

S P E E C H A T T H E A L P H A C L U B.

By

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1 - Gentlemen - I have seldom in my life been more gratified than by the compliment which you have paid me, in calling me to the chair of your meeting this evening - It marks your confidence in me as your fellow citizen and your reliance on my zeal for the happiness of my fellow citizens - In this reliance on my zealous good wishes you are not mistaken. I am hearty in the cause of your project - I have the most joyful anticipations of its success and of the benefits which such institutions are capable of bestowing when adopted by the middling class of Society - For this projected Society - unless we commit some great error in forming it - must and will succeed - You call yourselves the Alpha Club - I hail that letter as a goodly omen - I trust I shall live to see a whole alphabet of similar societies from Alpha even to Omega - and if my humble ^{efforts} ~~services~~ can be of the slightest use to you - such as they are and humble as they are they shall be at your service -

II - Your project is not new to my mind - It has ^{long} been long a favourite subject of my thoughts - In looking round the club-houses of London I have a thousand times said to myself - "How is this? All the rich men of this mighty metropolis - all those who are ambitious

to pass for rich and to frequent wealthy company - all these have
their club-houses - the titled men - the political men - the University
men - the naval and military men have built themselves palaces of
social resort - ^{May the very dustman has had his gin palace}
erected for him - ~~But the vast and valuable class of men~~
class, who can neither afford the palace club-houses of lordlings
nor condescend to the gin-palaces of the dustman - those men who
constitute the very ^{moral} strength and sinews of Society -
those men who are too respectable to make the public house their
daily haunt - yet who have nevertheless a natural yearning for
society for conversation & for the sight of many new papers and
many new books - how is it that the aforesaid men - as if they were
destitute of gregarious instinct have built no houses for themselves
for the purpose of social and sober resort -

This question however is satisfactorily answer'd to me ^{going} ~~the night~~
by the present meeting - The middling class of Society have opened
their eyes to the benefits that may be derived from ^{associations of} ~~clubs~~
a permanent and ~~half~~ half domestic or at least in some degree
domestic nature - similar to the clubs of the wealthier class,
though of course on a less expensive ^{plan} ~~system~~ - Clubs no doubt

and useful ones have long existed among the middling classes -
They have had benefit clubs and Masonic clubs - musical clubs for
the promotion ^{of harmony} and debating clubs for the cultivating ⁱⁿ of discord - ~~but~~
~~these~~ ^{these} Associations had no permanent ^{local habitation} place of ~~resort~~ - Their head quar-
-ters were the tavern that bourn from which the traveller returns,
indeed but not perpetually sober -

Now, however, at long & at length - the middling classes have discov-
-ered that clubs of a permanent habitation and of a character ^{to}
a certain degree approaching to domesticity would be an advantage
to them, as well as ^{to the} ~~to the~~ ^{similar} associations are to the richer part of
the community -

Now I come ^{here} ~~at~~ ^{may be made by due management} zealous to declare my opinion that such societies
such as you propose will be a greater comfort to the middling clas-
-ses than it can be to the richer - I know that to a man of
£1000 - up to 5000 ^{per} ~~ann~~ ^{ann} ~~ann~~ clubs may & frequently ^{are} - a great convenience and
advantage ~~to~~ & I further assert that to a man of £100 a
^{year} club of this kind will be a still & much greater convenience and
advantage - Mind that I do not ^{say} ~~prove~~ I prove this - I only as-
-sert it - as my firm belief derived from ^{con-} ~~the~~ ^{siderable} observa-
-tion - A young nobleman of £6000 a year and by no means a

A stingy man has told me that his Club was a saving to him -
How so I said - ~~Why~~ He answered why I get an excellent dinner
with less trouble and expense than I could have it at my ^{own} ~~my~~
house - But said I could you not get it well at a good rate coffee
house - Yes but I want society and conversation and who would
go for society and conversation to a coffee house - What public-
-ations should I find there beyond an almanac & an Army List -
Besides - if a friend from the country meets me whom I wish to invite
to dinner - I need not have all the fuss of ~~ordering~~ ^{making up} a dinner ^{separately} in my own
house ~~and inviting a party to it~~ - I need not take him to a coffee house
where we should dine only take a take - but I ^{bring him} ~~have~~ friends to the
club where I have friends ready to meet him - & where I can entertain
him with perfect comfort and ~~convenience~~ ^{repeat} this species of hospitality ~~over &~~
anon because it leads to no waste of money -

So says the rich man with an income of £1000 a year ^{or} upwards -
My thesis is that such a ^{kind} club moderated down of course to meet a narrow
income would be of still greater advantage to the bachelor of one
hundred a year than to the richer man - That to the latter ^{the} club
is a luxury - that to the former it would be a God-send -
I have used the word bachelor - because in a general view ^{all} the Clubs

are more important ~~to~~^{to} bachelors than to married men - On the whole
it is more essential to single than ^{to} connubial blessedness - but allow me
to say that in spite of this admission I by no means concede that
clubship may not enhance the comfort of a married man - On the con-
-trary there may be to him as well as ^{to} the bachelor a great advantage in
having an extradomestic place of sober and social resort, a place where
he may find news books & occasionally amusing conversation -
But gentlemen, ^{It may be told that} those sublime sources of Moral ^{by instruction} - the Fables of classic
antiquity - which inform us how Jupiter married his ^{own} sister - emasculated
his father - and turned himself into a bull in his amours with Europa - those
holy & classic legends seem worse to clubs - because they tell us that
Hercules laid aside his club when he became devotedly attached to a
lady - we are further informed that this lady love of ^{Hercules - stripped} ~~his~~
him of his lion's skin (It was before the invention of small clothes which
otherwise she would have worn) - what'd him with his own cudgel
& strapped him as he span in petticoats with her own buskins - But
gentlemen - this is no argument against clubs - the looman who
thus misused Hercules was not his wife but his mistress - It
forms no proof that married men should resign their clubs - if
they use them wisely and temperately -

But to return to the case of the £100 a year bachelor - which I have mentioned a category containing many a worthy man - This man has his friendships as well as the proudest peer in the realm - He has a friend, perhaps from the country to whom he wishes to show hospitality - He cannot ask him up to dine in his attic dormitory nor, may he get leave of his landlady to get the use, for one day of her dainty parlour - But he can take him to his Club & dine him comfortably and cheaply -

He ~~can~~ could get a sight too of a dozen publications to which he can with difficulty ^{now} get access as an insulated man - If the power of perusing at pleasure those publications be an ~~ex~~ convenience to the man of a thousand a year what an acquisition must they not be to the man of £100 - The former if he strained a point might bear the expense of buying them the latter could not buy them with his whole income - He of a thousand a year acts from the impulse of economy - but he of a hundred has ten times the motives for economy that can impell the other - If the reading advantage of the club is therefore of ten times greater value to the poorer man - Not will cheap publications such as the ^{cheap very cheap -} ~~poor~~ Magazine I ~~say~~ it with deep regard be a substitute to the middle classes

for access to a considerable library and to numerous periodicals
they are a blessing no doubt an unspeakable blessing to the
mechanical & laborious classes - But a young man in middling
life say the banker's - the merchant's or the lawyer's trust
clerk, ^{may have} ~~has~~ the prospective hope of one day attaining to ample circum-
stances and of mixing in the society of the most accomplished minds -
It would not do for him therefore to confide his reading to the
penny Magazine - he must have larger pasture field of knowledge -
and if call'd on for proofs - I ~~am~~ ^{am} confident I could prove the fact
that a Club Institution constructed on a scale of very moderate
expense would in no great time furnish a copious library -
In enumerating the advantages of a Club such as you propose - it is
my duty not to omit any single advantage - Therefore before I
debate further on its moral and intellectual benefits - allow me to speak
at the expense of being ^{dreadfully} ~~unpleasantly~~ unsentimental on its animal
benefits - on its creature-comforts, as the Puritans phrased ^{it}, & on the
cheapness of its cleanliness ^{refreshment} ~~of food & accommodation~~ -
Here I have got upon a subject ^{namely the cheapness with which men can live in large} ~~with which I feel a degree of acquaintance~~ ^{associations}
a subject with which I am better acquainted than you would
probably suppose me to be from my main ^{suits} ~~purpose~~ in life having

been researched into fiction - I say this from no fear of your suspecting
me of false pretensions to the practical ^{knowledge} of life but of my imag-
-ing that I know more than I do know ^{of} this humble ^{subject} - But the fact
is that I once projected a club in some respects very different from that
which you propose but in one respect identical with it - namely in the
object of uniting the greatest possible comfort with the smallest poss-
-ible expense - The desire of fulfilling this project was the ruling
passion of my mind for several months - During these I happened
to travel on the continent as far as Hungary & I lost no opportunity
of studying the excellent Statistics of every place that I visited not
as an expense - but as one intent on discovering how ^{the} greatest
possible comfort might be united with the smallest possible cost -
I then ^{on my} ~~visited~~ return home visited all the eating houses of London -
^{soon} ~~miss~~ to the lowest - missing with regret those noble picturesque
eating houses recorded by Smollet in which the guests mounted
a ladder to the refreshment by a ladder - which was removed un-
-til they ^{paid} ~~paid~~ their pence and descended once more by the ^{stairs} gra-
-dus ad Parnassum -

My general observation - after visiting a good part of Europe
was that considering the general prices of England and other

London is a wonderfully ^{cheap} place for ~~a~~ ^{eating} houses - Their profits, I mean the lower eating houses - must be very slender - & their ~~best~~ ^{strong} - priors are a very useful class of men - But they ~~cannot~~ perform impossibilities - They cannot ~~produce~~ ^{cook & sell} first rate meat ~~at~~ at a very cheap rate though it is wonderful what excellent meat may be found at some of them - In general however their viands are of the second rate - and what is worse they cannot present dirty and disgusting figures with marvellous foul linen - coming in to eat beside you men whom you have never seen before and who add nothing pleasant to the odour of the dishes set before you -

If you eschew those eating houses for better places the ~~expense~~ ^{expense} rises to double the cost of what you might dine for ~~at~~ in a cheaply and well estab-
-lished Club - You may smile perhaps at my claiming such knowledge of prandary statistics - But I assure you that if you will put into my hand a state of the Smithfield market prices I can tell you to the fraction ^{of a farthing} what a cleanly & comfortable Club-meal ought to cost - and I can further assure you that that cost ought to be somewhat less than the charge of the meanest eating house where the table cloth is soiled with grease and mustard -

I hold it therefore to be indisputable that Clubs established with ordinary prudence can afford the greatest possible comfort & clean-
-ness -

to the greatest number at the ^{smallest} ~~possible~~ possible expense—

But my fellow citizens much as we value comfort cleanliness and economy there is a moral benefit connected with such an institution as you propose which enhances even those blessings—

I mean the intellectual benefit of social & sober intercourse the exchange of thoughts among men, who gradually from month to month & from season ^{to season} become insensibly better acquainted and who discuss whatever points may interest them without the formality of appointed discussion—

What gives the resident of towns so generally a quicker faculty of thinking & even of uttering his thoughts than the rusticated man— It is the circumstance of his living in a denser state of society— where as iron sharpens the iron the wit of man is whetted by collision with other minds— Now the advantage of clubs is that they make town still more town than it would otherwise be— The club is a place of placid retirement without solitude— It is not a rus in urbe a rustication within a city— but an urbs in urbe a city within a city to the happy member of a well established club—

You will not form a Scientific or a Literary Club— but you will have many men among you more or less acquainted

with Science and Literature and the ~~less~~ ^{instructed} ~~informed~~ will have a
chance of improving their knowledge by colloquial intercourse if it
should be ever so fortuitous ^{to} the better informed —

Gentlemen I have no apology to offer for making so bold as to
advise you except in my honest zeal for the welfare of your
undertaking; but how earnest so ever my tone may be I really
mean to offer you ~~hints~~ ^{hints} rather than advice —

I beg to speak ^{of} ~~an~~ ^{one} important subject regarding ^{your} plan namely
to what limits you will carry your economy and to what extent
you will take courage to carry ^{your} ~~of~~ expenses — Of course I
must speak very generally on this theme — This is not a place for
specific consultation on ^{expense} ~~part~~ and outlay — The general ob-
ject of your institution no doubt ^{will be} ~~is~~ ^{to} ~~regard~~ economy — combined
as much as possible with comfort and convenience — This is the
life and soul of your undertaking — You cannot have heard
and believed what I have already said to you without giving me
credit for being a staunch economist in the conduct of Clubs —
So be not alarmed ^{with} ~~that~~ any suspicion ^{from} ~~that~~ I what I am
going to say that I am swerving from my plighted word —
No I have never changed my principles — & least of all

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my principle of belief in the sacred virtue of economy —
It is my economy in living that has made me ^{independent} ~~independent~~
through life and unchangeable in all my principles —

But economy is only a name and not a substance unless it helps
substantially ^{useful} ~~to some substantial end~~ & You my fellow citizens may defeat
your end by an exaggerated ^{attempt} at saving — and surely when a Scotch
man preaches to Englishmen against excessive ^{begging} he has a right
to be heard — Over saving ^{would} ~~will~~ exclude from your club a class
of ^{wealthy} ~~men~~ Plebsians accustomed to a good deal of comfort which
will ~~certainly~~ cost a certain expense though far below Patrician
extravagance — I divide this class of ^{wealthy} or at least
~~wealthy~~ ^{wealthy} Plebsians into two varieties — The first is
~~the easy - to - come - by~~ ^{that of men who with every other requisite for admission into}
^{wealthy} ~~clubs~~ ^{such as} ~~clubs~~ ^{unreproachable} ~~clubs~~ ^{character & good sense &}
^{any society} information are not eligible into ^{the} West End Clubs of London
because they deal honestly in retail — Let them cheat as
they like in whole - stile trade and they are eligible to a
West End Club — I have a friend — a counsellor in literary matters
a man ^{in English} ~~the~~ ^{best} ~~the~~ ^{best} informed ^{in English} ~~that~~ ^{whom} I know in London whom I con-
-sulted in writing my life of Shakespeare & should be happy

to consult on any similar subject - this man ~~would~~ ^{no doubt} would
not take the trouble of entering a West End Club if they were
to ask ^{him} - but he could not be proposed for one of them as a
member because ^{my friend} the learned villain keeps a retail book shop
& could be convicted of selling books over his counter -

Now in this variety of the Plebeian there are many men who would
be of great advantage to your institution - As to their being inel-
-igible to fashionable clubs - in the name of reason - can there
be either honour in eligibility or dishonour in ineligibility to
clubs - where a booby would be sure of entrance and a learn-
-ed man of refusal -

There is another variety of the Plebeian class - who would
be a great accession ^{to you} - I distinguish them as a variety be-
-cause they are perfectly eligible to the West End clubs -
though those ~~clubs~~ ^{clubs} are not eligible to them - I mean men
residing generally in the country where business allow ^{or calls} them
to spend perhaps ^{only} a month in the year in London - but who
grudge paying 20 £s down & 5 £s a year subscription for a
month's use of a club - Your terms would no doubt suit
many of them - But remember that both the varieties
of the Plebeian class I have mentioned would require


many comforts in a club and these comforts are not to be provided on an overrigidly system of Expenses—

In general I would suggest that the clubs ^{of} the middle classes of life ought not ^{on the first instance} to exhibit a precipitate descent from those of the class called by courtesy the higher classes—but succeed them in their formation like a continuation in the inclined plane of station in Society—

As I know my own heart I am neither a tuft-hunter nor a lover ^{of the word} ^{or the thing} of the word Aristocracy—yet you my friends must to a certain degree be aristocrat—you cannot help it—Society in England is out and out aristocratic—You also must to a certain degree aristocratic exclusively—You will have the lawyers the barristers and the merchants who come occasionally with their employers & they cannot salute their employers but as a mess mate of the same club—

These subjects however & others connected with them I must leave to your Councils & your own reflections—

The earnest advice that I would offer you is not to be hurried in this affair—& to be especially deliberate in your choice of members—



UNPUB
LISHED
SPERCH
AT
ALPHA
CLUB

THOMAS
CAMPBELL

ORIGINAL
MANU.
SCRIPT



