The Portrait of a Clubman, Richard Gaston, 1840-1901

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I

On 5 November 1901 the funeral ceremony of a clubman was held at Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington, London. The coffin left his late residence at 17 Albert Road, Dalston, at about 14:30 and arrived at the cemetery some half an hour later. There was a plate affixed to the coffin, on which the following announcement was inscribed:

JOHN WALKER,
Known as Richard Gaston,
Died October 28th, 1901,
Aged 60 Years.

Many clubmen came out to witness the funeral. Among them were B.T.Hall, secretary of the Working Men's Club and Institute Union (hereafter referred to as the CIU), Ralph Manley, secretary of the Mildmay Radical Club, from which club the largest crowds of mourners seem to have appeared, and other leading clubmen. George E.White, of the Central Club, to which Gaston belonged at the time of death, conducted the proceedings of the day. A report of the Club Life wrote: 'We lingered in the cemetery until the after glow had almost faded away and a chilly breeze had arisen. Fitting, indeed, it seemed that the winds of the autumn should whirl the desolate leaves in circles, making them whisper like ghostly voices of the mystery of life, and the still greater mystery of death. If we were to write the epitaph over Mr.Gaston's grave, we should simply write, in legible characters, "Here Lies a Man."'1)
It could be argued that the working men's club movement as a nationwide movement commenced in 1862, when the CIU, a body intended to be a national centre, was formed. Most of the working men's clubs in the early years of the CIU were established by well-off patrons, who sought to provide opportunities for 'rational recreation' to the working men. The clubs were intended to be instrumental in elevating the morally degraded working men. However, the clubs of Gaston's time, from the 1870s to 1900s, were of quite a different character from those of the initial years of the CIU. Many of them were no longer under the paternalist control of the patrons and more or less independent. At the clubs, for example, drinking, which had often been prohibited, became permitted. The principle of excluding political and sectarian discussions were not prevailing any more. Many of the clubs of Gaston's time could be called genuine working-class organisations.

Richard Gaston, a printer by trade, was a fairly well-known figure among the members of the working men's clubs, particularly those in London. It may have been as the editor of such club journals as the Club and Institute Journal, the Club World, and the Club Life, his last venture, that he was best-known. He died at the Charing Cross Hospital, where he had been an in-patient for about three weeks. His illness had become known in April of the year. However, at first it could be written of in not very much serious manners. 'An eminent physician, after a long examination, pronounces the malady to be a "severe form of dyspepsia" - no doubt the result of numberless club dinners which have not yet digested!' In October he once again became ill and was forced to leave his editorial duties of the Club Life, to which he was not to commit himself again.

On his death many letters of sympathy and condolence were written by the clubmen. One by the Bryanston Club wrote: 'His work in connection with the club movement was so persistent and so determined ... as to make his loss almost irreparable. Everything having for its object the advancement of questions beneficial to clubs had, in Mr.Gaston, a persistent advocate, and his loss will be keenly felt. The respect to his memory is, I feel sure, universal.' One by the West Southwark Liberal and Radical Club wrote: 'The committee of this Club learn with deep regret of the recent death of Mr.Gaston, and have instructed me to convey to you [the editor of the Club Life] their sincere sympathy for the almost irreparable loss his family, your paper, and clubs have sustained in his death. Trusting that time will soften the effects of so sad an event, and that the noble life he led, which we shall still have a record will be the pattern which, I hope, will find many followers.' Arthur Elliott, member of the Wood Green Liberal Club, whose name was known 'as the author of many stirring Radical lyrics,' contributed his poem in memory of...
Gaston to the *Club Life*.

And thou art gone! The genial, frank and kind,
Whose heart best valiantly for all mankind -
   Art gone away,
Far beyond earth into the vast Unknown,
Beyond the confines of this petty zone,
To where beams 'round the Almighty's throne
   Eternal day.

Yes, thou art gone, whose tongue and pen were free,
And ever used for sacred liberty
   And Freedom's cause;
Which sought thy fellow-man from ill to raise,
To make much sweeter all his toil and days,
And lead him pleasantly by easy ways
   To Reason's laws.

We will not say "Farewell!" thou livest still;
Thy spirit's with us and thy master-will
   Doth still abide
Where thou wast wont our drooping hearts to cheer,
And with kind words to banish care and fear,
Till grief gave place to joy, and all was clear
   As ocean's tide.

We miss thee now - thy frank and genial face,
The loving smile with all its charm and grace,
   The twinkling eye;
The racy story and the graphic speech,
That fun and laughter brought within the reach
Of crowded audiences, to whom thou'd teach
   The reason why.
The chapter 17 of *Our Sixty Years*, a sort of official history of the CIU published in 1922, by B.T.Hall, is entitled 'The Men of the Movement', in which brief sketches of thirteen leading figures of the working men's club movement are presented. Gaston is one of them. Other twelve are Henry Solly, Hodgson Pratt, Stephen S.Tayler, Herbert Praed, Thomas Paterson, William Minet, T.F.Hobson, J.J.Dent, Jesse Argyle, B.T.Hall, Rodolph Cuerel, and R.Richardson. Hall apparently regarded Gaston as a notable activist of the movement, who played important roles in the development of the CIU. Indeed, Gaston was the editor of the organ of the CIU, the *Club and Institute Journal*, from 1888 to 1894, and a member of both its Council and Executive. However, unlike such leaders as Solly and Pratt, Gaston was also deeply involved in the daily activities of the clubs. It could be said that he was a real clubman himself as well as the leader of the club movement. Hall was clearly aware of this.

Richard Gaston was a clubman of clubmen, "racy of the soil," an exact product of the movement, representing in himself, if few of its higher ideals, all its virility, good humour, steady determination, and plain commonsense. He was the link between the hopes of the idealists, and the people, and the facts. And if he allowed no wild passion for impossibilities to sway him, he nevertheless was sustained by an enthusiasm which was as solid, as stolid, and as vigorous, as his mind and frame.

Gaston was considered to be a person who could understand 'the people', in other words, the rank-and-file clubmen, with his 'plain commonsense'. Hall put forwards Gaston as 'the link' between 'idealist' leaders of the movement and the rank-and-file clubmen, by opening his sketch with Gaston's poem.

It may be glorious to write
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
Once in a century.

But better far it is to speak
One simple word which now and then
Shall waken their free nature in the weak
And friendless souls of men.

To write some earnest verse or line
Which, seeking not the praise of Art,
Shall make a clearer faith and manhood shine
In the untutored heart.

Gaston was not 'a great captain of men', who conceived 'great schemes' or saw 'great plans'. 'But he was of aid invaluable to the army service, the engineers, and the administration.' One of the reasons why Hall included Gaston in his thirteen 'Men of the Movement' might have been Gaston's commitment to daily club life, which could not be found in most of other twelve leaders 'of the idealist class'.

As a person of 'cheery and joyous of nature', who was gifted with 'keen wit', 'vigorous speech' and 'facile pen', Gaston was 'never above the heads of his fellows.' Such characteristics enabled him to be popular among the clubmen. However, Gaston was not just a merry and easy-going person. '... he hated with a dogged strength the sordid surroundings of his mates and his class, and devoted himself with speech and pen and labour to help the movement which he saw as the most powerful instrument in the destruction of sorrow and the manufacture of happiness. He believed with almost fanatical fervour that clubs raised the standard of life and conduct amongst workmen, ...'

Hall's sketch does not give much detailed information about Gaston's career.

Becoming a member of the Borough of Hackney in its earliest days, he became librarian there, and from here stepped into every activity of the movement. As Editor of the Journal from 1888 to 1894 he was, perhaps, best known, and the personal interest he then excited was kept alive by his connection with the Club World (a venture in which his downright trusting nature led him into alliances not always of profit to
himself), and by his editorship (and proprietorship) until his death of the now successful weekly, *Club Life*.

The main stage of Gaston’s activities as a prominent clubman was London, where ‘it was, for 20 years before his death, impossible to think of clubdom without Gaston.’ As ‘an inseparable figure of Metropolitan Club life’, he spoke, recited particularly poems including his own and performed dramas, some of which were, again, written by himself, ‘at every club in the metropolis’. His presence on the club platform and stage seems to have done much to attract a large audience. His experience of serving on the Council and Executive of the CIU gave him ‘a wealth of knowledge of the inner life of the Union which used with rare skill and discretion in his visits to the clubs.’ Gaston did not commit himself to any other movement than the club movement. ‘The clubs to him were the whole of his life. No other movement attracted his service. From the getting up in the morning till rest at night, with scare a day’s intermission, he laboured in this single cause. ... His epitaph might well record that he was a clubman first, last, and all the time. His life was given to us.’(6)

Gaston was a genuine and popular clubman, who was probably more loved rather than admired. This essay is an attempt at shedding some new light on the club life of working men in the late nineteenth century, by investigating the activities and writings of Gaston, who was deeply involved in it.

II

Richard Gaston, John Walker in his real name, was born in 1840 as a son of a shoemaker probably in London. After spending some of his youthful days in the same business, he soon decided to seek for fields afresh. Although much is not known about his early career, it was as a printer that he finally established himself. He developed his strong taste for poetry and drama during his childhood. One of his old friends recalled: ‘You could not please him better than by talking about authors or acting and actors, or by reading one or more of his numerous poems which sprang from his pen’. He used to write to fill up spare time while in the shop and visit theatres after day’s work. Sadler’s Wells was a place for his frequent visits.

When quite young I often used to mount the gallery, and from that elevated spot have seen Richard III., Macbeth, and many other tragic plays. I can well remember the
trouble to get in, the pushing and the driving before the gallery stairs were reached, and the rush down the slope to get the front seats. Many a time have I seen my favourites in the streets and followed them, admiring their figures, which I had often seen clad in “shapes” or in armour. As I knew the call boy of the Wells I was a bit favoured occasionally ...

Not much time had passed before he, together with his friends, made up his mind to take to amateur acting ‘as a stepping-stone to the professional boards’. The name of Richard Gaston, which was to cling to him all his life, was adopted at this time as his stage name. ‘... there were few ways for a young man to amuse himself 30 years ago [writing in 1894], and so many young fellows who cared not for dancing formed dramatic societies and periodically appeared ...’

The life of amateur actors was never easy. ‘Actors have ups and downs like other folk, but too often the downs predominate over the ups’. They had to get a suitable company together, arrange a place for rehearsal, engage a place for performance, and, above all, find enough money for necessary expenses. All of these tasks meant a lot of time and trouble. ‘Our friend “Gaston” made many friends, who formed quite a company of their own, and to produce anything of magnitude would get others to join them, they returning the compliment when wanted.’ There were then two main venues for the performance of such amateur actors in London. One was known as the Eclectic Hall or the Eclectic Theatre, Denmark Street, Bloomsbury, and another was called the Cabite Theatre, opposite King’s Cross Station. Since the latter, with proper stage and well-arranged seats, charged more, the former was engaged as a regular venue for Gaston and his friends. In order to make the most of their opportunities, they would usually put on as many as three pieces during one evening. ‘... we have seen the “Merchant of Venice,” “Black-Eyed Susan,” and “The Rent Day” performed in one night! ... The performances would commence at 7 o’clock and continue to 12:30 ...’ Gaston’s taste was strongly for heavy and tragic plays such as some of Shakespearean pieces. He was a great admirer of Henry Irving, whose performance in ‘The School for Scandal’ with a travelling company he witnessed at the Town Hall, Oxford, in the summer of 1865, when nobody knew that Irving would be one of the greatest actors of the century.40

Gaston had a pretty charming, though a little bit too dramatic, story to tell of his experience in Wales.
Many years ago I was stage-struck, and thought I only had to show myself to get rounds of applause, and in the end a large salary. Alas, for the dreams of youth! Against the advice and reason of those better able to judge than myself, I answered the first advertisement I saw, which was for a juvenile actor in a Welsh circuit. I went off full of high spirits and ambition for my new career, but my ardour was somewhat cooled when I arrived at a little railway station, and was told the place I was inquiring for was 12 miles off! It was a bitter day in winter, snow lay on the ground, but I determined to brave the weather - to do or die.

Together with the company, nine in all, he played Shakespeare and the legitimate ('I have often thought since it was a good job William was not alive to see our rendering of his immortal characters'), at 'The Theatre Royal', a wooden shanty temporarily put up, 'a trifle different in appearance to the Theatres Royal Drury Lane and Covent Garden.' No audience but a few boys and others turned out and there was virtually no chance for the company of making money.

Gaston happened to have acquaintance with a widow, who kept a grocery shop in High Street, consisting of three shops. Having noticed his pale face, she observed that the company was extremely hard up.

I told her the facts, and she sympathised with our difficulties. I left, and the same night at my lodgings I found a large loaf and a fine piece of bacon. I guessed where they came from, but I was opposed to accepting charity. I proposed to take the articles back, but old Spoutman, our heavy man, who was deuced hungry, would not hear of it. "Why, my boy," said he, "it's a tribute to your genius." I felt flattered. ... "Great actors have diamond pins and rings presented to them which they don't want - and little actors have bread and bacon, which they do." This argument seemed so sensible that we soon fell to, and got rid of the gift!

Having failed to attract a large audience, the company decided to move to another place. On the day of the departure, Gaston visited Mrs. Morgan, the widow, to thank her on behalf of the company.

She said she was sorry we were going ... but would not hear of any payment for what she had sent ... concluding with a hope that I would take a small gift to keep me on the
road, at the same time slipping two half-sovereigns into my hand. I was overcome with mingled feeling of gratitude for past favour, and with a sense of pride rebelling against the acceptance of money, I refused to accept what she offered. ... “Well,” said she with a smile, “you must have something to take with you if you won’t have money. You shall have a cake. I am making some nice ones, and I know you are fond of them. Call in before you start, and I shall have one ready for you.” I called. The cake was produced. ... After expressing our heartfelt thanks for this and other gifts so generously given, I left, taking the train with the rest of the company.

On the train the company soon began cutting the cake, which was big enough to satisfy the whole company.

A knife was produced, and the cake was cut. It was excellent. The middle, said I, shall be for myself. I pressed down the knife. It appeared to grate against something. I broke the pieces, and in the centre lay, quite snugly, two half-sovereigns. We were all thunderstruck. The company put it down to Providence, but I told the whole story and the non-acceptance of the money, and three cheers were given with gusto, Spoutman swearing the lady was a brick. Yes, said I,

“Kind hearts are more than coronets,”

and there are plenty of kind hearts if you only know where to find them.  

Gaston’s life as an amateur actor was well ahead of that as a clubman. Although he seems to have given up his dream of becoming professional and leading his living on stage sooner or later, he had, nevertheless, acquired fairly much theatrical experience before he became involved in the working men’s clubs. Such experience was to be quite influential upon his activities as a clubman. In 1892 he somewhat sentimentally recalled his early days on stage. ‘We know they were happy times in that old make-shift theatre, with the scenery and effects of the most primitive description, but all the actors and actresses were young and enthusiastic, with no thought but Shakespeare and other dramatic authors.’

Gaston became a clubman on 31 January 1875, when he joined the Borough of Hackney Club. In the 1860s very little thought had been entertained by him of the working men’s clubs. The Borough of Hackney Club, whose membership consisted of tailors, shoemakers, mechanics and other workers ‘of humbler position than that of skilled artisans’, was opened in November 1873 as the first such club in Hackney and to become
one of the leading clubs in London. The club, from which stem no less than seven clubs, that is, the United Radical Club, the Kingsland Club, the Cremer Club, the Hoxton Club, the Commonwealth Club, the Progressive Club, and the Bright Radical Club, proceeded, was locally called 'the Father of Clubs.' One of the founder members of the club was John Hales, who was active in the Reform League in Hoxton and Shoreditch and was the secretary of Hackney Road branch of the First International in 1872. With quite a few such activists being its members, naturally enough, the club was fairly class-conscious. It was established by working men themselves, 'without seeking any aid from any class of society outside their own.' The spirit of independence was cherished more than any. The strong commitment to politics, both local and national, of the club was also remarkable. The basic position of the club was on the extreme left of the Liberal Party. The club, the political influence of which was notable until well into the 1890s, also played a significant role in the Metropolitan Radical Federation, formed by major radical clubs in 1886 to co-ordinate the political activities. The Hackney Radical Federation established two years before was its main precursor.\textsuperscript{12}

As the obituary of Gaston in the \textit{Club Life} wrote, his part in the management of the club was not 'very important'. The period of his service on the committee was short. In 1887 he was nominated, probably against his wish, as one of the candidates for the secretaryship of the club only to be easily defeated by McNeill, secretary at the time. However, the office of club librarian was held by him for many years since 1883, 'with honour to himself and the credit to the club.' In the \textit{Radical Leader} of 11 August 1888, there appeared a brief mention to Gaston and the club library. '... we ascended to the library and reading room, where Mr.R.Gaston, who has for several years acted as librarian, was sedulously attending to the duties of his office. In the centre of the room is a large table bestrewn with magazines and periodicals of all descriptions. There is here no censorship of literature - the only standard of eligibility is usefulness. ... The library contains several thousands of volumes, neatly arranged in cases round the room. Amongst the books I noticed complete sets of the works of W.J.Fox, Thomas Carlyle, and Thomas Cooper.'\textsuperscript{13}

His part appears to have been more significant in the social activities of the club. Not surprisingly, he did much to initiate dramatic performances.

We spent many years with the dramatic companies, and the experience we gained was useful, for, on January 31st, 1875, we joined the Boro' of Hackney Club, and, meeting with Messrs.Sam.Clayton (now deceased) and J.Lawrence (now of the Rovers), it was
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soon decided that, as we all knew something about the stage, some dramatic performances should be given. No sooner said than done, and in 1876 was given Byron’s comedy, “£100,000,” which proved a great success. This must have been the first dramatic performance given in a club by members, and so much was thought of the new idea that the piece was repeated, and the Criterion Dramatic Society came into being.14)

However, at first many members of the club were not sympathetic with such attempts at performing dramas. ‘More sarcasm than praise’ was given to Gaston and his friends.

The idea of having a dramatic performance in a club was ridiculed. “It couldn’t be done” was the cry of members who did not believe in anything new but who changed their tune when they found it could be done, and crowds of members attended, to the benefit of the club. Upwards of 150 performances were given ...

Gaston might have been instrumental in making dramatic performances ‘a standard feature of club life in Hackney and beyond.’ Eventually a permanent body, the Criterion Dramatic Company, which was to become one of the major club theatre companies in London, was set up in the club. As its first secretary Gaston rendered considerable service.15)

Gaston’s membership of the Borough of Hackney Club came to an end in 1894, when the Central Club was formed under somewhat peculiar circumstances. The building of the Central Club had originally been intended for the use of the members of the affiliated clubs and controlled by the CIU. However, the scheme proved to be ‘a dead failure.’ Many clubmen preferred to remain in the congenial atmosphere of their own club and did not come to the Central building. The CIU soon found itself saddled with a financial difficulty. At this juncture the idea of launching an independent club, called the Central Club, was promulgated. Although the particular reasons for his switch are not clear, he later published some articles which were critical of the Borough of Hackney. He was both a member of the first elected committee and the first entertainment secretary of the Central Club. Until his death his loyalty to the Club, which he once called ‘one of the best, if not the best, in London,’ was to be kept.16)
It was in July 1888 that Gaston took up the post of the editor of the Club and Institute Journal. This official organ of the CIU, started on 6 July 1883, was the second attempt at the CIU's own newspaper. The first such attempt was the Workman's Club Journal, published under the editorship of Hodgson Pratt from May 1875 to February 1878 with a loss of £200 a year. Before the coming of Gaston, the Journal was managed by five editors; that is, Mark Judge, a man of advanced Liberal opinion, William Minet, a barrister who acted as a sort of legal adviser of the CIU, Ernest Parke, a Radical journalist and clubman, R.A.G.Cuerel, another Radical clubman, and H.E. Boyce, a middle class sympathiser and member of the CIU Council. Their attempts at making the Journal pay proved almost totally unsuccessful. Then Gaston, who had already contributed poems and short stories to the Journal, was appointed as the first paid editor, at £2 weekly, of the Journal.\(^1\)

Just before it became known that the editorship of the Journal was vacant, Gaston was about to emigrate to Australia, where he had many relatives. With the support of those clubmen with whom he had been working together, Gaston was elected as the editor, defeating by two votes his opponent, J.H. Dalziel, a future M.P. for Kircaldy Burgh. 'We believe in club life, or we should not have refused a good position in Australia.' From this time onwards, as 'a key figure in club journalism until his death in 1901', Gaston kept on earnestly undertaking the editorial duties of the Journal and other papers to be published later. The most significant phase of his life as a clubman began with his taking up the editorship.\(^2\)

Under Gaston's editorship, the Journal, which had been a rather serious Radical paper, was considerably transformed. In addition to enlarging its size, Gaston introduced 'a style of homely personality' into the paper. Now much space of the Journal was allotted for musical and theatrical news, club reports, the sketches of clubmen, short tales, and correspondence, particularly the personal and satirical, though such articles as the reports of the CIU Council were not excluded. The tone of the paper was thus lightened. 'This Journal is not conducted for superior persons, but to give the short and simple annals of the poor.' Gaston was successful in making the circulation of the Journal, which had never been well beyond 2000 copies a week, much more. It rose to and maintained about 4000 copies a week throughout the six years of Gaston's control. Accordingly the financial loss caused
by the paper slightly fell. However, the Journal could never make itself pay after all, owing partly to the editor's salary and increased printing costs.19)

In 1894 the CIU, which was in serious financial difficulties because of the construction of the much-controversial Central Hall, decided to discontinue the weekly issuing of the Journal. The paper was to be published as a monthly journal under the editorship of B.T. Hall, secretary of the CIU. The decision did not convince Gaston, who was critical of the Central Hall scheme.

The assertion often made that the Journal has always been a loss is ridiculous, considering that it has never been run as a commercial speculation, but as an aid to the work of the Union. The Journal is enumerated among the advantages of being affiliated, "that the Union publishes a journal as a record of the progress of the club movement." Should it be abolished, the members of clubs will ask themselves what advantage they gain in belonging to a Union which takes away the privilege of recording the doings of the members belonging to it. The Journal question affects all clubmen ...

Gaston argued that the Journal was never supposed to pay directly. The words of Pratt in March 1886 were cited. 'Their object in establishing a club journal was that it should deal with club matters and club questions. Their object was not to make money by it, but that the greatest number of people should read it. The pecuniary loss upon it was a legitimate expense.' Gaston was pretty sure that the Journal more or less achieved the object as defined in terms of those Pratt's words. The CIU, which did not seem to understand the usefulness of the Journal in the club movement, strongly frustrated Gaston. 'We offered no opposition, for we saw that sacrifices had to be made if the Union was to be saved from further pecuniary difficulties, but we will not acknowledge that the paper has had anything to do with the financial loss ... we assert that the Union has been greatly benefited by the publication of the Club Journal, which has always been worth its outlay'. Moreover, Gaston was rather proud that he had done proper editorial duties. 'We do not wish to boast, but few men have worked harder than we have for clubs much against our worldly advantage, for sacrifices have to be made if men work for their brothers.'20)

There were quite a few clubmen, who highly regarded the six years' work of Gaston. On 23 May ten leading London clubmen met to consider some recognition for his services. A. Priest, late president of the South Peckham Club, acting as a chairman at the meeting,
expressed his regret at the determination to discontinue the *Journal*. 'Little as it was thought of, it was the connecting link that bound the clubs together. The Editor had strengthened the tie, and had always the best interests of the clubs at heart, and he thought it only right that some recognition should be made for past services.' At the meeting, J. Maynes, secretary of the Metropolitan Radical Federation, spoke of the intended new journal to be independently published by Gaston. '... in his opinion, an independent journal edited by Mr. Gaston, would be a great success ... He believed, away from a certain cramping influence of the Club Union, the new paper would become very popular.' The new paper, entitled the *Club World*, was to be started on 7 July of the year.

In the first advertisement of the publication of the *Club World* the clubmen's support for this new venture was earnestly called upon. '... our readers must not think we possess great wealth, and intend running a paper upon philanthropic lines. If club members will not support a paper advocating their own interests, it will be dropped, for the circulation will show whether the publication is required or not. We believe an *independent* paper is required, and will be supported.' Gaston wrote of "The Future of "The Club World". At first it was emphasised that the *Club World* would be 'independent' of the CIU and 'uncontroled by any union or organisation.' Even the *Journal* was not considered just a mouthpiece of the CIU. Well before his disagreement with the CIU, Gaston once claimed that the *Journal* belonged to 'the whole of the members of the town and country clubs affiliated to the Union'. It was, therefore, not the CIU but the clubmen themselves who could make any important decision about the *Journal*. The *Club World*, now released from the control of the CIU, would try to be in touch not only with the clubs but with friendly and benefit societies, to which many clubmen belonged. Gaston expressed his frustration with the CIU in writing that there were 'many organisations outside the Club Union deserving attention and report'. However, Gaston did not intend to bitterly attack the CIU or the *Journal*. It would be absolutely possible for the *Club World* and the *Journal* to coexist peacefully. 'There is plenty of room for *The Club Journal* to give monthly the business of the Union, and *The Club World* to chronicle weekly the many pleasures associated with club life. Each will do its duty to the clubs of London and the country.' The conducts of the CIU over the Central Hall and the *Journal* did not make much difference in Gaston's feeling for the club movement.21

Gaston was the proprietor of the *Club World* as well as its editor. It was not made known where its financial support came from. During the first few months the *Club World* failed to be issued regularly, due obviously to its financial difficulties. With its initial crisis being
successfully overcome, the paper was to continue on a steady weekly basis for four years. The Club World was a rather gossipy journal, ‘filled with chat from club rooms and titbits on personalities in clubland.’ Indeed, it was a useful complement to the more official Journal. Gaston’s tastes and opinions seem to have been reflected more directly in the Club World than in the Journal, which was edited under the constraint of the CIU. Notwithstanding his early intention to attract as its readers the members of the friendly and benefit societies, it would be apparent that the Club World was chiefly for the internal and somewhat exclusive communication of the clubmen. The main function of the paper appears to have been to foster some feeling of fellowship among the members of different clubs.

Gaston’s editorship of the Club World came to an end in May 1898. It seems that his resignation was not caused by any personal friction. ‘I have done my best to give a fair and impartial account of club life, and I am not cognisant of making many enemies during my editorial career; but I have the knowledge of gaining many friends who have recognised a faithful performance of duty.’ Gaston even thanked Hall, who edited the Journal as his successor and made it a kind of his own mouthpiece, ‘for his unfailing courtesy in supplying much information which has been of value to the readers of the Club World.’ The paper was in fact never in a serious trouble with the CIU. There may be no reason for doubting that he resigned on his own intention. ‘To all clubmen, readers of this paper, reporters of clubs, and contributors: I thank you all for your generous support …’

However, Gaston’s retirement from the editorial duties did not last long. Just after the Club World discontinued in December 1898, another paper, called the Club Life, was started again under his editorship and proprietorship. The first issue of the Club Life appeared on 6 January 1899. The raison d’etre of the Club Life, described as the following, was almost the same with that of the Club World. ‘… as it [the Journal] comes out once a month, it is useless for the club’s purpose. The “Club Life” is then found useful to inform affiliate members and other that something special is to be seen and their co-operation is invited to assist the club.’ Like the Club World, the Club Life intended to be ‘independent’ and, therefore, had to be financially unstable. The editorial on 17 February 1900 stressed the necessity of the clubmen’s support.

This paper is not subsidised, it is run by business men who have to find the solid cash for its production, and it is surely not too much to ask that those who benefit by its publication should assist in paying its cost.
... The "Club Life" comes out once a week, but no one troubles about its cost or enquires who has to bear the brunt of its expense. If the paper is essential to clubs and the movement generally, it should be supported ...

The editorial on 5 October 1901, probably the very last writing of Gaston, was on the "Club Life" Competition'. The second of half-yearly competitions for the largest sale of the paper was then going on. The prizes were to be given to those who effected the greatest number of sales in proportion to the membership of their respective clubs. However, the clubmen were far from enthusiastic about the competition. 'The participation in our first competition, which ended on the 1st of April, 1901, was, we are sorry to say, not a great one, only seven competitors having entered it. ... We should be so much the better satisfied if this competition would excite general interest, as our motive in establishing it was less the furtherance of our own interests than of that of the various clubs which we represent.'

The next issue of the Club Life inserted a brief note, entitled 'Indisposition of Mr. Richard Gaston'. Having moved to the Charing Cross Hospital, Gaston never came back to the desk of the editor. His successor was Edward Garrity, a Radical clubman and once president of the Central Finsbury Club. Garrity was active also as a leading figure both of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants and of the Odd Fellows. Under the editorship of Garrity and others, the Club Life, in spite of its apparent financial difficulties, continued until 1931, thirty years after the death of Gaston.

IV

Apart from his editorial duties, Gaston was involved in various kinds of activities at the clubs. Delivering lectures was one of what he most consistently engaged himself. As a lecturer who was capable of attracting many clubmen, Gaston was rather sought after by such people as the political and educational secretaries of the clubs. The schedule of his lectures, inserted in the Journal of 1 October 1892, for example, shows his popularity.

2 October Kettering Club
9 October Gladstone Club, Southampton
16 October North East Bethnal Green Club
23 October Fulham and Deptford Liberal Club
6 November Bermondsey Gladstone Club
20 November Bryanston Club
27 November Central Finsbury Club

In addition to these, Gaston actually delivered lectures at the Central Finsbury Club on 18 October, in place of J.J. Dent, secretary of the CIU at the time, and at a club in Northampton on 13 November. It is remarkable that Gaston, as an unpaid lecturer, appeared on the platform of the clubs, including those out of London, on almost every Sunday.

The most popular of his lectures were, naturally enough, those on ‘The Poets of Labour’. One made at the Hatcham Liberal Club on 20 December 1891 can be looked into in some details. On this occasion Gaston spoke for two hours, during which he held his audience ‘spellbound’. He began the lecture with ‘a glimpse of the inner life of Robert Burns’, as ‘a poet of the people’, and recited many of his poems ‘with a pathos and humour which carried his audience back to the time and scenes which he delineated’. In talking about Burns’ poems he trenchantly attacked squires and parsons and urged upon the hearers to make ‘one united effort and for ever sweep away the crumbling monument of hereditary oppression, and not to wait till the turf closes over another generation of English lives wasted in pleading for their birthright’. Then such pioneers of the reforms for labour’s sake as William Lovett and Ernest Jones were brought to notice, whose memories should be ‘treasured by all earnest Radicals’. The Malthusian doctrine came on next and suffered a severe handling, ‘for he maintained that Nature would always provide a table for her children’. Another poet talked about was John Bedford Leno, a Chartist poet known for an autobiography, The Aftermath, whose homely poem, ‘Grease the Fat Sow’, was recited. ‘Finally, after having gone over nearly all the ground covered by modern reformers, he brought his address to a close by giving a short history of the club movement, and the benefits accruing therefrom.’ It was reported that ‘from first to last there was not a lagging moment’.

Other poets often mentioned in his lectures on ‘The Poets of Labour’ included William Morris, Thomas Cooper, Thomas Hood, and G.R. Sims. Much praise was given to these lectures, which quite often attracted a larger audience than others. ‘Plenty of jokes and stories kept the audience in good humour and there was not a dull moment during the evening.’ It is fairly clear that Gaston not only spoke of the poets and their poems. He also portrayed a sort of class struggle in his own version, discussed various political and social questions, and instigated the clubmen to act for the benefit of their own class. His lecture at the Mildmay Radical Club on 2 December 1891 was reported as the following: ‘Mr.
Gaston in his lecture, "Poets of Labour," introduced many advanced subjects. The Land Question - The House of Lords - Trade Unionism - Allotments and other questions were touched.29)

One of 'The Poets of Labour', William Morris, who delivered some lectures at the clubs, was much admired by Gaston. On the death of Morris, Gaston wrote of one of his lectures.

I well recollect going one morning to hear William Morris, whose recent death is mourned so deeply, his subject being "Art and Socialism." I am afraid I knew very little about either, but I certainly learned a great deal about both before I left the building. Morris, as I remember him, was a jolly fellow, a real "John Blunt," common-sense individual; a breezy, good-tempered man, who talked to the members as brothers. What he brought out in his lecture was the need of better houses, cleaner and brighter streets, plenty of light and colour, instead of dreary black walls, pictures to please the eye and make people think; in short, sweetness and light instead of dullness and despair. His Socialism, I thought, was a very mild, a Socialism that everyone could agree with; that made for happiness in this world without regard to what might happen hereafter.

However, Morris himself does not seem to have had very good impressions of the clubmen. He recalled his lecture delivered at the Borough of Hackney Club on 27 March 1887. 'I gave my "Monopoly" (lecture) at the Borough of Hackney Club, which was one of the first workmen's clubs founded, if not the first; it is a big Club, numbering 1,600 members; a dirty wretched place enough, giving a sad idea of the artisan's standard of comfort: the meeting was a full one, and I suppose I must say attentive, but the coming and going all the time, the pie-boy and the pot-boy, was rather trying to my nerves: the audience was civil and enclined to agree, but I couldn't flatter myself that they mostly understood me, simple as the lecture was.'30)

Another favourite among Gaston's repertoire were ones on drama. His lecture upon 'The Origin of the Drama', which took some one hour and half, at the Central Finsbury Club on 25 June 1892 was reported in detail. 'The lecturer traced the drama from the earliest times, describing the mystery plays of the religious houses and the part that monks and friars played in their performance; then on the Moralities - the Interludes and the comedy of "Gammer Gurton's Needle,"' written by Bishop Still in 1568.' He next moved to the drama of Elizabethan time, the 'golden age', followed by 'the gloomy time of the Puritans', when
'the decadence of dramatic literature' took place. The historical part of the lecture was brought to an end with 'a few lines upon the genius of Shakespeare'. The next part was given to many anecdotes about actors and short descriptions of such well-known actors as Garrick and Kean. Gaston then unfolded his belief in the educational influence of drama, quoting that 'the moral teaching of the stage was not one whit behind that of pulpit'. Compared with artists like painters and musicians, contended Gaston, actors were less regarded, though a little change could be found, with Irving being a notable example. Such a situation seemed to have something to do with the fact that in England, which did not have a National Theatre, subsidised from the government, the legitimate drama was not patronised as it ought to be. He concluded that without a National Theatre Shakespeare and other great dramatists might not have 'a chance beside the ephemeral comedies of the day.' It would be rather obvious that Gaston could fully utilise his theatrical background in dealing with such a subject. Many of the audience found his lecture entertaining. H. Munday, in moving a vote of thanks to Gaston, 'wished that all lectures were of the type of Mr. Gaston's, which were always amusing'.

Thus Gaston's life-long taste for poetry and drama found its proper stage in the club platforms. A report in the Journal of 19 December 1891 called him 'a born Sunday League lecturer'. It would not be difficult to imagine that his poetic rhetoric, dramatic articulation, and ample theatrical experience enabled him to be a fascinating lecturer. His lectures quite often attracted crowded audiences, who listened to them 'with wrapt attention' and 'heartily appreciated'. Such words were given to them as 'amusing', 'instructing', 'diversive', 'passionate', 'quaint', 'funny', 'graphic', 'racy', and others. 'In fact it was as though he held a kaleidoscope for us to view the shifting scenes of bygone times.' Apparently Gaston was pretty happy to be sought after. In some cases he was found appearing at more than one club on a single day. On 1 September 1890, for example, Gaston, together with his friends, delivered a Sunday morning lecture at the North East Bethnal Green Club. A lot of those clubmen who belonged to other clubs than the North East Bethnal Green came over to hear Gaston. Later on the day Gaston was engaged in a variety entertainment at the Borough of Marylebone Club, reading and playing a scene from 'The School for Scandal'. The show continued to a late hour. The club platforms were certainly the places, where Gaston could express himself and make his good old dream come true, at least to some extent.

Needless to say, it was not only as a lecturer that Gaston turned out on the club platforms. His recitations and readings of his own poems and others, which were also popular enough to draw many clubmen, were organised fairly often. On 27 January 1885,
in addition to playing his part in the performance of 'The Lady of Lyons' by the Criterion Dramatic Company at the Borough of Hackney Club, Gaston delivered readings. The occasion was for the benefit of the unemployed members of the club. During the evening Mr.Gaston, made up as a typical "working man", recited a poem written by himself, entitled "The Parson's Gift", referring to a clergyman (the Rev.Fleming Williams) who has for some time past supplied the distressed members daily with bread and soup, with other assistance. The lines told well, some 300 being sold at once ...' The profit of the poem was given to the fund for the unemployed members.  

Gaston as an actor was also a familiar figure at the clubs. He performed not only with the Criterion Dramatic Company. On 27 September 1900, for example, he played the role of Banquo in the production of 'Macbeth' by the Ballard and Company at the Mildmay Radical Club. Gaston also wrote plays, several of which might have remained regular pieces for the club companies. Two of them, 'Fireirons' and 'Bilberry Ben', were performed by the Criterion Musical Comedy Company at the Essex Club, Walthamstow, on 8 January 1899.

Moreover, Gaston had a great passion for opera and frequently appeared in the production of the Paragon Opera Company. In April 1897 the Paragon Opera Company, together with Gaston, visited Kettering. On Good Friday the company gave a sacred concert, the programme of which included 'selections from Wagner's operas and several popular ones of English manufacture.' On the next day an opera, 'Maritana,' was performed. '... the production was of a most successful character.' On the third day, Sunday, after the concert for the benefit of the CIU Convalescent Home, which was of the same programme with that of Good Friday, Gaston went upon the platform.

Mr.R.Gaston ... gave a short history of the Home and the labours of the unwearied workers, who had been, and were, giving valuable time for the good cause. He (the speaker) was in favour of convalescent homes in preference to hospitals, for many men required plenty of good food, pure air and rest rather than medicine. Employers took care their horses should go out to grass and recruit, and he asked why should not men who worked hard all the year go out to grass and recruit also? (Laughter)

The company performed a combined programme of 'The Bohemian Girl' and 'A Woman's Voice' on Monday, at the Desborough Club, and on Wednesday, at the Rifle Band Club, Kettering, and 'Maritana' again on Tuesday at the Rothwell Club. It is not clear if Gaston

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himself sang in such operatic productions.\textsuperscript{37)}

Gaston was invited to many other kinds of occasions. His presence sometimes did much to stimulate those clubs which were not very active. It was for such a purpose that Gaston and others visited the Bexley Club, Kent, on 30 April 1892. ‘The club is small one, and to a London clubman dreadfully dull and quiet, and with a view of putting a little life into the place, we offered to go down and give a few readings’. Having received a warm welcome, they gave ‘a few readings, interspersed with speeches principally of a Radical character’. For the members of the Bexley Club, the visit of Gaston and others may have been an occasion to remember. ‘The proceedings did not break up till a late hour, a vote of thanks being passed to those who had obliged. ... we were glad to have been the means ... in giving a little amusement to our brother clubmen.’\textsuperscript{38} At the Gladstone Club, Southampton, Gaston’s lecture on 9 October 1892 again attracted a large audience, ‘more persons ... than had ever appeared there before’. After the lecture the chairman of the day urged those present, many of whom were not regular comers to the club, to attend other club lectures as well and ‘to try to get members to still further help on the cause they had in hand, that of Liberalism’.\textsuperscript{39} Gaston’s lecture on 13 November 1892 was the first one ever held on Sunday evening at a club in Northampton. The club had been altogether closed on Sundays and to have lectures had been thought opposed to the spirit of the club. ‘The hall was well filled with members and lady friends, who listened with the greatest attention during the evening.’\textsuperscript{40} To many clubs the appearance of Gaston, a popular and fairly well-known clubman, was somewhat a special event.

The CIU often sent Gaston as a missionary on its behalf. On 17 October 1891 Gaston and Dent went to Leicester, ‘to extend and make better known the ideas of the Club Union’. They attended a Club Union Conference held at the Borough of Leicester Club. At the conference, in which sixty ‘members and delegates from surrounding clubs’ took part, ‘the Editor gave a short speech on the benefits of club life and the desire to spread the movement, and then Mr.Dent gave in detail the work of the Union’. Besides Dent, Gaston, editor of the \textit{Journal} and deputy from the CIU, could be called the most important participant at the conference. After the conference they moved to the Kettering Club and were warmly received by the clubmen. ‘... the introduction to the hall, which was crowded, produced rounds of applause, and when Mr.Dent appeared there were tremendous cheers, and the whole company singing, “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow,” when suddenly remembering the Editor was a jolly good fellow also, they altered the words to “\textit{They are Jolly Good Fellows}.”’ Gaston and Dent spent the Saturday night on mingling with the
clubmen. The next day was given to their visiting many clubmen and clubs in the district. While in the evening Dent made his way home after his speech upon the benefits of co-operation at the Kettering Club, 'the Editor on his attempt to follow was forcibly detained and kept until the next morning.' During the night of entertainment Gaston gave 'some of his readings and a speech or two.' To the clubmen Gaston seemed an easy person to have a fun with. Gaston's mission to the Gravesend Club on 8 August 1892 was more businesslike. 'We waited upon the committee and explained all matters relating to affiliation, and pointed out the advantages of being connected with a powerful organisation in London.'

In 1892 Gaston visited Ipswich at least three times. The first took place on 25 March of the year, when he was invited, on behalf of the CIU, to the formal opening of a New Hall of the Ipswich Club. At the opening ceremony Gaston made a speech on the clubs and club life, describing the London clubs, the functions of the CIU, and the planned Central Hall. 'He felt pleasure at the evident prosperity of the Ipswich Club, and hoped he would be honoured by another invitation on some future occasion.' He was actually 'honoured' to pay another visit within a month. The excursion to Ipswich and Yarmouth, organised by the Sunday League, on Easter Sunday gave him 'an opportunity to mix once more with the warm-hearted clubmen of Ipswich town.' It seems that Gaston was really impressed with the reception by the Ipswich clubmen. He did not miss another chance to visit the town, which came in August of the year, when a Liberal and Radical Club was established in Ipswich. Although 'a long talk about affiliation to the Club Union' was held between him and the officials of the newly-established club, more time might have been spent at the Ipswich Club, where Gaston gave 'a speech and a reading'. Indeed, he attempted 'to combine business with pleasure' in the visit.

The organising committees of the events of the CIU, such as Annual Athletic Sports Festivals and Workmen's Exhibitions, often included Gaston as a member. For example, the Second Athletic Sports held on 30 August 1890 was organised by the committee, on which Gaston served, together with W.R.Anderson (Clapton Park Club), H.C.Dewell (Borough of Hackney Club), C.W.Baker (St.James and Soho Club). Gaston himself was an earnest advocate of such events. He deplored that many clubmen did not take any interest in athletic sports and argued Workmen's Exhibitions would promote the educational function of the clubs.

Gaston was invited to play various roles. On 1 April 1893 he, as a main speaker of the ceremony, declared the opening of the Workmen's Exhibition at the Kettering Club. His
speech dwelt upon the need for such an exhibition at a time when trades were sub-divided
and 'few workmen had the opportunity of making a complete article'. After inspecting the
Exhibition, he on the next day visited two other clubs in the district, at both of which a
short lecture and several readings were given.49 The Edmonton Old Friends Social Club
asked Gaston to act as a judge of 'singing and musical drill gone through by children', which
took place on 11 January 1892. This was a rather rare occasion.

The hall was well filled by many proud fathers and mothers, whose sons and daughters
were to take part in the entertainment. On one side of the hall was a raised dais, on
which sat W.K.Walker, Esq., as chairman; P.Pearce, treasurer; J.E.Mann, secretary;
the Editor, and a number of other gentlemen and ladies.

Although he at first felt reluctant in taking on the task, Gaston found the occasion was 'of
real enjoyment'.49

Once Gaston was brought to court as an accused. There is a lively description of a 'Judge
and Jury' show held at the Victory Club on 15 November 1891, in which Gaston was
prosecuted. The following should be read as a sort of joke.

What a number of innocent men have been unjustly punished for offences never
committed by them, and now among the number will have to appear the name of the
Editor, who was brought up before Judge Oviatt on Sunday evening. The Editor was
simply listening to a few night charges being disposed of, when he was taken into
custody by police constable Joe Stock, of the A.Z.division, and charged with circulating
a libel against a workmen's club. The Editor's protests were of no avail, and the
literary gentleman had to endure the ignominy of standing in the dock without a seat
or even a drink.

The charge against him was that of publishing a libel in the Journal 'by saying that the
Victory Club was where the idea originated in reference to lowering the price of the
Associate Card.' In spite of his address against the prosecution, the jury brought in a verdict
of guilty. However, the verdict was 'with a recommendation to mercy on account of his
apparent respectability'. Accordingly, a few witnesses entered to give evidence as to
Gaston's character.
The Clerk of the Court (Mr. Blyton) called H. Sanders, who said he belonged to the Holborn Gladstonian Club, and had known the prisoner some time. He was strictly honest, and the only thing he had ever taken was a joke, but had no doubt he would take a glass beer if placed in his way. (Laughter in court, which was immediately suppressed.) Mr. F. R. Horsman, also of the same club, said he could vouch for his honesty, for on one occasion when a collection was made he put in 6d. and took out a 1s. when he could have taken out a 5s. piece or a half sovereign, which proved his character was unimpeachable.

The judge sentenced that he should fine Gaston £50 or six months' hard labour. The final part of the show began with Gaston's plea.

The prisoner here made a pathetic appeal for a mitigation of the sentence in consideration of his wife and 16 children, which drew tears to the eyes of the usher, and also drew the waiter in the court with the inquiry of "Any orders, gents?" The prisoner pointed out the smallness of his income, and the consequent ruin of his paper if he was incarcerated for half a year. His lordship was much affected, and said there appeared some extenuating circumstances in the case, and in consideration of his wife and children, and the necessity of having a weekly journal properly written and brought out by an experienced man, he should reduce the fine to 2d.

Gaston must have been a very suitable person for such a mock trial in joke. He was fond of joking and, because of his ample experience in farces, good at comical acting. With his presence the whole trial became enjoyable both for its participants and spectators. He made those present laugh at him and consequently love him.471

V

With all his various activities, Gaston's influence was most strongly exercised on the club movement through his writings, which would provide some clues not only about himself but also about the club life of working men. His writings, including fictions and poems as well as editorials and reports, cover quite a wide range. Here let us begin with what he wrote of the clubmen.

From 1883 to 1884 Gaston contributed to the Journal a series of sketches entitled 'Types
of Men at a Workmen's Club', which might be a relevant starting point of our investigation. It is almost impossible to overlook the strongly mocking tone of descriptions by Gaston, who was not yet very well-known at the time. 'What a many different types of character may be studied at a workmen's club! ... I belong to one of the largest, if not the largest in London, and have in my quiet way studied the ever-varying tastes of those I mix with.' Gaston pointed out five types of clubmen. The first was 'the Grumbling Member.'

The Grumbling Member. Who is it who always belongs to clubs but what knows this man the grumper whom nothing pleases? Everything and Everybody to him is wrong, he sighs over the decadence of the club's glory. ... I recollect one of this species who was always grumbling at the committee, and making everyone miserable by the glooming words: "They're sitting with closed doors; they are (pointing to the committee-room) hatching up schemes that mean ruin to the club. If I was on the job I'd expose 'em before I was a week older", & c. At last the committee and some others determined this member should be elected to rule the destinies of the club, he was returned; but when in the place he burned to get into, he was silent, his tongue rarely wagged, he found out nothing except that the committee was a number of men who had to work very hard for their brother members, and who got no thanks, but plenty of abuse for their trouble! This man soon left the committee, he found it was easier to grumble than to work, but there is no doubt in some other club he continues his grumbles as before.

The second was 'the Dirty Member'.

Another sample is the dirty member, who ... sneers at clean shirts and faces, the appearance of a clean shirt being to him like a red rag to a bull; who asserts the dignity of labour with grimy face and ditto hands and is so afraid at being taken as a "gentleman" that he rarely washes ... I remember one of this sort very well, who was continually girding at a fellow member who made a point of dressing well, and always looked clean and smart. One night the spruce member came into the club with a "full front", which was too much for the soapless man; he began to throw out remarks that "they didn't want ... Lord Mayor there; swells wasn't wanted with working men; better join a West-end Club, & c.", which so enraged the well-dressed member, added to what he had before received, that the result was a well-directed blow, stretching the dirty member on the floor.
The third was 'the Beery Member'.

This is a man very often to be found in clubs - one who dreams of beer, who thinks the greatest study of mankind is - beer; ... He is a stranger to the library, but is friends with the "Stock Committee,;" who tries to be made one, and if he gets on, is generally found the first night overpowered in a corner of the cellar, no doubt from inhaling the fumes of the liquor. No one ever hears him pass any remarks dissociated from beer. He knows not the numbers of any club, or their educational advantages, or their ways of management, but he can tell you which club sells the best beer, and whether the "stout and mild" is better than the "old and bitter"! He is the club's authority upon malt liquor, and his opinion is listened to with respect on such questions. The only politics he knows are those connected with public-house legislation.

The fourth was 'the Hard-up Member'.

In any large club, in addition to the three previously mentioned, may be found the "Hard-up Member,;" and if what he says is true, he deserves to be pitied.

If man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, then this man has not only his own share of troubles, but the misfortunes of a dozen men beside. The way our old friend Job was treated was nothing compared to the dire mishaps falling to the lot of the hard-up one, for not only he, but those under his roof-tree, become partakers of the same ill-luck! ...

... We lose half our troubles by imparting them, and the Hard-up Member is always ready to impart to the generous hearer.

The last was 'the Bumptious Member'.

... the bumptious individual is to be found in most Workmen's Clubs, though his influence is to be seen to a greater extent in the larger clubs belonging to the Union. Who does not know the shallow, frothy, wordy member, who descants so eloquently upon his valuable services to the club, and would make it appear that the club would collapse if he withdrew his services? The bumptious one proclaims at all times, in or out of season, with a flourish, his work for the club; but in many cases he takes the
credit of results made by former members and better men, who were content to labour silently for the good of others, and felt rewarded by the consciousness of doing their duty. ... The bumptious one is decidedly ambitious, and his ambition is only equalled by his impudence, and he cares not whose backs he mounts if he can only rise to a good position. He is the fool rushes in where angles fear to tread; but while a fool, he is unaware of the fact."

Obviously Gaston's sketches should not be read too simply. It would be totally nonsense to conclude that his five 'types' represented ordinary clubmen. He doubtless did not try to describe those who formed the majority at the clubs. What he did might have been to caricature club life. By enumerating these rather grotesque 'types', he seems to have tried to sneer both at those who took club life too seriously and at those who blamed the clubs for being the 'drinking dens' and so on. The basic tone of his sketches was not hysterical or indignant. Gaston, who dared to pick up these 'types', appears to have accepted and loved the clubs as the combination of not particularly respectable or decent persons.

The similar tone can be recognised in his poem about a clubman, 'who has had all the diseases mentioned in medical books'. This man would make his fellow clubmen disgusted with his tale of suffering.

When men are ill they seek M.D.s,
   Or go to quacks and other duffers;
Now why should I, who gets no fees,
   Be bored with what the patient suffers?

So, should the bore his ailings quote,
   His mouth at once I try to shut it;
And if he talks of uncer'd throat,
   I am quickly apt to say - "O! cut it!"

And when the influenza's woes,
   His swollen feature early show it,
If I am asked to view his nose,
   'Tis likely I may cry - "O! blow it!"
Gaston did not argue that such a man should be banished. It seems that he would rather like the clubs to generously accept this kind of fairly disgusting men.\textsuperscript{49}

However, some clubmen felt uneasy with the mocking tone of Gaston's writings. Fletcher Pape, a leading member of the Commonwealth Club, unfolded his displeasure at the cynicism of 'Types of Men at a Workmen's Club' in the \textit{Journal} of 25 April 1884. For him Gaston's exposure of 'the weaker side of human nature', which was discoverable 'among the myriads of necessarily uncultured workmen composing our general body', was awful. Pape appears not to have considered or accepted Gaston's satirical implications. He was certainly not the only one in feeling uneasy.\textsuperscript{50} About a month later, in turn, Sam Thomas of the Borough of Finsbury Club criticised Pape, who was 'so destitute of humour'.

These remarks have called force by the letter of Mr. Fletcher Pape which appeared in one of your recent issues of the \textit{Club Journal}, and also by the hostility shown by one or two East-end clubs to "Some Types of Working Men," written by my facetious friend, Mr. Gaston; while such clubs as the Cobden, Bryanston, North London, and the Boro' of Finsbury have been enjoying them, ...

There is one club at least, at the other end of the town, that has positively threatened personal violence to the author if he comes on their premises. Now this is very silly, and surely not becoming in Englishmen, who are constantly boasting on platforms about their liberty of free speech, and a love of truth, and justice.\textsuperscript{51}

Gaston's writings much provoked some clubmen. Although there were supporters like Thomas, it was far from easy to comprehend and accept what Gaston would mean.

His fiction, 'Weeding 'em out', published in the \textit{Journal} of 25 September 1885, also requires careful reading. The main character of the fiction was Jim Stokes of the 'Cauliflower Radical Club', who made himself obnoxious to his fellow clubmen 'by coarse language, drunkenness, and a studied defiance of all rules and regulations'. Jim was 'one of these hectoring, loud-mouthed fellows, good enough when sober, but most disagreeable when in his cups'. Fearful of his temper, and 'from a lack of knowledge of human nature',

\begin{quote}
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\end{quote}
none of his fellow clubmen would 'drop a word or two of advice as to his better conduct'. Jim was treated 'with disdain and an indifference', and felt to be insulted.

They would not enter into conversation with him. He could rarely find a chum to play a game of cards with, while his attempt to join in conversation on topics of the hour was a signal for the party to dissolve, and a hint that his presence was undesirable. He must be "weeded out," and that operation was always looked forward to as the only thing proper to do under the circumstances.

A slight scuffle with other members caused his expulsion. No neighbouring club admitted him. Jim had to be satisfied with nightly beer at a beer-house called the 'Cock and Bull', 'a place Jim had once looked down as being too low for him.' On some Saturday night Jack Smith, one of the committee of the 'Cauliflower Club,' who was the mover of Jims expulsion, came in the 'Cook and Bull.' 'Jim handed the pot to his once old chum, but "Jack didn't drink with anybody; he only drank with respectable men, not chaps who were chucked out o' club!" & c. Hereupon, Jim's old temper breaking out, he struck a blow, which was returned.' Having been struck heavily, Jim's hand went through a pane of glass. Soon Jim was found to have bled to death. At his funeral it was made known that he was actually a most kind-hearted man and that a great deal of his rough style was put on, 'for he hated to be thought maudlin and woman-hearted.' He had collected money for 'a poor woman and her husband who had refused to go into the "House"' and only a few weeks before had adopted a little orphan to grow up with his own. The moral of Jim's story was told.

No man is all bad; there is some soft place in his heart that can be touched by kindness, by consideration for his weakness; and many errors of poor human nature, that will not give way to harsh words and sneering speeches and an assumption of superiority, may be overcome by brotherly love and a forgiving spirit.63)

From Gaston's point of view, such persons as Jim were well entitled to be genuine members of the working men's clubs. The same could be said about the afore-mentioned five 'types'. For all their weaknesses and shortcomings, they would be made proper clubmen by being treated with the 'brotherly love' and 'forgiving spirit' of their colleagues. At the clubs such love and spirit should prevail.

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In the *Journal* of 29 August 1891 Gaston wrote of those childish clubmen who were ‘not more than seven or eight years old in sense and experience’ and often quarreled with other clubmen. Since there were ‘all kinds of men’ in the clubs, it was somewhat inevitable that such childish men were found at the clubs. What was needed was ‘a little more of the give and take, the bear and forbear principles’. By concluding as the following, Gaston seems to have expressed his hope that the clubs were the places where such childish men were to be made mature. ‘No doubt as men get a little more education they will esteem each other better, and strive to cultivate friendship instead of enmity.’

However, the clubs could not accommodate anybody. Gaston’s another fiction, ‘The One Man’s Club’, was about ‘the great ‘I am’’, who made troubles in the clubs. ‘... the constant use of the little letter [I] has ruined more clubs and organisations than all the long words put together.’ Other members soon became disgusted with the ‘I am’ and came to do everything opposite to what the ‘I am’ said.

... the “I am” generally has a few round him, some of whom are afraid of him, and others are little “I ams,” but have not sufficient power to make their influence felt. So weeks pass by, and even what is proposed for the benefit of the club by the “One Man” is tabooed. The club languishes, the members get tired of continual discussions and meetings, and stop away. There is great trouble to get a quorum, and the club with no interest taken in it, and with the trade fallen off, has the greatest difficulty to meet its obligations. ... It is only a matter of weeks, and the club eventually closes its doors, much to the regret of members and affiliated members alike.

In order to keep the clubs of ‘brotherly love and a forgiving spirit’, the clubmen had to listen to and esteem the opinions of their fellows. At the clubs the clubmen should associate with each other basically on equal terms. Since the presence of such ‘I ams’ would do much damage to the clubs, the clubmen sometimes had to expel them.

In the *Club Life* of 9 March 1901 Gaston described ‘the model clubman’ in detail.

The model clubman is one who, wishing to have his rights respected, respects those of others, and who understands he is a member and not the proprietor of the show. He recognises that he is not number one, but one of a number, and is prepared to abide by the rules that have been passed for the benefit of all. He does not bore people with the recital of his supposed wrongs, or weary his listeners with long details about his
business, of which others know nothing and care less. In short, he does not talk "shop," but leaves his business behind him when he takes off his apron. He has a feeling for those who do the hard work, and is ready to reward with praise all those who have contributed to his comfort and enjoyment. He never tries to degrade the steward by telling him that "he is only a servant," while the member is his master. He never expects the bar to be kept open to oblige him, but is ready to depart when the time comes for closing. He is courteous to all, and never reflects upon a member if his appearance suggests that his circumstances are not of the best. He believes in the Club movement, and is ready to assist it by urging men to join it and buy the "Club Journal" each month, and the "Club Life" each week to know what other Clubs are doing to advance the good work. He never obtrudes his political opinion at inconvenient seasons, but recognises that everyone has a right to his own opinions, however wrong these may appear to be. A model clubman is, in short, a gentleman, and the more there are of them the more the Club will flourish.55)

Although here Gaston gave the word of 'gentleman' to his model clubman, the word was more or less replaceable with that of 'citizen', which was actually used more often among the clubmen of the end of the nineteenth century. The ideology of citizenship was an important feature in various working-class educational ventures, including the educational activities of the clubs, of the time. The model clubman was a man who was considerate enough to esteem and think of other people and their opinions, appreciated industry and courtesy, associated with his colleagues on equal terms, observed what were once decided, and tried to contribute to the club movement. At the clubs where various kinds of people assembled, the ability to have consideration for those people around, who were to be regarded as brethren, was, in addition to industrious devotion to the movement and courtesy, quite essential. The model clubman was absolutely far from the five 'Types'. For Gaston the most important quality of such a model clubman might have been independence. Independent working men would never submit to the patronage of wealthy men. At the clubs the clubmen should be able to spend their leisure without loss of self-respect. On 17 November 1900 the Mildmay Radical Club held a ceremony of lying foundation stone for its new premises. At the evening reception of the day Gaston spoke that 'the fact that struck him when thinking of clubs was their independence and their self-reliance'. Independent persons would respect other persons' independence; in other words, they would treat other persons as 'citizens'. At the same reception, a gentleman, called
Dickinson, who had never been in any club before, made a speech. 'Clubs properly conducted made men feel independent and made them better men and better citizens.'

Gaston attached much importance to such an educational function of the club membership. By joining the clubs and associating with other clubmen, persons would become more independent 'citizens'. A Brief Handbook for Enquirers, Speakers, or Critics, published by the CIU wrote of such a function in a slightly different manner. 'The mutual intercourse and friendliness obtained by membership of a club, playing in friendly contests with the members of their own and other clubs tends to create a very fine spirit of comradeship among workmen in various towns, and is in itself a form of real education.' Dent also argued that the club membership was 'an important element in the development of character and in an acquisition of the education and training necessary to make a man a keen and earnest citizen.'

Gaston's fiction, 'Bob Flinders' Conversion', was about this function. Bob Flinders, an artist and engraver, spent most of his leisure time and his earnings at a pub called the 'Blue Lion'. The following was his typical answer to a friend who tried to take him to a club: 'What, join a club? A club, where you get three parts politics and one part beer is rather out of my line, thank you.' Bob's sweetheart, Mary, grieved at his drinking habits. Under the influence of her friend, Clara, and her sweetheart, Charley, secretary of the Neptune Club, 'one of the best of them now in London', Mary came to go to see the dramatic performances at the club. "Oh! I wish Bob would join the club," Mary would often say to Clara. "I know he would be such a different fellow. He is so good and generous to others and entirely forgets himself."' After a great deal of persuasion, Bob at last agreed to pay a visit to the club. On the day of his first visit 'The Bottle or a Drunkard's Fate' was performed at the club. To his surprise, Bob's first visit proved to be enjoyable. 'Bob was obliged to confess, when comfortably seated, that the club was not so bad after all, and was surprised to see the large stage and happy design of the drop scene.' Not much time was needed for him to decide to join the club and its dramatic class. Bob soon found out that drinking was not compatible with learning a part assigned to him. His nightly visits to the 'Blue Lion' was given up, for he was so determined to succeed. And the performance was actually a splendid success.

Next morning Bob was surprised to find a long notice of himself in a sporting paper as one who had a decided talent, and predicting a great future for him on the regular boards. The incident took place some sixteen months ago, ... Mary blessed the Neptune
The Portrait of a Clubman, Richard Gaston, 1840-1901

Club, for Bob is almost a teetotaler, and vastly different to the time when he was a cub of the Blue Lion.⁵⁸)

The ability of self-control, which Bob obtained through his club life, was one of the essential qualities of independent 'citizens'. A close fellowship was certainly among the main reasons for such an educational function. 'There is a brotherly feeling, and a desire to help one another in time of trouble. ... All the varied feelings of friendship and personal regard are found in clubs.'⁵⁹)

If the clubs were the places of fellowship, a distinction between those who within and those who without had to be somewhat clear. Writing of the 'visitor question', Gaston claimed that the clubs were not the places for non-members. Late in the nineteenth century, some of the major clubs in London like the Mildmay Radical had a great difficulty in dealing with the 'visitor question'. Many non-members, who came to their popular social events, especially those on Sundays, made these clubs too crowded for the members to find their own seats.⁶⁰) Gaston was for shutting out these visitors altogether.

We are glad to find that several of our clubs are waking up to the fact that Sunday visitors are a danger, and their presence is not conducive to the respectability of the places they frequent. ... The fact is that the Sunday visitor is rarely made a member. He is not a clubable man, and were it not that there is a chance to get refreshments during prohibited hours, the clubs would not see him from one year's end to the other. The question is whether clubs were built to supply the needs of those who never subscribe to them or whether they should be confined to men who start and support them through a belief in their power of good.

Only those who contributed to the clubs were entitled to the pleasure and benefit of club life. Visitors without any intention to be really involved in the clubs would only do harm to them. 'If a visitor believes in club life let him join, or keep out altogether; they are an annoyance to officials and an expense to the members who introduce them.' Gaston welcomed a decision taken by his own Central Club in October 1900 not to admit any visitor on Sundays.⁶¹) Not 'open to public' but 'members only' should be the principle of the clubs.

How should the clubs, which contained various kinds of working men, be managed? In the journal of 31 January 1891 Gaston stressed that 'Clubs should be run on Democratic lines, and be managed by the best men'. In order to secure such a democratic management,
every clubman had to take interest in club affairs. As a matter of fact, however, many clubs were not necessarily conducted democratically. In many cases, the management got into few hands. Gaston pointed out 'the apathy of the existing members of clubs'. The polarisation of the clubmen into those who were 'apparently making a merit in being selfish' and those who were 'constantly showing their generosity' took place at many clubs. And the former was always much larger. '... many members there are who pride themselves upon their abstention from the ballot-box [for the elections of club officials], as if a lack of interest in their own business was really something to be proud of'.

Such an apathy was especially apparent on the occasion of the election of club officials. 'We like to see plenty of candidates for office, it shows some interest is being taken in club affairs. There are some clubs where great difficulty is found in getting men to sit upon committees'. As a result, at many clubs, the duties of management tended to fall upon same few members. Moreover, these few were not necessarily suitable persons. 'Unfortunately, the best-liked men get the most votes, while the man who has the rules carried out, without fear or favour, who will see the bar closed to the minute, is called a "harbitary cove," and gets found at the bottom of the poll.' Since too little thought was bestowed upon the abilities of the candidates, the best men to direct club affairs were often excluded from the committee. The main character of Gaston's fiction, 'Pity the Poor Blind! : A Sketch of Club Life', was Tom Basingall, secretary of the Neptune Club. He was not particularly well liked, for he did not spend much time on drinking with his fellow clubmen. More of his thought was given to his family than to the enjoyment of the bar. His nickname was a 'stingy member'. When he asked for some salary for his service as the secretary, some of the committee members were quite hostile to his demand. After much consideration, it was decided to pay him £20 a year. Many members, who could not see the amount of work, envied Tom. 'It was only writing', 'wot a boy could do!', and so on. During the next twelve months, owing much to Tom's secretarial efforts, the club got two hundreds new members. Accordingly, Tom's duties became much more. And the illness of his wife and the birth of a new child made his living distressed. However, his demand for the rise in his salary caused much disaffection among the members. '... it made him sick to see men always wanting a rise'. After all, Tom switched to the newly-founded Liberal Association, which would pay him £40 a year. Tom's successor was Dick Waster. He was a popular chap, who drank a lot with his fellow clubmen but simply was not well-organised enough to be a secretary. There was a falling off of the members and no balance-sheet was presented to the first quarterly meeting. Before long, the club finally broke up. Gaston concluded the
moral. 'Neptune must have gained plenty of wisdom by what they had learned. Many other clubs have no doubt gone through the same experience.' Popularity was not the first quality required for secretaries. Their duties needed, first of all, certain abilities. And the clubs could be made collapsed under the mismanagement of unsuitable secretaries.

It was far from easy to manage the clubs. 'There must be men at its head who are careful and prudent, and filled up with the responsibility of their position.' And the duties of the club officials were well worthy of a fair reward and gratitude. However, the club officials too often met with none of these.

Many hard-working, disinterested, warm-hearted fellows have been discouraged and embittered by members who have sneered when they should have praised. It appears the common fate of all who give their services to meet with scanty appreciation. Philanthropic men suffer, Christian workers are derided, charitable agencies accused of fraud - all come in for some men's censure. And the sting comes sharper when it is found directed by the very people who are being benefited by the exertions of benevolent agencies and humane men. So in clubs, the very members, who have comfortable premises, cheap games and amusements, plenty of light and warmth provided for them by the gratuitous work of unselfish members are the first to complain, to grumble, to sneer, and wound with cruel remarks the hearts of men who should be honoured and respected and made to feel their doings were appreciated.

Many clubmen did not sympathised with the officials, who were often considered seeking 'self glorification and profit'. Gaston argued that their efforts had to be more properly recognised both mentally and pecuniarily.

In the 1890s some of the leading metropolitan clubs came to contain more than a thousand members. Against this background, it became necessary for the clubs to be conducted on 'business principles'. 'The clubs are getting so large, and the business part of them so important, that secretaries and committees need to be men with a large amount of commercial knowledge. Clubs may be established for pleasure, but there is a great deal of serious business associated with them. When thousands of pounds are turned over in the course of a year there requires skillful management to prevent leakage and loss.' Such a kind of management was absolutely indispensable, contended Gaston, to keep the clubs independent.
Clubmen have not sufficiently understood the fact that clubs are now run on business lines, and not as charitable institutions. They must not expect help from outside, as they have decided against patronage. They will not receive money from men who, as a condition of money lent or given, make rules for the recipients to go by. They speak of independency, of standing by themselves, of not being the slaves of anyone, all of them excellent sentiments, but of no value if not carried out in a practical manner. ... Words are easy to form into sentences about "freedom from tyranny" and "independence of man"; it is when actions are required to show belief in the sentiments enunciated where the difficulty comes in.  

Independence was one of what Gaston regarded as most essential in club life. In order to enjoy their independent club life, the clubmen, or at least the leaders of them, had to be practical and prudent.  

The independence of the clubs was often threatened by the financial patronage of brewers. Some clubs looked to the loans from brewers, when they needed large funds for such purposes as building new premises. These clubs were usually forced to be under the strong influence of the brewers. 'There is no friendship in business, and very little consideration even may be expected from the brewers of beer. "My money or your life" is demanded, and if the ready cash cannot be produced, the death of the club comes about as a natural consequence.' The brewers demanded the exclusive sale of their brand of beer and interfered in the club affairs. Their interference sometimes even compelled the closure of the clubs. The most notable case may have been that of the United Radical Club, which was closed in June 1901. The Club, once a major club in London, was known for 'the sturdy independence and hearty co-operation, the devotion to Radical principles, and the sensible sociability.'

It is so rarely that an important London Club closes its doors and comes to an end that the stoppage of the well-known United Radical Club will come as a surprise to many of our readers who were under the impression that the institution was in comparatively smooth water. Started some sixteen years ago by members who were dissatisfied with the Clifden Club, Goldsmith Row, named after the lady who established it, they took a top floor over a shop opposite Columbia Market, Hackney Road, subsequently moving to a house further up the same road. Finding the membership growing out of all proportion to the size of their last venture it was decided to take some buildings in
Kay Street, and which were originally carpenters' shops. After many alterations it was thought best to build a new club house, which was done after immense work and difficulties, and some 12 years ago the building was opened by Mr.Cha rles Bradlaugh with some amount of ceremony. For a time the club appeared to prosper, it was felt that it was needed for the neighbourhood which is far from a rich one, but from the start the members have been hampered with a great debt brought about by the building of the new club, and with loans from brewers for the furnishing and necessary refreshments. In busy times it was a task of some difficulty to pay the interest with some small diminution of the principal, but in the summer time when the boot trade was slack it required all the brain-power of a financier to keep the club from sinking. About a couple years ago the original secretary, Mr.Dorrell, resigned with several other officials, and a new régime was inaugurated which it was hoped would lead to success, but apparently the best of management has failed to keep the club open.

Now that many clubmen demanded comfortable premises and substantial entertainment programmes, it was somewhat unavoidable for the clubs to put much money on their facilities. The undertaking of the clubs was becoming expensive. '... men rightly demand more comfort, and healthier and brighter places in which to spend their evenings and ask for something more refined and elevating than the old sing-song of the tap-room. But money is required'. Against the background of the new standard of comfort and new levels of provision now expected the loans from brewers, which sometimes tended to make the clubs tied public-houses, looked attractive to the club officials.68

However, if only they were paid off, the loans from brewers were not very harmful to the clubs. Gaston even argued that they were of great assistance to many clubs. The primary causes of the clubs' failures were 'too low contributions and too many free entertainments', which made it impossible for the clubs to pay off the loans. Here well-organised and able officials were really required. If subscriptions were too high and all the entertainments were paid for, many working men would not come to the clubs. Those who could manage the clubs on business lines would find suitable solutions. Gaston himself was an advocate of 'a much higher subscription'.69 He further proposed to raise money by issuing shares to the clubmen. This was thought to be a safer way of fund-raising. Moreover, by purchasing such shares, the clubmen would take more interest in the management of their clubs. 'Five or ten pounds should readily be found to take up shares, and, with a few hundreds of such men, the difficulty of getting money to rebuild clubs would
soon be overcome. They would feel a pride in their clubs that had never been found before, and the management would improve by the practical interest felt in their working." This was one of the means which would bring about what was supposed to be the most secure basis of successful clubs, democratic management.

VI

Late in the nineteenth century, many clubmen demanded more comfortable clubs. Gaston wrote that they were now in 'a new era in club life', in which the comfort of the members was one of the first considerations of the club committees and a distinct advance was to be made upon what had hitherto been thought good enough. 'When we remember the early days of the club movement when a wretched tumble-down room was thought sufficient for the clubman, with wooden forms and sanded floors in imitation of the taproom, we are surprised and delighted at the advance made of late years'. What might have been called the 'age of comfortable clubs' was brought about by, above all, the stronger pride held of themselves by the working men. They came to have a better opinion of themselves and demanded what was due to them as producers of wealth. On another occasion, Gaston used the words of 'a sense of independence' in describing the clubmen of the 1890s. The 'new era in club life' was spoken of more or less affirmatively. In a rather peculiar rhetoric, Gaston wrote of the working men's capacity to improve themselves. 'Clubs are improving, of that there can be no doubt ... it should be expected that better conduct must mark our working people and their general habits be more refined. ... They must imitate their "betters" in manners, conversation, and general conduct, and show their natures are capable of improvement.' Was the word of 'improvement' considered to be replaceable with that of 'imitation'?"

In the 'new era' more and more young generations of the working men, who had quite distinctive characteristics, came to the clubs. Unlike those who had painstakingly established the clubs for themselves, they did not have to take much trouble in founding and maintaining the clubs. The afore-mentioned apathy was particularly notable among these younger clubmen.

There are plenty of clubmen who feel little interest in the clubs of which they are members, solely because not a shilling of theirs is invested in the building, and if they care little for the club that shelters them it is not likely they would trouble themselves
about what other clubs are doing. They are not called upon to make sacrifices, or required to help, and necessarily look upon a club as a sort of shop where they can purchase refreshments or amusements at a cheap rate, and where they are not expected to display any gratitude for what is done.72)

The rise of these younger clubmen did much to change the nature of club life. Instead of establishing their own clubs, they chose where they would join out of many different clubs. While all clubs had once been more or less alike in their catering, now they were very much different with each other in what they could offer to the clubmen. The younger working men could be introduced to and inspect many clubs before deciding the one to join. And, in many cases, the most powerful factor of their selection was a entertainment programme to be offered. ‘... where they can see a play or hear a concert of paid artistes showing their abilities in a large hall is where they join, in preference to some small shop which has been converted into a club. Even those join the small clubs neglect them in favour of the large ones, which accounts for the crowds seen on entertainment nights at the Central or the Mildmay.73) Now the central function of the clubs was not educational or political but social. The ‘age of comfortable clubs’ was also that of the dominance of those large clubs which could provide substantial entertainment programmes. Consequently, a kind of polarisation, prosperous larger clubs getting wealthier on the one hand and smaller clubs declining on the other, took place in clubdom. As Gaston put it, ‘a club with a 500 membership’ was as a rule ‘a failure from the inability of the club to provide the amusements now deemed indispensable by clubmen’. In many cases, club life was no longer based on what could be called a face-to-face brotherhood. ‘Those clubmen who are in favour of small clubs with a 300 membership are proved by results as being far behind their time’.

However much some people may regret the change in ideas of club life, there is the fact, and the most sensible thing to do is to recognise it. ... We should like to see a club where the members know each other and would render assistance when required; where the band of brotherhood would be strengthened by a thorough knowledge of each member’s tastes and ideas. No doubt small clubs would now be successful if they were in reality working-men’s clubs; but club life is dominated by the wives and daughters and sweethearts of members to whom a small club offers no attractions. They must have their concerts and dances and dramatic performances by clever
artists, which only a large club can provide and pay for. Amusement is the order of the night, and where the most is given there will success be found.74)

The point of 'club life dominated by females' will be discussed later. Here it would be enough to remark that club life itself was fundamentally transformed in the 'new era', in which large and wealthy clubs were dominating. The personal relations among those clubmen who looked for comfort and amusement were not as intimate as they had once been.

Clubdom was also in the age of 'light social amusements'. 'There is no doubt that a man joins a club for pleasure and not for knowledge, and hence resents any attempt to lecture him as to his duties to society or to the political party to which he may belong.' Gaston did not conclude whether it was 'a good sign of the times or not'. Nevertheless, he would not deny such changes in club life. The essential starting-point was to be precisely aware of the state of things in clubdom. It was of no use to deplore the disappearance of the good old club life. '... Clubs have got away from their old ideas, and it is useless complaining that the clubs of 1900 are not as the clubs were in 1870, or earlier. Those who join clubs have a right to spend their time in their own way, and if they prefer games and concerts to lectures and classes there is no one to say them nay. Changes come about in clubs as in everything else'.75)

In the 'new era', there were fewer and fewer 'serious' club events like lectures and political discussions, which could attract a very small audience. Gaston wrote of the reasons why many clubmen came only to entertainment events.

There is no doubt that amusements hold the first place in people's minds, not in clubs alone, but in society generally. Theatres and music-halls are building everywhere, and the larger the club the bigger the show the greater share of patronage it gets. Life is easier than it was a quarter-of-a-century ago, wages are higher, and the people more contended.

The relative affluence of the clubmen, which made them more or less satisfied with the existing state of their lives, was considered to be the most fundamental driving force in bringing about the age of 'light social amusements'. The larger educational opportunities for the working men also did much to cause their stronger taste for 'light social amusements'. 'It is plain to everyone that since education has been popularised there is a
desire for all that is light and frivolous in amusements, and anything requiring a little thought is voted a bore and a trouble.' Gaston was not necessarily much alarmed by what John Taylor called the 'hegemony of entertainment'.

Of course there are a number of earnest men in all clubs who fear that if their institutions change from political to social degeneration will set in, and the members will lose interest in serious work. But the reverse is generally the case; the membership increases, and when election time comes there are additional soldiers to fight in the battle of progress.\(^76\)

It would be notable that Gaston did not consider that social clubs were degraded or worse than political clubs, though he seems to have been a little too optimistic about the serious work performed by these social clubs.

Quite a few clubmen complained about the dominance of 'light social amusements'. At the annual meeting of the CIU on 26 September 1896 Hodgson Pratt spoke. 'When looking back on the club movement, as he remembered it at the start, he must find many changes have been made, and, to his idea, no doubt, not for the best. The trend of mind of Mr.Pratt does not take him to concert halls and billiard saloons, and he is apt to think a great deal of time is wasted in such places.' Gaston was rather critical of his speech. '... he must remember that tastes change, and the seriousness of one age is followed by frivolity and a desire for the lightest of amusements. We at present are in that age, and, much as Mr.Pratt may regret it, his speeches and his advice, we are afraid, fall upon all ears.' Gaston argued that those who mourned the 'departure from the high ideals of the first promoters of clubs' were simply 'out of touch with the times'.

We have often called attention to the small attendance at a club lecture, and the lack of interest apparently shown by members in the political and social questions of the day. We ask again what is the use of blinking our eyes to the fact that lectures are not appreciated, and that amusements of a musical and dramatic nature never fail in drawing hundreds of people together? Those sanguine people who announce their lecture expecting a full hall will not understand that there are many ways of getting instruction besides the old plan of lecturing from a platform with the table and conventional water bottle and glass. There are the daily and evening papers with the best information upon all subjects, and so written as to win the attention of the
There was no point in deploring the degradation of, particularly younger, clubmen, without knowing the realities of their daily lives. As 'the link' between 'idealists' leaders and the rank-and-file clubmen, Gaston always intended to be realistic in his arguments.

Needless to say, it is far from precise to conclude that Gaston felt nothing uneasy with the 'hegemony of entertainment' in clubdom. As mentioned above, the clubs had to try to satisfy those who wanted something more serious. 'Where are the winter programmes of lectures and discussions which would give instruction and information and keep the members well grounded in current topics and great questions of the day? They are absent, and in their place plenty of announcements of entertainments, games, and amusements of all kinds.' Those who were not much interested in 'light social amusements' would, sooner or later, leave the clubs, where they could not enjoy nothing else. The loss of such a kind of clubmen would, contended Gaston, do much damage to the clubs, for the clubs were, in many cases, led by those clubmen. Proper club management required seriously-inclined persons.

...to our mind there is room for clubs for workmen who wish to spend their leisure with profit to themselves, and who have no craving for the so-called amusements, as seen in so many clubs. To the quiet, studious man - hard worker though he may be - with a literary turn, enjoying a chat about books and their authors, and fond of a discussion upon the problems of the time, there is no provision made, and the present style of club is not suited to his taste. By the constant catering for those who like amusements of the comic song order, and ignoring those of educated tastes and refined feelings, the clubs lose a number of superior men who would be of great assistance in helping forward the club movement.78

Furthermore, the ability of thinking rationally was one of the essential qualities of independent citizens. At those clubs where nothing but 'light social amusements' was offered, the clubmen could not be made such citizens. In his lecture on the 'Poets of Labour' at the Mildmay Radical Club on 5 December 1891 Gaston talked:

The lecturer called attention to the light and frivolous amusements of the day, and the disposition to make clubs merely places for comic songs, for drinking, and games.
While believing in innocent amusements, yet he felt there were times when men should think and show themselves rational beings. ... Plenty of men would not join a Trade Union or a benefit society, but when in sickness or poverty sponged upon the provident for the means of subsistence. Such men did not deserve consideration, but should be made to suffer for their self-neglect. They were a disgrace to humanity, they had not a spark of independence in them; all they cared for was selfish pleasures, and when old looked round for some one to help them. Continually singing comic songs and devoting their whole minds to variety shows would not improve their position, nor would their future career be benefited by them. Clubs, he contended, should be more educational, and not think it worthy of praise that large sums of hardly-earned money had been taken for strong drink.\(^79\)

His arguments sound like those of ‘self-help’. Independent clubmen had to help themselves, by being rational, considerate, and educated. Certainly, the dominance of ‘light social amusements’ would not make the clubmen more independent. Those clubs which consisted only of less independent members could not prosper.

How should these ‘thinking members’ be catered in the age of ‘light social amusements’? Gaston contended that the clubs should not compete with the theatres and music halls, which were established only for amusement, on the same lines. The entertainment events at the clubs should be more intimate and simpler than those offered at the West End theatres and music halls.

We will yield to no man in our appreciation of honest laughter and good humour, but surely there is a time for everything. Cake and sweets, however pleasant, cloy on the appetite, as continual singing of comic songs create a dislike in the minds of thinking members. Every taste should be gratified in a club, and the claims of the reading and observant clubman should be recognised with those of his lighter brother. Lately the clubs have devoted more nights than ever to dramatic performances, and far be it from us to try and decry the amusement which gives pleasure to thousands. But in the old days of club life it was the dramatic class of the club that played, and their repertoire was made up from simple one-act dramas and farces. ...

... Let clubs be clubs, and not minor theatres and music halls ...
In the early days most of all the club entertainments were provided by the clubmen themselves. Plays were performed by club dramatic societies, concerts were given by club brass bands, and songs were sung by all those who were present. Although it is not likely that these entertainments were of high quality, the clubmen of these days were largely satisfied with them. However, in the ‘new era’ when many clubmen demanded more refined entertainments on a larger scale, increasingly many professional performers were engaged. Accordingly, the entertainment events came to be commercially run. The entertainments by the clubmen themselves made their presence smaller, though not extinguished. Clearly Gaston advocated a return to the earlier state of club entertainments. In addition, he insisted that the entertainment events were to be held less frequently. ‘There are plenty of clubs, and some of the best, whose concerts are but of weekly occurrence, and then got up cheaply, for the talent is provided by the members and friends.’

Gaston had a clear preference for certain sorts of entertainments. Not surprisingly, dramatic performances were earnestly recommended by him, for they could function as a means of education. ‘Lectures, we grant, would do our artisans a great deal of good if they would come and listen to them, but they decline to do so, and it is best to admit it and seek some other way of raising their tastes and imparting instruction. For these purposes we urge the stage.’ On the contrary, ‘so-called comic songs’ were considered to be ‘generally of a depressing tendency’. ‘We have often wondered how presumably educated men and women could find any amusement in the efforts of the vocal comedians whose cheek and impudence are more conspicuous than their ability.’ Gaston found ‘a cheering sign’ in the changing nature of the amusements provided at the clubs, which showed ‘the taste of the members’. In his views, ‘the variety style of show’ was losing ground, and sketches and short plays were taking its place. In the Journal of 6 January 1894 Gaston wrote of the improvement of the club entertainments.

Much improvement has been seen in the style of club entertainments, especially on Sundays, and the songs and sketches have been more in keeping with the day of rest. We do not wish to see long faces in club halls on Sunday evenings, we would rather hear the sounds of laughter, not the loud laugh that shows the vacant mind, but merriment caused by legitimate humourists. Artistes with absurd make-up, with loud untuned voices, singing stupid insane songs, with coarse and vulgar dialogue, have found their occupation gone in many a club on Sunday evening, and in their places appear ballad singers, bands of musicians, glee parties, and dramatic companies with

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comedies, conveying a wholesome moral.81)

Needless to say, not only such ‘improved’ entertainments but also educational and other kinds of events should be organised at the clubs. These club events will be discussed later.

One impressive point in Gaston’s arguments on the age of ‘light social amusements’ is somewhat a decisive role he assigned to women. As quoted above, it was ‘the wives and daughters and sweethearts of members’ who most earnestly demanded entertainment events at the clubs. The age of ‘light social amusements’ was brought about by such a female dominance of club life. There is another description of women’s role in club life by Gaston.

No doubt the female belongings of the members have had something to do with this constant succession of entertainments. We cannot believe the members care to sit, night after night, listening to songs which, in many cases, are stupid and the reverse of amusing. Likely enough the member wishes to please his women-folk and so urges upon the committee the desirability of having plenty of song and dance.... This anxiety to nightly fill club-halls is not a healthy sign, for it often crosses the mind that the women might find something much better to do at home.... The influence of women over the business of clubs is very marked, and which accounts for much that is light and frivolous in their arrangements.82)

These writings would reveal much of his views of women, which were based upon those of family. Gaston’s portrayal of happy family life could be called both sentimental and common. ‘To come home tired after a hard day’s work, and find the hearth neatly tided and the children thrown up, and Clara with a bright cheerful face and welcome smile for her good man, and Tommy and Jacky, an opposite sides of the fire, counting over “Robinson Crusoe” or the “Arabian Nights,” is happiness to the poor man, and makes him content with his hard lot in life, forgetting his troubles in the dear delight of home.’ On this matter Gaston was not far away from the mainstream of late Victorian society. In Gaston’s happy family the sexual division of work was very clear. The main duties of married women were bringing up their children and ‘keeping the rooms or the house clean and comfortable for the breadwinner’. In reality, however, many married women were forced to be wage earners. In order to enjoy proper family life, contended Gaston, the working men had to secure enough family wages. Had they got higher wage, the necessity for their wives to
work would have been taken away. 'Men should not be satisfied until their wages enable them to keep their wives to do their natural duties of women - home-work, and the care of growing children. ... The condition of the women workers is a disgrace to England'. To make matters worse, the employment of women and children did much to drag down the wages of men. '... with the combined efforts of men, women, and children, the trades in which they are all employed are the worst paid of any.' Therefore, it is not surprising that Gaston was somewhat cynically critical of those women who took prominent positions in 'the sphere of work', of which men had been only supposed to be capable.

Much as we appreciate the good deeds of many women well known in social movements, we are afraid the success they obtain is out of all proportion to the efforts made. The truth is, women are not loved by women. There is always antagonism that is fatal to any great work proposed to be done by the well-to-do ladies. ... If any reforms are to be made in England, they will come from the efforts of men, and while women may help, they certainly will never be able to initiate great movements for the benefit of the people at large.

In Gaston's views, few working class women felt degraded by not being treated as the equal of men. Those socially active women, most of whom were well-to-do, were affected with 'a sort of disease'.89 The strong sexism of Gaston, which was nothing but common in late Victorian society, cannot be overlooked.

VII

Many pioneers of the club movement sought to achieve the elevation of the working men. Although their expectation was rarely fulfilled, educational activities were earnestly organised in the early days. However, they were certainly in decline and many clubmen of the 'new era' were not much interested in the educational function of the clubs. Gaston insisted that the clubs should act as an educational institutions, even though many of the members kept themselves away from the educational events. 'We consider it unfair to the minority of the members, who prefer lectures to concerts, that their tastes should go ungratified. ... Clubs are started for all classes of men - men who are intellectual and those whose minds cannot grasp anything beyond what is conveyed in a song.' It was fairly common to argue against the educational club events that the spread of cheap newspapers
made the educational activities unnecessary. Gaston refuted:

There are some silly people who will swallow anything they see in print; "It must be true - it was in the paper," we hear them say, and whatever rubbish is concocted they will swear by. They have not had the experience to know reports are "faked" and how little truth there is in numbers of articles they read. Eminent men who once used to lecture at Clubs would soon expose the whole business and show why the policy of certain newspapers is continued. ... There never was a time when instruction was more required than at the present, when lies and misrepresentation are spread broadcast.

Moreover, Gaston claimed that the educational activities would bring about the success of the clubs by retaining 'old friends of the club movement' and enlisting 'new ones'.

On the one hand, Gaston's advocacy of the educational activities was very much worldly-interest oriented. It was simply argued that those who had better education got on better in the battle of life. '... in the world of labour, sent out to earn their own living, they [boys] soon find that without education a life of drudgery and low wages is before them, and if they have any grit they seek to get as much knowledge as possible, which makes them respected by employers and a pecuniary gain to themselves.' In order to get up rungs of the social ladder, the working men should not satisfied with their ordinary school education. Only those who consistently educated themselves could make their way upward. Therefore, education had to be practical. Gaston bitterly rejected religious education and clerical interference. 'Religion does not count much with employers. They want bright, educated, practical men, quick to understand; and if they get such, they are satisfied, and ask not whether their employees know the Apostles' Creed, or even the Catechism.' It was not religious education but secular education that could teach 'sound business habits and practical knowledge of trade and its probabilities'.

On the other hand, Gaston contended that education made the working me 'more valuable citizens in many ways'. Only those who utilised their leisure time in 'something more than mere amusement' could acquire due respect of which citizens were worthy. The basis of the afore-mentioned stronger pride held of themselves by the working men was education. '... it requires education before men can be brought to see that it is their right to be as well catered for as their employers'. In order to be citizens, who were rightly proud, the clubmen had to organise and take part in the educational activities. Education was considered to be what would not only give the clubmen greater chance for worldly success
but also make their personalities more refined. On another occasion, Gaston described education as a sort of weapon of the working men in their battle against employers. '... only the educated men will have much chance against educated employers. The ignorant workman is heavily handicapped - he is full of prejudices, and often fights against his own friends, and playing into the hands of his enemies.' Without educational efforts on the parts of the working men, class-struggle would only be one-sided.

In Gaston's views, the leading status of England in the world was certainly threatened, particularly by Germany. Such a crisis had something to do with the lack of education among English working men. 'It is ... known that the German lad makes his way quicker than the English, and those that are competent to judge see that the former has a wider and fuller knowledge of all that is necessary to success.' England had to try hard to make its working men better educated. 'If England is to be kept supreme among the nations of the world, it will only be by an educated working class who will not be afraid of the competition coming from Germany or anywhere else.'

Many capable writers in a position to know tell us that the curse of England is the general love of amusements, and instead of improving ourselves in commerce, we are busied in wasting time with every form of sport. It is pointed out that Germany is envious of England's commercial greatness, and is striving to be foremost in the race for the world's trade. Only education will enable us to keep our place, and that fact should be known and acted upon by every lover of his country.

Thus Gaston unfolded his somewhat patriotic feeling in his arguments on education, though it is to be shown later that he was never a jingo.

In spite of his earnest advocacy of education, Gaston wrote little of the actual educational events at the clubs. This is rather surprising. As an active and popular lecturer himself, Gaston seems to have known that it was not at all easy to educate the working men. 'There is nothing appears so easy, but in reality few things more difficult than to become a successful lecturer to working men.' Especially those lecturers who were of upper classes did not know how to deal with the working men. With all their good intentions, their efforts would never succeed, if they looked down the clubmen or misjudged the amount of knowledge of them. 'The ignorance of suitable themes to lecture upon is marvellous; many of these would-be educators trot out some pet "fad" of their own, till at every place they attend they are shunned as bores, and eventually find no one listen to
Tact was very much required in such undertakings. Gaston again meant to be realistic in his advocacy of education.

Another kind of club activities often referred to as what the clubs had to try hard to organise were political ones. Like the educational activities, the political activities looked lukewarm in the 'new era in club life.' Their heyday was in the 1880s, a decade noted for club radicalism particularly in London. In August 1888, for example, the Radical Leader wrote: 'Radical clubs are quite a feature of London life. They have multiplied rapidly during the last ten years, and their number is still increasing.' Even in the 1880s most of the clubmen were not 'ardent politicians and social reformers.' However, under the leadership of some active Radicals, they were rather easily mobilised for political purposes. '... they are leavened with the spirit of progress, and in a crisis they throw themselves on the right side. ... when a burning question is to the front the clubs are alive from head to foot, and committees, meetings and demonstrations are the order of the day.' The apparent stagnation of the political activities in the next decade annoyed Gaston. 'In the clubs the tendency has been to get rid of everything educational or political in favour of more entertainments, which does not show real progress in the club movement.' The outbreak of the Boer War made Gaston more alarmed, for under the war the clubs generally became even less active in political matters. 'A cry goes up now and again from serious club members, that many of the clubs have departed from the purpose for which they were established and that politics are dead letter, and all interest in Imperial and social questions have faded out. It is all very true, and there appears no remedy for the stagnation which has been noticed, especially since the war began.' Gaston was just one of many in deploiring.

The war seems to have paralyzed all efforts in clubs, for those who once were strong upon Radicalism appear to have lost all energy, and never enquire who are the men running the National Show and plunging the country into debt and disgrace. When they sing 'Rule Britannia' they think they have done all that is necessary. Mr. Hodgson Pratt said a few weeks ago, "That men followed without question, the dictates of their favourite newspapers;" and in speaking of clubs said "I cannot consider that any workmen's club does its duty to its members or the community, unless it provides a Political and Educational Committee." ... We might well ask "What's in a name?" when Radical Clubs never do an hour's political work, and frown down upon those who wish to introduce a little education in addition to the eternal variety concert.
A letter from 'an Old Chartist' in the Club Life of 4 August 1900 urged that politics should be studied. 'If the men of to-day only knew the price their fathers and grandfathers had to pay for a little freedom, they would not ridicule the political work of some of your clubs. Although so much has been gained there are many more reforms required before they can feel happy in the world.'

The general tone of Gaston's writings on the political apathy of the clubmen was pretty pessimistic. He obviously did not know how to make these clubmen politically interested. 'Those who like their variety will still applaud their favourite singers, and while the lecture hall in which the anomalies of taxation or the greed of monopolists are exposed will be empty, the concert-room will be full of those who decline to be troubled with what they call a waste of time "bothering about politics and other dry stuff."'

A controversy, in which many clubmen took part, started with the appearance of an article, 'An Radical Clubs Failures?', in the Reynolds Newspaper of 13 July 1900. The article pointed out the 'sorry spectacle' presented by those clubs which were named 'radical' and concluded that they were the 'gross caricatures of what they ought to be'. Diverse repercussions were caused by it. On the one hand, there were those who agreed with the article. H. Hayward of the North-East Bethnal Green Club wrote: 'Are Radical Clubs a failure? Yes; as far as the word Radical is concerned. Take this Club as an example. ... What are we now? Radical? Certainly not! Politics don't trouble our members as long as the majority of them can come in when Club is open, drink their glass of beer, or play a game of billiards or cards'. A. E. Finden of the Isle of Dogs Club also admitted that 'in a large majority of clubs' politics took a back seat. On the other hand, some clubmen tried to refute the article. A. Davis of the Lansdowne Liberal and Radical Club wrote: '... I claim that the Club which I have the honour to belong to ... has done a lot of hard work for the Radical cause of Hackney. ... if "Gracchus" [the author of the article] would kindly visit any Radical Club on the eve of an election and see the earnest work of the members to secure the return of the Radical candidates, he would see that Radicalism had not gone so stagnant as he feared.'

However, it seems that those arguments which fell between these two extremes could tell more about the political life of the clubs. W. C. Wade of the Metropolitan Radical Federation thought it not true to say that political life was altogether dead in the radical clubs or that their influence was without weight. The radical clubs simply did not recognise sufficiently the 'enormous power' in their hands. 'They are even now the strongholds that, when election time comes, help on the cause of progress.' The writing of A. Dawes of the
North Camberwell Radical Club sounds very realistic:

Radical (or other) clubs are not a failure. It is true that the bulk of the members do not actively interest themselves in politics, except at election and other times of excitement. But this is only characteristic of the average working man - clubman or not. Owing to the difficulty of mastering complex political and social questions, and the keen struggle for a livelihood, it is no wonder that the worker leaves his thinking to be done by the few. After a hard day's work he prefers amusement, and as clubs have to be run on business lines - and pay their way - they must supply the demand. But there are redeeming features. The clubs are a rendezvous for a number of earnest politicians, who are afforded an opportunity of conferring continuously, and much good but quiet work is often done. Then they inculcate the principle of self-government and business habits, being conducted on a democratic basis.

Dawes refused a simple comparison between what the clubmen ought to be (or what the clubmen had been in the 1880s) and what the clubmen really were. If the difficulties surrounding ordinary working men were taken into account, the apparent dearth of the political activities of the clubs was understandable enough. Based on such realistic considerations, Dawes stressed the importance of the functions of the radical clubs in the cause of progress, though they were not really as much vigorous as they had been in the previous decade. Alfred Hill, vice-president of the West Southwark Liberal and Radical Club, also insisted that what was actually done by the radical clubs should not be underestimated. 'We have had some of the leading lights of the Liberal party lecturing in our hall, viz., the present Lord Chief Justice, etc., and in the near future expect to have two or three prominent M.P.s to further enlighten our members politically. I may further add that at School Board, County Council, and Parliamentary elections, should “Gracchus” be in neighbourhood, he will, as an honourable man, acknowledge that we take some part in trying to get right men elected.” Although they might have disappointed those who knew the heyday of club radicalism, the political activities of the clubs in the next decade were not necessarily negligible.

Gaston himself took part in the controversy in a rather modest manner. 'We hope our readers will not think we want to thrust politics down their throats, or decline to see any use in social clubs'. Agreeing with Dawes, Gaston acknowledged the right of every man to do what he liked and join whatever clubs suited him the best. What he found fault with was
the word 'radical', which many of politically inactive clubs put on their names. If the bulk of the members stood aloof from any work of political character, these clubs should not inform the outside world that they were political clubs. As a man who knew club radicalism of the 1880s, Gaston thought that such clubs 'under false colours' would disgust the radical clubmen of the past. 'The Radical clubs past have done some excellent work, and those who first started them are sorry to find them departing from the policy that once made them a power in the land.'

As many of participants of the controversy mentioned, the clubs tended to be politically active during elections. Their political commitment was expressed by intense but occasional electoral activities rather than by weekly political lectures or more or less regularly held debates or demonstrations. However, 'very little excitement', which took the clubs just before the forthcoming general election of 1900, made Gaston fairly frustrated. Under 'a paralysing influence' exercised by the Tory government, argued Gaston, the working men became quite content to be governed by anyone who was said to be fit to rule. 'The debates, the discussions, the speeches formerly in evidence at the time of an Election find no place in the present daily life of the workers. The old political spirit is dead, the determination to have certain men to represent the people does not now exist, everyone is satisfied with the present policy and it appears too much trouble to seek an alteration.'

Pretty pessimistic, again.

With respect to politics, the basic position of the club movement was non-partisan. Gaston claimed that such a neutral position on political questions, as well as on religious ones, of which men naturally held different opinions, did much to advance the movement. However, such a basic position did not prevent the clubs and the clubmen from holding particular political opinions and taking actions. Although it was not considered desirable for the clubs to become part of its party machinery, the Liberal Party was, in many cases, regarded as closer to the interests of the clubs. Gaston was also generally sympathetic with the Liberals. The victory of the Liberals at the general election of 1900 was congratulated. 'The result of the Elections this week has proved that the old liberal spirit is not dead, and that the people can rise superior to the khaki baits held out to them.' However, it should not be overlooked that he also showed his regret at the defeat of several labour leaders. 'There should be in the House men representing the trades of the country, for there are often questions arising that can only be answered by practical men.'

Gladstone and his times were warmly wrote of by Gaston. Unlike in Tory regime leading to the Boer War, in the age of Gladstone, 'home affairs were studied, and ... we had the
The Portrait of a Clubman, Richard Gaston, 1840-1901

respect of nations'. Under the Tory rule, much expenditure of money was spent not on domestic policies but on imperialist ventures. In place of 'the respect of nations', England now only had 'their hatred'. 'Who would have thought that in a few years from the retirement of Gladstone, England would have changed from being a lover of peace to a spreader of discontent among our erstwhile friends'. There is a poem of Gaston, in which Gladstone is praised.

When Liberal Gladstone ruled this land
   How busy was each art and trade!
Then money flowed to every hand,
   And taxes light were gladly paid.

...*  
Men tried the Tories years ago,
   To find them failures in the end;
Our history's page will ever show
   They never proved their country's friend.

...*  
With folded arms men vainly wait,
   For prosperous times in which to thrive;
But not while Tories rule the State
   Will British trade again revive.

...*  

It seems that the clubs committed themselves more earnestly to local politics rather than to national parliamentary politics. The elections of the London County Council, the Borough Councils, and the vestries were the occasions on which the political activities of the clubs were most intense. 'The clubs worked very hard in the recent vestry elections, and we are glad to chronicle a success in many parts of London.' Gaston argued that these Councils and vestries were not less in importance than Westminster. They certainly came nearer to the daily lives of the clubmen and 'quite as valuable to the ordinary citizen.' There were actually widespread attempts at local level to ameliorate social conditions. Many Londoners, in particular, looked to municipal solutions to their social problems. Moreover, the clubs could be fairly influential in the elections of these local institutions.

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The clubs can do very much to help to-day's result [of the London County Council election], for if the thousands of members determine to vote and get their friends to vote also on the Progressive side, there ought to be a complete rout of the obstinate Conservatives, who will not do anything themselves and are determined no one else shall. The clubs do not know their strength or they would use it oftener in the direction of political and social progress. When we know clubs with a thousand members each, they should be able to turn any election in their favour, and so destroy the power of those who would injure them.

As a matter of fact, it was almost foolish for candidates to overlook the clubs, some of which had more than a thousand members. They often attended at the meeting of the clubs to make speeches and canvass for themselves. Not only did exercise their influence upon the candidates, the clubs sometimes nominated their own candidates. The number of the clubmen serving on these local government institutions is far from negligible (in 1901 at least 45 of the LCC Councilors and 155 of the Borough Councilors were the clubmen). In other words, the functions of the clubs were somewhat indispensable in the democratic system of local government. Many clubmen were quite proud of having their colleagues serving their communities, who had acquired citizenship by club membership. Gaston contended that local politics was essentially different in character from parliamentary politics. Unlike in parliamentary politics, partisan spirit was not important in local politics. As was in the case of club management, in the administration of local affairs the co-operation of men of various opinions was strongly required. At Westminster the Liberals were much more favourable than the Tories, while in local politics this was not always the case. 'The Radical party have not all the virtues, neither do the Conservative possess all the vices.' Therefore, even those social clubs which did not have particular political creeds could be active in local politics. Radicalism was not necessarily the only one brand of club politics.

Local affairs can be administered by men of all ranks and who are different in politics. Therefore the vestry and guardian elections can interest clubs who call themselves by no political name. The social clubs can work side by side with the pronounced political one for the better treatment of the poor, the improved lighting and paving, also the new sanitary appliances for the preservation of health, which are subjects that appeal to the Socialist, the Tory, and the Liberal alike, and each can help in making our lives
brighter.99)

However, as long as the London County Council was concerned, such a rather naive understanding was not accurate. In fact, party politics was an important feature of the London County Council from the beginning. In the 1890s it was obvious that the London County Council was dominated by the 'Progressives', a loose alliance of Liberals, Radicals and Socialists, the main opponents of which were the 'Moderates'. As cited above, Gaston actually called upon the clubs to take sides with the 'Progressive' candidates. Furthermore, he briefly summed up the respective positions of the main two parties. 'The Conservatives have shown themselves in their true colours - men who are determined to keep London as a place for the slum owner, the gangs of monopolists who fatten upon the people's poverty, and the shady classes generally. The Progressives will make a quick end of abuses if they are elected, and will make London brighter, cleaner, and cheaper to live in, for they are pledged to progress and reform.100) Thus the comparatively most active political commitment of the clubs in the 1890s was not free from party politics.

VIII

Gaston wrote much of the Boer War. It was because, above all, of his alarm in the afore-mentioned political stagnation of the clubs caused by the war. Many clubmen were 'infected with the war fever' and took little interest in the domestic affairs. '... if the people prefer to shut their eyes to which most concerns them, neglecting their own business to assist others, who shall say them Nay? If they are well satisfied, as they appear to be, it is better to let them have their jingo songs and their patriotic shouting until the time arrives when they awaken to their own interests.' Naturally enough, the tone of his writings of the war was depressing. Even if the war came to an end in British victory, 'the thought of the cost of victory', which was obtained 'only by death and suffering', made him sad.101) Gaston was apparently against imperialism. The typical slogan of imperialist ventures like 'civilising or improving the natives' was utterly refused. Such a slogan functioned only as a convenient excuse for invading other countries. '... if the civilising process consists in robbery and murder, the less said about civilisation the better.' Neighbouring countries rightly saw the real intentions covered with these flowery words.

It is evident that England has lost the respect of foreign nations and our campaign in
South Africa will not regain it. This continual hectoring and threatening weaker nations or republics, which is called "Imperialism," does not commend itself to our Continental neighbours, whose fear of England has turned into hatred. They see affairs with different eyes to ourselves, and can look deeper into the causes of war than the biased and press-ridden people of this land. They find the many protestations of protection for the weak are not true, they are merely made to quiet the minds of those that England wishes to annex. This talk of civilising and improving other places and people is to cover the robbing of others' property. The civilization has to be paid for, and very dearly by people who do not believe in it and do not want it. All this is seen and noted abroad, and no wonder we are called a nation of hypocrites.\(^{102}\)

Undoubtedly the 'lust for gold' was at the bottom of all military ventures. In the pursuit for wealth, robbery and murder were to be justified. Gaston insisted that 'the rubbish spoken about patriotism', which taught 'the divisions of the world into groups of suspicious people all enemies of one another' was unworthy of sensible. First of all, the notion of national superiority over other nations was totally nonsense. Such a notion was out of place 'in the present age', which was supposed to be 'one of progress'. 'What is wanted is a healthy public opinion directed against the absurd notion that other nations are necessarily inferior to our own, and excuses made to show our superiority on the battlefield.' However, it should also be noted that Gaston used the word 'the savage' in describing South Africans.\(^{103}\)

The monetary benefit of imperialism was not to be reaped by the working men, who did 'all the shouting and paying in body and purse'. Only 'the rich' could be profited by the war. The working men were used for the purpose of the rich. They were brought to South Africa and suffered heavier taxes for the war, which was against their own interests. The 'dreadful work of upholding "Old England's Glory"' fell mainly upon them. 'Imperialism should be paid for by those who indulge in it, but it appears that payment is to be demanded from those who are its greatest opponents.' Therefore, the tight grip of the war fever on so many working men looked really alarming to Gaston. Well before the outbreak of the war, in February 1894, he actually argued that the desire for a 'good war' was rarely heard among the working men. 'The songs urging men to fight for the glory of old England rarely get a hand when sung in music halls.' The overwhelming jingoism among the working men during the war forced him to reconsider. In his views, the press played a crucial role. '... the daily papers take care to keep up the glamour of war, and repeat the cry that every Englishman should be prepared to die for his country.' As mentioned above, Gaston was
The Portrait of a Clubman, Richard Gaston, 1840–1901

well aware of the negative influence exercised by many popular papers upon the working men. The war fever was so overwhelming that Gaston seems to have considered nothing but the end of the war would cool it down. ‘We are certain when the country settles down many of these shouters for war will think what fools they have been, and what nuisances they had made themselves to other people. ... The end of the war will restore men to their senses’.104)

It should be remarked that Gaston’s discourse was by no means free from imperialist or patriotic implications. As mentioned above, he described South Africans as ‘the savage’. Some more examples can be pointed out. In his following statement his strong pride in ‘great and rich’ England and his critical awareness of its decline coexist with each other.

It is monstrous that a great and rich country like this should be so badly served as it is. It has everything except leaders and men who are capable of managing important undertakings committed to their charge. With all our boasting we are really inferior to many nations upon whom we look with scorn. ... If England is to recover its prestige and maintain its position among nations, a different class of men will have to be chosen or the country will be led to ruin.

It was clearly claimed that England, ‘a great and rich country’, could and should enjoy a prestigious position in the world, which could not obviously be held by ‘the savage’. The words ‘the reputation of the Empire’ were also used by Gaston in praising a clubman, Tom Newman of the Dartford Club, for his military service in Egypt.105) Since such a expression was, needless to say, far from uncommon in the 1890s, it would be too much to conclude that Gaston was a royalist or imperialist person. Nevertheless, he doubtless thought, spoke and wrote within the intellectual and emotional framework of his age, that of the upsurge of imperialism.

Similar rhetorics were found in his writings of monarchy. Not surprisingly, he called England ‘a great country’, in which freedom was paramount, on the death of Queen Victoria. Although his opinion of monarchical institutions was not very clear, he did not hesitate to admire the members of royal family. ‘... all must acknowledge the late Queen as one of the best monarchs who has ever ruled this Empire. ... no one can question the fact that Her late Majesty had a kindly feeling even for the least of her subjects, and interested herself in matters which some people might think were beneath her attention.’ These flattering words were used not only on such special occasions as Queen’s death. In April
1900, for example, Gaston wrote of the Prince of Wales in no less a flattering manner. '... the most bitter opponent must confess that the Prince of Wales has played his part in the country like a true Englishman. Placed in a different position he has never come in conflict with the people, rather has he helped them in their social life and aspirations. ... No man could be better liked, for his unaffected manner and real courtesy to all classes has won for himself universal admiration'. Whatever opinions the clubmen, among whom there were some republicans, may have held of the system of monarchy, argued Gaston, there could be 'no question about their loyalty to the Throne'. Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales were 'liberal subscribers towards the establishment of clubs for working men' in the early days of the club movement.\textsuperscript{106} Though it is not known what kind of opinion they held of the clubs in the 'new era', which were essentially different from those under reformist patronage.

As his reference to the necessity of labour representation in the House of Commons shows, with all his sympathy with the Liberals, Gaston certainly had an acute sense of class-consciousness. The independent spirit of the working men and their clubs was consistently stressed in his writings. His poem, which was first read at the United Radical Club on 20 May 1885, would be a good example.

\begin{quote}
We working men are often called hard names by jealous scribes,
And made the butt of many jokes, and sneers and cruel jibes;  
We are the 'mob', and 'great unwashed', sometimes the 'dregs' and 'scum';
As if they thought from working men no good could ever come. 
But if we drink we also think; we're not all thoughtless men;
We have as much (perhaps more) good sense as have the Upper Ten;
And if some proof they wish to have that my remarks are true,
Let them come here and see this club, that has been built by you. 
We've asked no guineas from the rich, nor patronage from peers;
We're independent of them all, and have been so for years. 
To build their churches and their schools the parson often begs;
The 'scum' pay for their clubs themselves, as also do the 'dregs'.
We have toil'd hard, been oft cast down, depressed, yet not lost heart; 
We felt success would crown the end, though humble was the start.
So now tonight we welcome friends from clubs both far and near,
To share the pleasure that we feel in what we're doing here.\textsuperscript{107}
\end{quote}
A working man himself, Gaston always cherished such independent sentiments. The clubs should be free from patronage, even if they supported the Liberals or Progressives at elections.

To Gaston the labour question was 'the most important one in the world'. In order to solve the labour question, nothing was more ardently required than the solidarity of the working men. There is another poem of Gaston, which passionately called upon such a solidarity.

... I have heard of men, when new clubs have been started,
    Have tried every way the bright scheme to condemn;
    Would deny fellow workmen a share of their pleasures,
    Withholding all help they might render to them.
I also have heard that the highborn and wealthy
    Will try to crush labour, and delight in its fall;
Yet how oft working men try to tread down each other,
    Which makes thinking men only laugh at them all.

That sense we call "common" - I would many had it -
    Then our clubs would progress to a far different end;
Yet we must not despair, education will teach men
    To work hand in hand - hail each man as a friend.
For if club working men were like brothers together,
    Our strength would increase, while our trials would be small;
Hand and glove with each club, all the members united,
    Then the few who could harm us, we might laugh at them all!^{108}

The solidarity of the working men should be extended to foreign countries, for 'labour all over the civilised world' had 'the same interest, the same desire, and the same enemies'. Although the use of the words, 'the civilised world', might have had something to do with Gaston's somewhat Euro-centrist feeling, further examination of this point is to be refrained here. '... only by the amalgamation of trades and those who work in them will their aims and desires be recognised, and their enemies frightened and made powerless.' Gaston was aware that such an international solidarity was, at least partially, emerging.
The more the interests of the working men were identified all over the world, claimed Gaston, the less the fear of war would be.  

However, Gaston seems to have been more interested in promoting the solidarity among the British working men in various trades. Trade unions should not be only for privileged working men. All kinds of working men ought to be organised into their own unions, which would co-operate with each other. ‘There should be no aristocracy of labour - one section having the power to look down upon another - but more equality, so that all those who worked would be sure of fair treatment.’

The idea of trade unionism was fairly influential among the clubmen, many of whom were trade unionists themselves. Gaston argued that trade unionism was ‘a mighty factor in the advancement of the workers towards a more comfortable and happier way of living.’ The trade union movement and the club movement should advance hand in hand. As a matter of fact, the clubmen did much to assist trade unionism, especially during industrial actions. Quite a few clubs collected contributions for those unions in industrial actions and offered their clubhouses for them to assemble. The clubs could function as powerful and reliable allies of trade unions. ‘We are certain it would strengthen ... trade unions to have clubs where their members could meet both for business and pleasure.’ In January 1891 Gaston wrote of the case of Scottish railway workers’ strike.

The Scotch railway difficulty is a case of point, where the principal actors have really no personal claim upon clubmen, but donations are asked for, and but rarely unheeded. There never was a time in history when so much money was contributed to help men fighting for a principle. Personally, our clubmen have nothing to do with the railway strike, and do not know, and never will know, the men engaged, but the cause is one of justice and humanity and right against wrong, so the pence of our hard workers is forthcoming.

Although it is not very clear if many clubmen of the ‘new era’ actually took part in such activities to assist trade unionism, Gaston hoped that these activities would change the nature of club life, which was dominated by ‘light social amusements’. ‘That amusement plays the leading part in the lives of most workers is well known to many of their friends, who would like them to take a little more interest in questions that deeply affect them. But the present crisis [the lock-out of engineers] must make men serious and reflect upon the doings of their employers. ... Is not this a time for serious thought, when the much-prized
liberties of workmen are in danger and likely to be destroyed. In other words, it was expected that trade unionism would have educational influence upon the clubmen.

However, some trade union leaders criticised the clubs, on the basis of the clubmen's drinking habit, 'a curse to working men'. 'Drinking in club life' is a point to be examined later. Gaston refuted such criticism. '... if they believe the moderate indulgence in drink is wrong, then they shut themselves away from the sympathies of thousands of honest, hard-working men, who would support them if their tastes were acknowledged. Some of these leaders may be clever in many things, yet ignorant of human nature.' Those working men who drank a pint or two after the day's hard toil should not be blamed. Trade unionism would not be able to organise many working men on a 'puritan' teetotal principle. Gaston's argument could be said to be based on realistic understanding of the daily lives of the working men.

His realism can be found in his writings on other aspects of trade unionism. 'Men must not trust in the justice of their cause to gain them a victory': this was the starting-point of his arguments. However right or just their demands might have been, some industrial actions had to meet with defeat. Therefore, such actions as strikes should be avoided before the working men were really ready and had 'sufficient ammunition to last them through'. Since many of these actions were supported by much hard-earned money 'given by men who could barely afford it', trade unions should try their best not to waste such sacrifice by taking ill-advised struggles. Reckless and consequently disastrous actions did much harm to those clubmen who assisted trade unionism. Gaston urged that 'the workers should be practical'. What would make industrial actions successful was not 'the justice of their cause' but 'money', which would be impossible to obtain without strong organisation. 'One or two men if they could hold out for some months would not be able to settle affairs with employers; it is only combination and the force of numbers can decide which side shall win the day.'

However, Gaston expected more from co-operation rather than from trade unionism. He was quite conclusive in declaring his devotion to co-operation. 'We have devoted a great deal of thought to the condition of the workers, and we have come to the conclusion that their salvation lies in co-operation, "each for all, and all for each."' The co-operators, who did not 'waste their leisure demonstrating against employers and against capital', were regarded as really practical. They devised means to improve their worldly position 'by becoming employers themselves, and possessing capital'. In comparison with the co-operators, the trade unionists were described as rather childish. '... it is easier to shout and
applaud a lot of clap-trap than to practice a certain amount of self-denial, and that is why we have so many noisy meetings and so little business. ... all their denunciation of employers will not loosen one of the chains they say they are bound with.14) Moreover, Gaston claimed that the idea of co-operation and that of the clubs were essentially identical. It was very natural for the clubmen to take interest in co-operation.

That co-operation is a grand idea is seen in our clubs, where a few workmen getting together in time build up a club themselves, and in a few years are worth many hundreds and sometimes thousands of pounds. The members say in effect “we want no one to provide us with refreshments and amusements while we can do the work ourselves, and so we take the profits that would go to others.” Co-operation at Woolwich or elsewhere is merely the club idea on a larger scale. Clubs supply one or two wants - co-operative stores supply the whole of them. In clubs, no individual gets any pecuniary benefit - in the co-operative movement every customer feels that some profit accrues from his purchases.15)

The increasingly friendly relations between the club movement and the co-operative movement emerged since the late 1880s, owing much to Dent, who attended fifty Annual Co-operative Congresses, and Woolwich was a popular destination for the excursions organised by the London clubs. However, not so many clubmen actually committed themselves to the co-operative movement and especially London remained a graveyard of co-operation. And there were some clubmen who were strongly critical of co-operation. In his letter published in the Club Life of 1 September 1900, W.J.Robins, the Borough of Marylebone Club, emphatically concluded that co-operation would never solve the labour question. 'For what is the labour question? It is the question how to secure to the labourer the full result of his labour. That and nothing more. ... there are four principal methods whereby the workers are robbed of their reward. There are: - Rent, profit, interest, and taxation. ... of the four forms of robbery against labour which I have enumerated, the Co-operatives have not destroyed one iota.' It is likely that Robins was a person of socialist inclination. His bitter attack on co-operation was no less bitterly counter-attacked by Gaston. He considered Robins' argument to be absolutely dogmatic. Such persons as Robins never took the slightest trouble to understand the realities of the working men's daily life. They only attacked those fellow working men who earnestly tried to solve the problems 'in a practical fashion'. 'We would seriously suggest that Mr.Robins and those who think as he
does should take the trouble to pay a visit to Woolwich and have a talk with some of the many Radical clubmen there who are also Co-operators, and who know from practical experience that Co-operation is doing much more than he dreams of to remedy some of the evils about which he is so indignant'. Gaston's practical and realistic attitude is simply obvious.

His writings on socialism were also based on realism. He was not very sympathetic with socialism except for that of William Morris. What particularly made him uneasy was its being wild and visionary. 'It appears to us that the Socialists have themselves a great deal to learn before they set out to teach others.' Above all, they should know that men were not perfect. The socialists were portrayed, again, as being unrealistic and childish. Although quite a few socialists, particularly some Fabians, were among the most active of the club lecturers and the Fabian policy of 'permeation' was widely carried out at the clubs, not many clubmen committed to socialism eagerly. Even more controversial than socialism was secularism. Although not a secularist himself, Gaston, a decisively anti-authoritarian man, was quite critical of the church, as his criticism of religious education might indicate. He was aware that the church was losing its hold on the people. It was because the church, which put heaven before earth, would not take up 'practical questions of the day'. The church was considered not practical enough to lead the people in the real world. Therefore, realistic and practical men would not look to the church. '... as a rule, the less knowledge a man possesses the more religious he is likely to become'.

In 1885 Gaston published a poem, 'Lord Randolph's Sauce,' the main subject of which was Randolph Churchill's speech: 'The followers of Bradlaugh are composed of the dregs and scum of the population.' The poem, which caused rather wide repercussions, also reveals much of Gastons class-consciousness.

A Lord renowned for brass and cheek,
One of the stars of "light and leading,"
Has uttered words the other week
That hardly shows [sic] his birth and breeding.
The working class have raised his bite
Because no church they care to enter,
And liking not the parson's style,
Choose Bradlaugh for their guide and mentor.

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Now whether they are right or wrong,
I do not care a farthing candle;
But “dregs,” and “scum,” are words too strong,
And weapons paupers should not handle.
For workmen’s hearts beat just as true
With generous love towards each other,
As those who in their church’s pew
Regard with scorn their poorer brother.
Of wealth they do not boast a sum,
They do not meet beneath a steeple;
Yet why should they be called the “scum,”
The “dregs,” the “mob,” the “common people”?
For ‘tis the dregs his income pays,
From workmen comes the food that fills him,
And when he shines with dazzling rays,
It is the toiler’s gold that gilds him.
Contempt he showers upon the poor,
And so it seems a trifle funny,
That Randolph, like some thousands more,
Condemn the “scum” but takes their money!
The “dregs” have fought on many a field,
Have helped to write our English story;
The “scum” are men who never yield,
But shed their blood for England’s glory!
Well, let him sneer, the time may come
When Randolph, now so great and clever,
Will find the “dregs,” the “mob,” the “scum,”
Will not keep saucy Lords for ever!119.

Since it was a fundamental principle of the club movement that theological subjects were to be avoided, the clubs did not take any particular opinions on religion. Nevertheless, they were, in general, not hostile to secularism. Some of the leaders of the CIU, most notably Dent, were strongly free-thinking. In fact, Charles Bradlaugh was elected by a small majority as one of vice-presidents of the CIU in August 1885, though, having been
vigorously opposed to by such leaders as Pratt and Minet, who believed that the his election would not benefit the movement, he finally declined to take up the office. This episode soon led to the abolition of the whole of vice-presidents excepting one. Gaston once suggested that there were quite a few secularists among the clubmen. ‘We have been told that hundreds who never say a word in public on Atheism yet are disciples of the Hall of Science.’ And, above all, Bradlaugh was quite active in assisting the clubs and often appeared at them. On the death of Bradlaugh, Gaston claimed that he had done much to ‘raise the status of the people’. His rhetoric in praising Bradlaugh sounds rather peculiar. ‘... it does not matter what a man calls himself if he shows in his life the Christian virtues. Deeds and acts of a man who has just gone there was everything that a Christian might be proud of.’ Gaston insisted that men should be estimated not in terms of what they were called, but in terms of what they did.

In some people’s idea every man should be badged and labelled as belonging to some organisation of a religious character, and only those with the badge and label being considered genuine. What matters what a man professes, if his life is devoted to raising his fellows and making smooth the road of life upon which all are travelling? Is the man an honest, true, and loyal worker? should be asked; if he is, then what matters whether he believes in the “true Church” or Mumbo Jumbo.120

This was his practical way of thinking.

IX

Another topic which was frequently discussed by Gaston was that of the sale of alcoholic drinks at the clubs. Although the clubs were expected to be teetotal in the initial years following the establishment of the CIU, the transition from ‘dry’ to ‘wet’ took place at many of them in the 1870s at the latest. The temperance movement, which had been one of the most important sources of support for the club movement in the ‘dry’ days, became hostile to these drink-selling clubs. Besides the temperance movement, the licensed trade was another, even more formidable, foe of those clubs at which the members enjoyed refreshment often at cheaper rates. The clubs were often threatened by the plans of legislation to regulate their sale of refreshment. Gaston was opposed to these attempts at controlling club life. The rhetoric of ‘free-born Englishmen’ was put forwards.
There are some silly people, we know, who think the clubs would be improved by legislation, and would welcome some law to deal with them. We say, if clubmen cannot manage their own affairs, and make their own laws to govern the clubs so that they shall be kept going in a respectable, orderly way, then they do not deserve the name of sensible men. If they require a number of officers to control them, to come prying about into club affairs, to make the hours when they shall leave, or when they shall drink, then they are nothing else but slaves, and unable to appreciate the liberty which is the right of every Englishman.121)

Those who demanded legislative control argued that the clubs, which were not subject to the licensing laws or to police entry without a warrant and could choose their own opening hours, were nothing but 'drinking dens' or 'illegal pubs', where the members could have as much cheap alcoholic drinks as they liked anytime, even during midnight or on the Sabbath. Their basic demand was to put the clubs on the same footing with the pubs. In particular, the licensed trade was keen on redress 'unfair competition' with the clubs. Gaston was not moved by the deploiring licensed trade. '... with all their [publicans'] heartrending tales of empty tills and ditto bars, I cannot find a tear to shed for their distress, for they do not deserve any sympathy from us.'122)

Gaston contended that attacks on the clubs as 'drinking dens' were based on ignorance. They were nothing but 'imaginative reports' of what was supposed to be going on in the clubs. Therefore, almost all the arguments denouncing 'drunken clubmen' had nothing to do with the realities of club life. In addition, Gaston regarded the panacea advocated by the teetotallers and temperance reformers for social evils as too simplistic.

The stupidity of the temperance party is shown in believing that water drinkers must necessarily be angels while those who prefer beer or spirits are the reverse. It is these one-idea men who are so bigoted and can see no good in anyone who does not possess the same set of opinions. ... To believe that everything in the world will be set right the moment that people take to drinking water is to confess ignorance of history and general knowledge.123)

Those one-idea men who would not esteem different opinions from theirs were not 'citizens', properly so called. The spirit of club life, in which independent 'citizens' associated with each other, was alien from such an intruding attitude of the one-idea men.
As Gaston himself admitted that club life could not claim to be perfect, there were certainly some notorious clubs, on which denunciation could rather easily be made. Particularly, the so-called 'bogus clubs' were very convenient targets for the licensed trade and the temperance reformers. In clubdom those discourses which would distinguish the 'bogus clubs' from the 'bona-fide clubs' were widely pronounced. The word 'bogus' was generally given to those clubs whose sole purpose was the sale of refreshment. They were often called the 'public house clubs', for many of them were nothing but unlicensed pubs, which attempted to carry on their business under the disguise of being clubs. They seldom organised any other activities. Early in 1870s Henry Mayhew was employed by the Licensed Victuallers Protection Society to investigate the activities of such 'bogus clubs.' In his Report some notorious clubs were described. Gaston himself also pointed out an example.

A man named Charles Cox is manager of the Café Royal Club, and was summoned [by the magistrates] for selling intoxicating liquors without a license. He had, it appears, been the holder of a refreshment license, but, giving it up for "certain reasons", he turned the premises into a so-called club. Anyone might become a member by paying 1s. per year, but the directors and shareholders were nominally the proprietors, and the defendant acknowledged that no accounts were submitted to the club meetings, and the balance-sheet was only sent to the shareholders.¹²⁴

Thus Gaston was well aware of such 'bogus clubs' in existence. Nothing prevented him from admitting that they were illegal institutions. However, the existence of the 'bogus clubs' should not be used as an excuse for introducing legislation to restrict the activities of the 'bona-fide clubs'. Since 'sufficient power existed to put down shady clubs if the police were so minded', no new legislation was really necessary. Gaston blamed 'the masterly inactivity displayed by the police towards bogus clubs'. The police was supposed not to control the 'bogus clubs' intentionally.

The gambling and drinking dens of Soho and Tottenham Court Road have raised the indignation of many worthy persons in that part of London, and loud calls are made to the Government for legislation on the subject. Club must be registered, they say, and their control given into the hands of the police, to see that the rules made are carried out. That increased vigilance should be shown to places which are clubs merely in

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name we cordially agree with, but to curtail the liberties enjoyed by bona fide clubs because of the doings of spurious ones we unhesitatingly condemn.

Gaston claimed that the 'bona-fide clubs' were respectable enough to be free from any restrictive legislation. They were completely different from the 'bogus clubs'. Such a sharp distinction between the 'bona-fide' and the 'bogus' and an advocacy of putting down of the latter were quite common among many other club activists.125)

The Bill for Registration and Regulation of Clubs of 1888 and the Clubs' Registration Bill of 1893 failed, owing much to the strong opposition from the CIU and the clubs. Another attempt was started in May 1896, when the Royal Commission to inquire into the Liquor Licensing Laws began to hear evidence. The CIU representatives were expected to give evidence to the Commission on behalf of the 'bona-fide clubs'. 'Mr.B.T.Hall points out that the Commission must not be allowed to issue its report until an opportunity is given for the Club Union to send one or two representatives to state the case for the clubs, and to contradict any untruthful evidence that may have been given.' As a matter of fact, on 9 February 1897 Hall was allowed to give very influential, somewhat decisive, evidence. The Commission eventually issued two reports, a Majority Report and a Minority Report, both of which agreed that some form of registration would be beneficial to the club movement. As Hall confidently concluded that 'practically all the recommendations of the Union' were adopted, the commission's proposal of registration was acceptable enough for the clubs. Having been given the consent of the CIU, the Bill to Amend the Licensing Law and to Provide for the Registration of Clubs was passed in 1902. Without any clause which was likely to seriously diminish the current privileges of the clubs, the 1902 Act proved not to be harmful to the 'bona-fide clubs'.126)

Although he himself did drink, Gaston did not have any objection to the principle of temperance. What he did not agree was temperance reformers' way of implementing the principle. 'No one has a word to say against the wish to put down excessive drinking, and the evils attending over-consumption of intoxicating liquors. Every citizen would be glad to see a sober England, but those who know the most about the “liquor traffic” are convinced that sobriety will not come about by the shutting up a few public-houses. Such an idea could only be born in the watery brain of a teetotaller who sees the effect of drink but is blind to the cause of excessive consumption.' Since such forcible ways could not solve 'the cause of excessive consumption', they would, after all, not be very effective. Gaston claimed that the supply of counter-attractions would be able to do much more. 'If
temperance is to reign among the people, it will be by opening plenty of playgrounds and
parks, rather than by closing a few public-houses here and there. ... Give the people plenty
of innocent amusements, and drink will offer very little inducement to stay in town.' This
was quite a common argument among the leaders of the club movement, such as Henry
Solly, in its early days. Although this kind of argument was much less influential in the
1890s, Gaston was still optimistic about the effectiveness of the strategy of counter-
attractions.127)

Needless to say, the clubs were considered to be one of these counter-attractions.

We remember the time when there were no clubs, when men spent their time in
public-house free-and-easies, when there were no music-halls, gymnasiums, or technical
institutes, free libraries, or other places in which to spend leisure time; there was only
the public-house, and skittles as the only game thought fit for working men to play at,
when there was every temptation to go wrong after the day’s work was done. Perhaps
our temperance friends would like to see clubs abolished, and men driven back to the
public-house, where at one time they spent time and found their recreation in front of
a dirty bar. Clubs are part of the improvements seen in the present age, which is one
of progress, and are evidences of the better tastes of the people, and are as necessary
for many of our workers as are technical institutes and free libraries to others.

At the clubs, Gaston argued, the working men would not drink as much as they would at
the pubs. Far from being ‘drinking dens’, the clubs did much to make the working men
temperate. ‘Teetotallers should recognise the fact that clubs were established not for the
purpose of distributing drink among the members, but to give them the maximum of
amusement and recreation, with the minimum of drink.”128) In order to promote the
principle of temperance, the clubs should be under no restrictive control. And Gaston was
aware that such a function of the clubs was increasingly recognised. In other words, the
clubs came to be regarded as respectable institutions.

... we think that clubs may claim to have the hallmark of respectability stamped upon
them since our ... enemies have become silent. Even the publicans have had little or
nothing to say on the great club question, so the prospects of restrictive legislation
appear very remote. Perhaps the social purity monger, the teetotalers, and faddists
generally have become educated, and, with acquired knowledge, have dropped many of
their prejudices and dislikes. They may have read of the charitable work of clubs, of
the tendency toward refinement in amusements, of attempts made to import education
into uninformed minds, and the desire of the members to act as honest citizens proud
of their country. There is good in everything, and the water drinkers and other
extremists may have at last discovered that there is good even in working men's
clubs.\textsuperscript{129}

In discussing drinking, Gaston emphasised the respectability of club life. His emphasis of
respectability did not necessarily mean that Gaston committed himself to the middle-class
values. Proudly class-conscious working men could be respectable. The principle of
temperance, for example, was not advocated only by middle-class reformers. There were
always quite a few working men who stressed the necessity of temperance and gave their
own meanings to it. Since the ability of self-control was essential for independent club life,
much importance was attached to temperance in the 'education for citizenship'. However,
it is also true that Gaston sometimes spoke in a tone, which was quite similar to that of
middle-class reformers. In contrasting drinking at the clubs and that at the pubs, he
actually accepted the statement that the working men drank a lot at the latter, which was
not necessarily precise. His arguments on the 'bogus clubs' also sound pretty exclusionist.
At least to some extent, Gaston was doubtless under the influence of middle-class
reformism.\textsuperscript{130}

X

This essay has been attempting at looking into several aspects of club life by examining
the activities and writings of Gaston. Although there are some other aspects to be
investigated, it would be better to stop here to consider the final question: what kind of
man was Richard Gaston? In previous parts, some remarks on his characteristics have
already been referred to. In writing of his 'homely personality' and 'cheery and joyous'
nature, Hall portrayed Gaston as a witty, vigorous, and anti-authoritarian man. On his
death, such words as genial, frank, kind, fair, and beaming were given to him. He was
described by the witnesses at the 'Judge and Jury' at the Victory Club as a man who was
fond of jokes and beer, but strictly sincere. Moreover, previous parts seem to have made
it fairly clear that Gaston was a pretty gifted public-speaker, amusing performer, and,
above all, energetic club activist. Rather more a clubman himself than an idealistic leader

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of the club movement, Gaston appears to have intended to be realistic and practical in dealing with matters. Even more notable was his easy-going and amiable character, which did much to make him an enjoyable person to be with. He was certainly a popular clubman.

The description of Gaston in an article in the *Journal* of 31 December 1892 was as follows. 'The Editor is a modest and a bashful, and it has often surprised his friends of years ago that he was not found in a Methodist pulpit, rather than in the chair of a workmen's club. But who can control his fate? No one, so we have adapted ourselves to circumstances and the erstwhile shy man throw off his reserve, steps on the platform, and tries to make people laugh.' Apparently much importance does not have to be attached to such words as 'modest', 'bashful' or 'shy'. At that time Gaston was fairly known to many clubmen, who probably understood that he was not so. It would be truer to suppose that these words were used to make this portrayal of Gaston a sort of joke. Whether or not he was born shy, Gaston, as a clubman, was a crowd pleaser. The article proceeded: '... there are many readers and reporters who have that most uncommon quality - common sense - who believe we do our best for everyone, who know the Editor's chair is not the most comfortable piece of furniture to sit in, have sent us their good wishes and flattering remarks about what we attempt to do. At this season of the year it would be churlish on our part if we did not acknowledge them and thank the senders for their consideration.'

It seems that Gaston had a strong desire to be appreciated and loved. His activities were never carried out for his complacence. He wanted to be rewarded; in other words, he desired other clubmen's appreciation and love. And, fortunately for him, he was fairly successful in obtaining his rewards.

In the sketch of his early experience in Wales, Gaston several times referred to himself as a rather proud person. During his days as a clubman, his pride was based, above all, upon the sense of independence. It was far from easy for the working men to keep themselves independent. Their independence, in many cases, had to be secured collectively. Gaston considered the clubs to be the most powerful institution, with which he could enjoy the sense of independence. In other words, independent club life was essential to his own independence. What was at the bottom of his devout commitment to the cause of the club seems to have been his pursuit of independence.

It was not the case that Gaston was loved by everybody. As mentioned above, there were some clubmen who found his writings disgusting. In a controversy over the desirability of compulsory programmes for entertainment events, Gaston sided with the Mildmay Radical Club which supported the compulsory programmes against the Borough of Hackney Club.
L. Goldsworthy, member of the Borough of Hackney Club, criticised Gaston. 'I am surprised to see the Editor of this paper, Mr. Gaston, taking one-sided view of this matter ... what a bright example for Mr. Gaston, one of the first to stand against compulsory programmes when connected with the Boro' of Hackney, but now he doesn't stand for the right but for the majority, whether they be right or wrong.' Gaston did not write anything to deny Goldsworthy's statement. Therefore, it is not very unlikely that he, intending to be realistic and practical, was actually flexible enough to change his opinions.  

Gaston might be called an epicurean in essence. He would find pleasures in his life and enjoy them. Knowing that some difficulties were always there, Gaston, naturally of a happy frame of mind, would try to have as much fun as possible in his given surroundings. It may be relevant to cite his poem at the end of this essay.

What care I for the weather,
For rain, or snow, or hail,
When friends can meet together,
And genial thoughts prevail!

Some minds are tinged with sadness
When clouds obscure the skies;
For them there is no gladness,
No sunshine in bright eyes.

But when the way is dreary
To traveller bound to roam,
The path need not be dreary,
Made bright by thoughts of home.

Then, let us take the weather
Like life - as good for man -
The bright and dull together;
For that is Nature's plan.
NOTES

(1) Club Life, 29 Nov. 1901.


(3) Club Life, 27 April 1901.

(4) Club Life, 9 Nov. 1901.

(5) Ibid.; Radical Leader, 10 Nov. 1888.


(7) Club Life, 16 June 1900, 2,23 Nov. 1901.


(9) Club World, 26 Feb. 1898.

(10) Club and Institute Journal, 17 Sept. 1892.

(11) Club World, 28 July 1894; Club Life, 2 Nov. 1901.


(13) Club World, 28 July 1894; Club Life, 2 Nov. 1901; Radical Leader, 11 Aug. 1888.


(21) Club and Institute Journal, 26 May, 2,16 June 1894.

(22) Club and Institute Journal, 18 April 1891, 16,30 June 1894; Club World, 28 July 1894.


(24) Club World, 7 May 1898; Ashplant, op. cit., p. 103.


(32) Club and Institute Journal, 10 Jan., 19,26 Dec. 1891, 30 July 1892; Club Life, 9 Nov. 1901; Marlow, op. cit., p. 611.

(33) Club and Institute Journal, 6 Sept. 1890.


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(37) *Club World*, 24 April 1897; *Club Life*, 2 Nov. 1901.

(38) *Club and Institute Journal*, 7 May 1892.


(40) *Club and Institute Journal*, 19 Nov. 1892.


(42) *Club and Institute Journal*, 13 Aug. 1892.

(43) *Club and Institute Journal*, 23 April, 27 Aug. 1892.


(45) *Club and Institute Journal*, 8 April 1893.


(47) *Club and Institute Journal*, 21 Nov. 1891.

(48) *Club and Institute Journal*, 16 Dec. 1883, 15 Feb., 11 April, 9 May, 26 Sept. 1884. The fifth type was under a different title, 'Types of Working Men.'

(49) *Club and Institute Journal*, 13 Nov. 1885; Rogers, *op.cit.*, p. 98.


(51) *Club and Institute Journal*, 23 May 1884.


(53) *Club and Institute Journal*, 29 Aug. 1891.

(54) *Club World*, 13 June 1896.

(55) *Club Life*, 9 March 1901.


(59) *Club and Institute Journal*, 22 July 1893; Hall, *Our Sixty Years*, pp. 289–91; Marlow,


(64) Club and Institute Journal, 31 Jan. 1891; Club Life, 10 Feb. 1900.


(66) Club and Institute Journal, 7 Jan. 1893; Club Life, 10 Feb. 1900.


(68) Club and Institute Journal, 21 May 1892; Club Life, 29 June 1901; Radical Leader, 25 Aug. 1888; Ashplant, 'London Working Men's Clubs,' p. 252; Peppin, op. cit., p. 43.

(69) Club and Institute Journal, 17 June 1893; Club Life, 6 July 1901.


(71) Club and Institute Journal, 26 Sept. 1891, 20 Aug. 1892; Club Life, 8 June 1901.

(72) Club World, 18 May 1895.


(74) Club World, 27 Nov. 1897; Ashplant, 'London Working Men's Clubs,' pp. 245-6, p. 259.


(78) Club World, 12 Oct. 1895; Club Life, 7 Sept. 1901.


(81) Club and Institute Journal, 6 Jan. 1894; Club World, 26 Jan. 1895.

(82) Club and Institute Journal, 21 Nov. 1891; Club World, 27 Nov. 1897.

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(84) Club Life, 24 March, 21 April 1900.

(85) Club and Institute Journal, 13 Aug. 1892; Club World, 20 Nov. 1897; Club Life, 1 Dec. 1900, 11 May 1901.

(86) Club and Institute Journal, 13 Aug. 1892; Club World, 20 Nov. 1897; Club Life, 11 May, 8 June 1901.


(89) Club Life, 26 May, 7 July, 4 Aug., 29 Dec. 1900; Radical Leader, 4 Aug. 1888.

(90) Club Life, 23 June, 28 July 1900.

(91) Club Life, 21,28 July 1900.

(92) Ibid.

(93) Club Life, 21 July 1900.


(95) It should be remarked that there were other national bodies of working men's clubs than the CIU, such as the Association of Conservative Clubs and the National Union of Liberal Clubs. Unlike the clubs affiliated to the CIU, the members of these bodies were involved in their respective party machineries. In the case of the Association of Conservative Clubs, for example, each member was expected to sign a declaration on joining a club affiliated to the Association to the effect that he was a believer in conservative principles and supporter of the Conservative Party. Conservative Clubs Gazette, Jan., July, Sept. 1899; Club News, 4, 11 March 1911; Association of Conservative Clubs, List of Affiliated and Inter-affiliated Clubs, London, 1898, p. 2; Do., Specimen Rules and Bye-Laws for a Conservative Club, London, 1895, pp. 3-4; National Union of Liberal Clubs, Official List of Liberal Clubs, Leeds, [1908], p. 3; Violet Sparrow, The History of the Bishop's Stortford Working Men's Club, n.p., 1987, p. 10; Working Men's Club and Institute Union, A Brief Handbook, p. 14.

(96) Club World, 10 April 1897; Club Life, 22,29 Sept., 6 Oct. 1900; Davis, op.cit., pp. 115-7; Taylor, op.cit., pp. 53-6.

(97) Club Life, 8 Sept. 1900, 16 March, 9 Nov. 1901.

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(99)  Club World, 23 May 1896; Club Life, 15 Sept. 1900.


(102)  Club World, 10 Feb. 1894; Club Life, 7 April 1900.

(103)  Club World, 10 Feb., 14 July 1894.

(104)  Club and Institute Journal, 10 Feb. 1894; Club Life, 3,31 March, 7 April, 2 June, 7 July 1900, 16 March 1901.

(105)  Club Life, 9 June, 7 July 1900.


(110)  Club and Institute Journal, 8 Oct. 1892.


(113)  Club and Institute Journal, 10 Jan. 1891, 2 June 1894; Club World, 7 May 1898.

(114)  Club World, 7 May 1898.


(116)  Club Life, 1 Sept. 1900; Marlow, op.cit., pp. 318-20.


(118)  Club World, 24 Nov. 1894.


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(125) Club and Institute Journal, 2 July 1892; Club World, 11 April 1896, 20 Feb. 1897.


(127) Club World, 13,20 April 1895.


(133) Club and Institute Journal, 13 Nov. 1885.

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