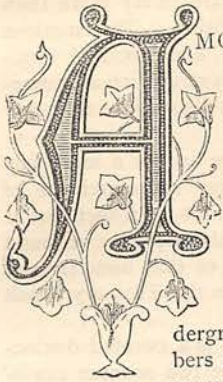


THE OXFORD UNION SOCIETY.



AMONGST the many points of interest connected with Oxford and its University, the Union Society may justly claim a place. Fiction has something to say of it. Was it not there that Pendenis harangued appreciative audiences? But surely the Union has some substantial claim to notice.

Amongst those who, whilst undergraduates, were prominent members and officers of the society, are many statesmen of to-day, including the ex-Premier, whose portrait adorns the debating-hall, Mr. Cross, Sir Stafford Northcote, Viscount Cardwell, Mr. Robert Lowe, the late Mr. Ward Hunt, Mr. Goschen, and others, not to mention many a name famous in other walks of life. Some interest must centre in the society which first heard the rhetoric of those who as statesmen, prelates, and in other capacities, subsequently came prominently before the world.

Early in the present century there was founded at Oxford the United Debating Society. This, however, did not long exist. After some few years it was dissolved, in order to be purged of some turbulent members, and re-constituted as the Oxford Union Society. Under this title it has continued with ever-increasing prosperity until the present day, when its position may be judged of by the fact that its income is now about £3,600 per annum. At one time the meetings of the society for debate were held in a room at the back of a picture-dealer's shop in High Street. Now, however, the Union boasts commodious though in some respects inconvenient premises, and offers to its members many of the advantages of a club. Indeed to many the debates are no doubt of secondary consideration, in comparison with the other facilities offered by the society.

The visitor to the Union turns down a narrow passage out of Corn-Market Street, and soon finds on his left hand a house which has the appearance of having been added to and altered until the original building is insignificant compared with the additions thereto. To these premises the society moved just twenty-six years ago. The additions still continue, a new debating-hall being in course of erection. On entering, the visitor finds himself in a small hall, wherein telegrams, notices, &c., are displayed. From this, one door conducts to a room devoted to the weekly papers. Here, in addition to such publications as appeal to all readers, are found journals of all classes and shades of opinion. Communicating with this, but separate from the main building, is the present hall for debates, a handsome room capable of accommodating a considerable audience. Around it runs a narrow gallery for the

convenience of strangers. Except during meetings of the society this hall is used as a reading-room, and scattered up and down the comfortable benches, or grouped around the central stove, graduates and undergraduates may be seen deep in their newspapers. From the entrance-hall, other doors open into the spacious writing-room, a lavatory, and an office over which the steward presides, wherein the business of the society is carried on. Ascending a flight of stairs, a room devoted to the magazines and some works of standard English authors first calls for attention; then the handsome library with its tempting rows of volumes, and seductive arm-chairs. A large number of books are also kept in the ante-room connected with the strangers' gallery, and in the gallery itself. Every part of this gallery, except that immediately over the president's chair, commands an excellent view of the proceedings of "the house." It is invariably well filled during debates, a large proportion of the visitors being ladies. The coffee and smoking-rooms are scarcely on a par with the other portions of the society's premises, and are separate from the main building.

The debates are held on Thursday evenings during term, business usually commencing punctually at half-past seven. If the subject for discussion is of an interesting or party character, the room will be crowded by that time. Upon the dais, whereon the president's chair is placed, members who intend addressing the house usually collect, and all await amid gossip the arrival of the president.

Presently loud cries of "Order" are heard from the doorway, and all hats are removed as the expected one enters, attired in evening dress, and accompanied by the treasurer and secretary. The president having taken the chair, and the secretary having composed himself before a volume bearing a marked resemblance to a ledger, the proceedings commence. New members are first announced; then the librarian reads a list of books he proposes to add to the society's library during the ensuing week. Then the president asks "whether any honourable member wishes to ask a question of any officer of the society relative to his official duties." Upon this lively scenes frequently ensue. Many questions are always asked, some hinting at a breach of duty or negligence on the part of an officer. It always appears that the questioners have first in view the discomfiture of the officers, whilst the latter in replying seem to concentrate their energies on "scoring off" their interrogators.

The proceedings are occasionally diversified by a whirlwind of cries of "Order," caused by some member having entered the house without removing his hat. Occasionally too some one rises to address the house in inaudible tones. Remonstrances of no gentle nature are immediately addressed to him, and loud cries of "Speak up, sir," usually add to the speaker's confusion without rendering his remarks more audible. It will be

observed that in most particulars the proceedings are modelled on those of the House of Commons. The phrases common at Westminster are used in the mimic house, but not always with equal success. An inexperienced member, who addressed a question to the chairman on some point of order, spoke of another honourable member as having been "in possession of the president's eye!"

When all the members with questions have had their curiosity satisfied, the house "proceeds to public business." The president reads the subject for debate and calls upon the mover. The latter advances to the secretary's table, and having taken a little water with gravity worthy of "another place," proceeds with his oration.

As is the case at all debating societies, the speakers are few in number compared with the whole body of members: nor is this surprising if we consider the critical character of the assembly. The views and sympathies of the chief speakers are well known, and upon any of the burning questions of the day they are

sure of enthusiastic audiences. But as the evening passes the attendance gradually grows less, until even upon a political question there are rarely more than sixty or seventy left at a division. The motions brought forward are usually of a political or semi-political nature, and as all shades of opinion are represented amongst the members, the discussions are rarely wanting in spirit.

At first it is somewhat strange to see a mere boy holding forth amid the cheers and counter-cheers of an excited throng. It is strange, too, to reflect that at some future day this now youthful orator may be found addressing the House of Peers, or that nations may catch up the words he utters from the Treasury bench of the Lower House.

To be president of the Union is a coveted distinction. Not unfrequently there are two or more candidates. Then, after a vigorous canvass by partisans in each college, the ballot-box decides the question, and elevates the chosen one to the chair of this mimic Parliament.

A. R. BUCKLAND.

THE FANS OF THE PAST AND PRESENT.

"Three thousand years of fans."



FIG. I.

MORE than three thousand years ago, or about the time that King David reigned over Israel, the artists of ancient Egypt depicted the fan upon the walls of the tombs at Thebes, and the Pharaoh of the day sits on his chair of state surrounded by his

fan-bearers, each in his stated rank. The office must have been both honourable and onerous; for in time of war the fan-bearers, with their fans as standards, acted as generals and marshals; while in peace they ever waited on the king in the temple worship, waving their fans to cool the heated air and to protect the sacred offerings from the profanation of flies and other insects.

These insignia of their office were vividly coloured fans, on long, slender, twisted, and variegated handles. Their modern successors are to be seen in the Pope's official fan-bearers. There are two of these chamberlains, as they are called, and the fans they carry, but

do not use, are made of peacock's feathers, with long ivory handles. The modern Greek Church and its branches place a fan in the hands of the deacon, to be used in the same way, and for the same purpose, as practised by the early Egyptians—viz., to guard the sacred elements from desecration.

The use of the fan in the worship of ancient Greece was similar, but its forms were far more beautiful.

According to Virgil, they were sacred to Bacchus, and were carried in procession at the feast of that deity. They were called "flabellum" or "muscarium;" and in the Roman Church of to-day the same kind of fans are called, in Italian, "frambella."

In our chat about the ceremonial use of the fan, we must not forget the Scripture reference to it, for the purpose of winnowing the grain: a very primitive method of separating the chaff, but one which it took some thousands of years to supersede, for the present "fanning" machines were not invented till 1737.

The graceful figure given under Fig. I. is taken from a representation of an Asiatic slave holding a feather fan, and forming part of an elegant group, painted on a vase. The other figures represent three Greek ladies, upon whom she is attending. Amongst Roman ladies, too, the services of an attendant slave to carry and use the fan were needful; and the ornamentation bestowed upon these very essential appliances was rich and costly—dyed ostrich plumes and peacock feathers being used for their adornment; while the handles were of gold, set with precious stones, or else of ivory, beautifully carved.

Approaching more closely to modern days, we find the folding fan, said to have been first invented by the