

PARK ROW DEBATING SOCIETY DRAWS MANY FANATICS

Open Daily From 8 A. M. to 5:30 P. M., With War Bulletins for Texts and Franklin Presiding

At 8 o'clock every morning there begin to collect about the statue of Benjamin Franklin at the confluence of Park row and Nassau street the members of the Park Row Debating Society, formed for the interests of international justice, democracy and the age old desire of man to have himself heard. At 5:30 o'clock in the afternoon a single policeman disperses the society. It grumbles a little about restriction of freedom of speech, but it disperses. The Park Row Debating Society is peculiar among the deliberative assemblies and forums of the world. It has no rules; it never reaches a conclusion; it never takes a vote. Its leader of discussion is the newspaper bulletin board; its limitation on discussion is seven minutes understanding. It talks for the sake of talking and listens to talk for the sake of the conflict of arguments, races and personalities.

It assumes as an axiom that the United States is the greatest and happiest country in the world, is dominated by the consideration of the war, cheers subduedly at shows of anger, and is founded on the freedom of speech, confining its most violent differences to words, except when an insult is offered to the United States. It speaks with the accent of the north and exhibits the peculiarities of all the northern races of Europe. The Latin seems not to care for it.

"You are a German! Bah!" says the Englishman.

"Neffar mint where I was born; I am an American citizen and as an American citizen I have the privilege to speak out what I think," shouts the German in reply.

"Where were you born?" You're a foreigner," demands a flashily dressed clerk of a black haired Slav preaching socialism.

"It makes no difference where I was born," replies the Slav aggressively.

"This is a free country and I have a right of speech. As a matter of fact, I was born here."

"That's right!" the crowd nine times out of ten comments in approval.

The Englishman and the German may stand for an hour with their faces so close that there is barely room to shake their fists at each other, casting insults generically, racially and individually, until breathlessness, but no trouble results. But when some one touches the American flag the society is inclined to mob him.

Why the members argue is an interesting question. The reason is very evident in the case of the red faced lawyer in the Palm Beach suit and cheap Panama hat, who uses a cigar stub in emphasizing his remarks. He has been drinking.

"Now see," observes a bulky, placid German, as the lawyer, having concluded with triumphant inanity that his opponent, another German, should be shot at sunrise for treason, moves out of the circle. "Dot man has had a kiddle bit too much and is foolish."

Whereupon he himself is challenged as being an anti-prohibitionist, and the loyalty of the German American, a subject to which discussion has naturally gravitated for a time, is forgotten. It is an excellent hold. The German has pointed out with his own lips an example of the evil of alcohol. He spars confusedly for time. There are jeers. A debating society acquaintance indulges in some innuendoes about its being impossible to stand for what you believed was right when all your money was left to you by your father, who was a distiller.

"Whose vader was a distiller?" demands the German, angry at his belittling.

Personalities follow, and the German retires in the end, fling a last

centres about the German. They do not argue with equanimity. Numbers usually put them on the defensive. They are apt to be large of abdomen, splendid of beard. When they are called "boobs" they splutter. Finally, the attitude of the German American is the all absorbing question of the day.

"If you think so much of Germany, why don't you go back and fight?" cry their baiters continually and the Germans almost weep with rage in explaining that an one with sense could see that the British navy wouldn't let them.

"What did you ever come over here for, if you think Germany counts for more than this?" is another cry. Should American citizens embark on English ships? Of course not. Enter a logical mind and, with an air of getting fairly at the point of view of the speaker, says: "You have a perfect right to go up and jump off the Woolworth Building, but you don't do it. Now as I understand your argument that is the way with American citizens on English ships."

"Yes, dat is it," says the speaker.

"But you haven't any right to jump off the Woolworth Building," comes back the logical mind, springing his trap. "A policeman if he sees you will arrest you for attempted suicide. Therefore the two situations are not alike, and therefore—" And amid the plaudits of the crowd he talks the German off his feet and out of the circle.

In another circle they are covering exhaustively the question of whether international law can be considered as existent with only a moral sanction. Another German is upholding the negative with all the arguments in the battery. Those who know nudge one another and say "professional" in a whisper to those who don't. "Hired by Bernstein," they add. "Talks all the way from Columbus Circle down every day. Never a stroke of work."

A huge Irishman with blue eyes and a huge fist interrupts with the information, forcefully conveyed in a brogue, that he doesn't care about what they call international law, that he's an Irishman, that England had treated Ireland badly, but that the little Frenchmen and the "Rooshians" have helped America, that if they get

another man just because somebody tells him to and waves a flag—in other words, a fool.

The "professionals" already referred to are a mysterious class. There is a perfectly definite impression among the experienced of the crowds

opponent, this suspicion is generally considered in the Park Row Debating Society to be one which it is against etiquette to employ.

The "professionals" whoever they are, belong among the leaders of the twenty odd groups that form the big

society. They fairly start an argument in one group, watch it blaze with a fatherly satisfaction, and move on to the next. To the observer they appear to be deriving intense pleasure from

that every morning they report at the German consulate for orders and return in the evening for their pay, \$3.50 a day, though in the gamut of accusations against the sincerity of your

Here a socialist is expounding his

word over his shoulder. An Irishman announces from his circle of onlookers that he likes to listen to a good argument, but personalities make him tired, and if there is no one to take up the gauntlet the group dissolves among adjoining groups.

It is easy to see why the derelicts come. It is their vocation. They probably sleep in a lodging house on the Bowery and lunch on coffee and rolls for a cent in the park at noon. Their coat collars are usually shiny, their ties unkempt, their clothes spotted, their faces unshaven. They are true hoboes, sometimes, of individuality and confidence, who before the rough court are worthy foes for any one; more often they talk desperately like men with their backs to the wall.

Then there are the socialists, though fewer of course than in other gathering places uptown, black haired for the most part, loudly declaring war on the present civilized world. Then there are German reservists and other Germans seeking an opportunity to fight the English sentiment, backed by the sympathy of their own kind; and then there is the wandering population which is caught by the cluster and the statue in passing and slips slowly round the edge like twigs against a snag in the current.

It is plain that the chief interest



Park Row Debating Club as seen from the Sun Building.



Types in Park Row Debating Society.



Partisans stand for minutes glaring steadily.

COUNTRY TOWN OFFERS MUCH TO ANY BRIGHT YOUNG MAN

"I've always been a believer in young men getting out of the city, especially New York," said a Broad street business man. "And I particularly believe in those young men getting out: who are educated and who have been accustomed to some social recognition. With small salaries, small for New York at least, and not knowing the kind of people they have been accustomed to, they are mighty apt to drift the wrong way."

SUBWAY SCIENCE.

WITH admirable restraint she had listened to the man defending himself and those brothers that fill the seats of the evening expresses. These miscreants who, on the entrance of a woman, fasten their eyes to the newspaper as if it were the will of a bachelor uncle naming them as the favored heir.

"Well, then," she inquired plaintively, in meeting his gaze about the standing woman pouncing on each vacated seat as hers by preordained right, "what are we to do? As a subway traveller you know as well as I that a woman must carry a baby, have a near expiring look or be 65 or over to stir tender masculine sympathy to the sacrificial rite of standing in her stead. And yet, without coming under any of these heads, she may be tired enough to deserve a seat of her giving. So she has to get one with her wits through her eyes."

"No, really, not by 'sneaking,' but by making them see, making them read the signs. For instance, the Grand Central aura can be felt as well as seen. There is an air of ease and plenty about the man bound for Ardsley or Greenwich that cannot escape the discerning. He is most likely to be found seated near the middle door, scanning the market page of one of a sheaf of newspapers he carries. He is unmistakably labelled for exit at East Forty-second street."

"Spot the man or woman that reads between axioms, it comes around to catch the names of stations and you are in the way of finding a modicum of repose on your homeward journey."

"The passenger that sits with a kind of prim but wide-awake uprightness is working out a plan of early egress without self-mutilation."

"But the rider that settles down comfortably to his mental pabulum or confection, his sister or his soul companions is going through to the Van Cortlandt or Bronx Park. For the seat hunter he is worse than negligible; he's an immovable obstruction that doesn't brighten the seatless one's watchfulness with even an agreeable delusion."

"He listened to me and went. Last week I met him on the street, down here on a week's vacation. He was looking fine and I asked him if he felt as good as he looked. Well, he was enthusiastic over his job and over his country town life. He told me that he lived at the hotel—electric lights, hot and cold water, baths, and all the conveniences—at five dollars a week for everything, that he belonged to the baseball club and their nine could beat anything in sight, that he owned an automobile, that he was all right with the best people in town socially and that he was saving money."

"He had done it all in a year, and though the town hasn't more than twenty-five hundred people and is not near a city of size he wasn't noticed a ruble in his clothes to be noticed in Broadway. In fact, he was spick and span from head to foot and about the cheeriest specimen of young man I have seen in a long time. I asked him how he would like to come back to New York, and you should have seen his gestures of protest. I suppose

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capacity, and the ulterior motives which lead him to champion his particular cause.

There can be no suspicion of secrecy. You advertise yourself to all who care to argue. There are no literary tests, no citizen's papers, no parliamentary rules. Fifty separate arguments are progressing and if none is to your liking you can start for yourself a fifty-first.

So long as you don't block traffic and don't use language tending to an immediate violence you are responsible to the police for no indiscretions. Only two other restrictions are present, one growing from the conception of the liberty of the individual, the other democratic. On rare occasions you may go too far in personal remarks to a too morose person, and he will seek retaliation. Again you must retain a certain respect for the United States and its flag.

An assembly that is the clearing house for the argument of the street, without politics, universally franchised, almost without limitations. For the bug, the fanatic, the drifter, the unappreciated reasonable man, there is some one to listen and contest if he has words to say.

Benjamin Franklin, who looks as if he should be the leader of the debate towers above the society in bronze and verdigris on his pedestal, but is largely ignored. The faces are turned from him toward the bulletin boards of more immediate interest. The Park Row Debating Society, however, has a position in the long row of debating assemblies of history, and must be connected with Franklin. For Franklin, wise and just, signed the Constitution with the vision that the painted sun behind the President's chair was rising, and the society is something that he would have comprehended in the rise.



Looks like a fight, but it isn't.

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