

There is a place in New York most open yet most secret, apparently accessible to all, in reality more exclusive than the Imperial Yacht Club of Petrograd or the ~~Acopagus~~ ^{Acopagus} of the Illuminati. If I do not tell you where it is, it is from no fear of intrusion, but to spare you the pain and *ignominy* of election; for if you are worthy of it, you already know it. A singular and subtle distinction is the passport to admission. It is not enough to be "successful" in art or letters; indeed, it is ^{un}necessary; but it must be understood by those who understand things that you have done something, or at least that you too understand. It would be impossible to explain in forty years what is meant by "understanding", or by "things"!

Yet this secret shrine is situated within the Clock and Suit zone; the Elevated Railroad rattles eternally above it; it is a quite ordinary restaurant, and the sacred corner is in no way fenced from the curiosity or intrusion of the vulgar and ~~uninitiated~~ ^{uninitiated} world. Invisible are the archangels who compass it with flaming sword! Amid the clamour of a thousand inebriates it preserves inviolable silence, though the consecrated table is often voluble indeed! But such speech is of the gods - it transcends mortal speech; and silence is the only fitting *form* for it.

Let us look reverently at these mysterious persons who compose that symposium of *splimity*! First, if not foremost, is that spurred fighting-cock of letters, Irish to the stiff short backbone of him, ~~guzzled~~ ^{guzzled} as a Colonel of Light Infantry, always ready for a fight, the indomitable Cragg. He is fiercely discussing Sir Rabindranath Tagore with his vis-a-vis, the amiable Galantine, whose architectural genius is said to have sent the ghost of Giotto howling into Limbo, the *rearmost*.

of back numbers. By his side, assiduously clipping the war news from the evening journal, is Larrigan, the man of whom Rodin is said to have remarked, "He must increase, but I must decrease". The story is not true. Larigan is one of those pro-Germans who disguise themselves as angels of light. His super-subtle method is to make the cause of the Allies ridiculous by declaring that Bach and Beethoven knew no music, and that Goethe was no more than Alfred Austin. In addition, he takes himself seriously, and it is generally recognized that he is more ornamental than useful at the table. But facing him, a genial sneer upon his rosy Vandyke face, is Smartsett, the Principal Deity of the Temple. He has really arrived, beyond the shadow of error. He wears, with modesty and distinction, the insignia of a famous foreign order. He made his name as a painter; but if he had not done so, he would have been famous as a wit, for he is as ready as ever was Wilde, and as caustic, as Swift or Voltaire. No one ever saw the Universal Joke more plainly; no one ever possessed - or indulged - the Panis Spirit in a more eminent degree. (I will not explain the Universal Joke and the Panis Spirit - if I did it would show that I failed to see the one or use the other; but one day I may try them on the reader. In fact, I am doing it now!) No Smartsett, for all his success and pretigue, is an artist of the artists; a perfect devil, and the darling of the gods - and the girls! In a word, he is just such another as myself. Next him sits Van Huyt, whose uncle has just left him four millions. I had better not describe him; it is a ticklish business; but I always did like him; in fact, he's one of my oldest and best friends. He is chaffing with Baffin - a descendant of the Baffin who discovered Baffin's Bay - looking like an heraldic griffin, and very proud of it. I take this opportunity of

reminding him that he owes me a dinner. A damned good fellow, and the first painter in America. (I think he owes me two dinners, now). I have never seen his work. At the end of the table sits, or, rather, agitates himself, Giacur, like a Mexican jumping bean. He vitalizes the entire table by his mere presence. He is flirting assiduously with the only lady present. Nobody knows quite who she is, or what she does, but it must be something pretty wonderful, or her looks deceive us! She has that strange beauty which so many people mistake for great ugliness, and that exotic charm which attracts the artist and repels the tired business man. There are some others at the table, for instance the algebraic pair who are spoiling the tablecloth with demonstrations of the irrationality of the indices of pqr when sub-fact^{ori}~~ions~~ is the imaginary root of a quintic equation of the m th order, and the solitary lunatic who is sketching the above-mentioned aboriginal goddess; but all these are but transients. The genius of the table is the waiter, Duchesne, who never gets any blonder or fatter or less efficient as the centuries pass over his head.

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