an ally in political maneuvers and when elected puts her upon the reception committee. Meanwhile Mr. Henning moves to a house on Lake Shore drive.

"When a woman is once thoroughly inoculated with the bacilli of the club fever," "Confessions" continues, "there is no course; no great scientist has yet been brave enough to apply a remedy sufficiently heroic to kill the germs. These women who have had the advantage of social intercourse with their kind have the disease mildly and rationally; but those of us who have been deprived of experience with the world, especially those who have been tied, willingly or unwillingly, to home duties, are hopelessly cases from the very outset. And I have been thoroughly inoculated."

Says the "Confessions": "Those who think the real excitement of a biennial banquet with the opening exercises have never known the delight of being one of the hundreds of women who journey to the great convention of clubs by special train. The visits between occupants of different cars, the gatherings in the observation car attached to the rear and monopolized in the ordinary train by the men, even the 'caucuses' held in the deserted smoking compartments of our coaches, put another plank on the timbers of ordinary travel. . . . A great modern hotel given over to women—have you ever seen it? Hundreds of up-to-date, middle-aged women in soft, swishing silks everywhere; the tradition of the hotel goes, sit in window and hang about news stands and telegraph offices set aside for the nonce, and a soft rush of femininity in corridors and reading rooms and hallways, until the few homeless ladies in the hotel are crowded into the hotel are fain to hide in further smoking rooms and out-of-the-way corners. For once we felt the freedom of our better halves and rejoiced as les nouvelles femmes d'un discret mariage."

The episode of a Mormon wife and two colored women as delegates threatens to develop a row in the convention. This is averted by the tact of the presiding officer, the ladies in the "banquet" room, who have a hold on Jackie because of having written her speech, has through her secured a scoop for her paper.

The rush for seats at the convention reminds Jackie of "a stampede of cattle in a Kansas road-up."

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The Veiled Prophetess

"Do you think she will die?" he whispered, when Mrs. Marston had beckoned him out of the room, and surely any one could read the haggard misery in his face. But the father answered with cruel directness: "I think that if she dies you have killed her by your neglect and coldness."

When Esther came slowly back to health and strength again her father insisted with rather an imperious manner that she should accompany him home. "And you may depend upon it," he added, "that I shall detain her as long as possible from a place where she is expected to do general housework."

"You are mistaken, sir," she said in her stiff way. "I do most of the work here. I seldom called on Esther to assist me."

Mr. Marston pointed towards his daughter's room. "I have done my best to give her a poor man's education, but she has certainly higher than mine. You are certainly better than my daughter's home comfort. I could do no more. Unhappily, she has few resources within herself, and at such a young age she is too ignorant."

"Hush, mother," interposed Arthur, who had listened with ill-concealed impatience to all this. "What fault exists with my daughter? I made too little allowance for my poor girl's pleasure-loving nature, and denied her the social excitement to which she had been accustomed. In future—"

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