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SOCIETY'S REAL LEADER

Mrs. Astor is the Reputed Head, but it is Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish who Entertains Most Lavishly, Introduces the Novelties and Spends the Most Money.

To come to the point at once: For all that Mrs. Astor is the recognized head of the famous "Four Hundred," Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, of Newport, New York and the "Four Hundred," is America's leading society personage.

She has spent a bigger fortune on social entertainments than any other woman of her day and generation, probably than any other woman who has lived in America.

She was one of the summer pioneers at Newport, and her social life there has helped most powerfully to make that city by the sea famed on two continents.

She is the most consistent, most regular entertainer in this country. Mrs. Astor gives one or two big functions in the course of a twelve month; Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish does not average less than a half dozen a year, and her small dinners, receptions and other lesser entertainments are several times more numerous than the weeks. No other member of the socially elect is so much the hostess, and but few of the titled social lights of Europe, where entertainment is more heavily gone in for than here, can equal her record of functions, big and little, of the past ten or fifteen years.

The various epochal steps in her social career are marked by the most extraordinary entertainments, embracing, as the alliterative circus press agent would put it, startling, stupendous, stupefying, stunning innovations.

"Only Mrs. Fish would dare to do such a thing," is a stock comment by her associates.

In brief, it may be said that it was she who set the style of entertainment and amusement that has been in vogue among the millionaire and multimillionaire social devotees of recent years, and of little money, too. The cakewalk, gymkhana races, society vaudeville, private theatricals by professionals on an elaborate scale, costume and symbolical dances, and festivals on a scale even more magnificent, and true to times past to the slightest detail; the engagement of the world's most noted and highest-priced song-birds for an afternoon or evening of music—all these widely copied features of present day big "S" society amusement she either planned out and introduced, adapted to her uses, or was instrumental in giving them their popularity.

Mrs. Fish is, in truth, the genius—one may almost say, the brains—of the "Four Hundred." And, strange as it may seem, she is one of its bitterest critics.

She is easily the busiest society devotee in the country, and yet for all her ramifying interests in this butterfly sort of existence she somehow finds a great deal of time to devote to charitable and philanthropic work. This, however, does not attract the attention that her unusual modes of entertaining do, and naturally, so that Mrs. Fish could be easily misjudged by one not familiar with her except on her social side.

Society counts her one of its most open-handed members. Many a young woman, now safely launched on a business career, owes her start to Mrs. Fish. She is particularly keen to help young girls with talent for the arts but with no



money to secure them the necessary coveted education. Her fondness for grand opera and classical music in general has led her to be the good fairy to quite a number of girls ambitious to become prima donnas in time.

A story is told of her way of carrying good messages to those hoping against hope. It seems that a well known painter of portraits was commissioned to paint Mrs. Fish. At a sitting the conversation turned on art students, and this led the artist to tell of a certain young woman in one of his classes who was making exceptional progress, who seemed to have what is known among the profession as the divine fire, but who was soon to lay down her brush and palette for the stenographer's pencil because of lack of funds. "But," added the speaker, "mark my words, she'll be back in the class as soon as she has managed to rake and scrape together enough money to give her another course of instruction."

Two nights later Mrs. Fish, unaccompanied, unexpectedly appeared before the portrait painter as he was busy in the class room.

"Show me the student you were telling me of the other day," she commanded.

"I like her earnest look," she added, a moment later; "please call her to me." Then, when the young woman had come up, Mrs. Fish said:

"You are to continue here until you are ready to take a step upward, and remember, under no condition are you to give up your studies until you are fully equipped for your work."

With that she swept out of the classroom and on her way to a social function, and had not the man informed the stupefied and shaking student who her benefactor was she would probably have remained ignorant of her identity to this day, the necessary funds for her art edu-

cation being supplied through the man who quite incidentally brought the young woman's case to the attention of Mrs. Fish.

A rather daring and out-of-the-ordinary way of engaging in philanthropic work, but in her social life she is even more daring and ingenious.

Recently she set the tongues of the country's gossips to wagging when it was announced that she was to give a dinner at which the guests were to appear in bathing suits. Newport has it that before the season is finally over she is expected to give a yachting-party-in-doors entertainment, at which, it is whispered, the guests will be received, amused and dined in a yacht, in her great ballroom in Crossways, a marble "cottage," and one of her three homes.

There is her city house in Seventy-eighth street, New York, and her third house is known as "Glenclyffe." It is at Garisons-on-the-Hudson, opposite West Point, and is the old home of the Fishes.

At her "Harvest Festival" some time ago Mrs. Fish transformed the spacious lawn of her Newport "cottage" into a farm. Sheaves of wheat, shocks of corn

and haystacks of conventional size were scattered about; one corner of the lawn was a pasture, where two oxen, fresh from a Rhode Island farm, quietly grazed. The house itself was stored with products of the soil; agricultural implements that had been in daily use decorated the rooms. Mrs. Fish, representing the goddess of agriculture, received her guests on a dais of plows, reapers, cultivators and what not. The broad piazza was made into a grape arbor, the living vines bearing luscious clusters of fruit; the flower beds and the stone wall were planted with the kinds of wild flowers that are to be found in every countryside.

To obtain the harvest effect desired Mrs. Fish bought up a goodly portion of the crops of a small Rhode Island farm; and its owner also made a second pretty penny by placing the sheaves of wheat, the haystacks, the shocks of corn and other things in traditional manner.

She has had an entire theatrical company, stars and chorus, provide post-midnight vaudeville for a house full of guests. She has made over her town ballroom into a small theater, the stage being complete in every detail. She has had a special play written for production by her.

At a dinner the table's centerpiece was

a lake, on which little yachts steamed and in which fish darted. At her umbrella dinner each guest sat under as costly and rare an umbrella as patient search on her part and money could secure. At her peace ball, which reproduced the famous one held at Mt. Vernon in 1789, she filled her Newport house with furniture and decorations of the period, spending thousands of dollars to give the affair as correct a setting as possible.

As a result of her work in connection with the ball, Mrs. Fish is a recognized authority on the peace ball and entertainment and other things colonial. She spent weeks in studying up on the subject before she began actual work on the ball; her thoroughness in this matter is but indicative of her thoroughness in all things. Therefore, her days are crowded with work.

As a critic of the Newport set Mrs. Fish is certainly thorough-going—and refreshing. Probably no one outside the charmed circle of the "Four Hundred" has spoken or written harsher things about it. She says that the Newport folk are "uniformly stupid." She ascribes little or no brains to not a few, and generally and specifically she declares that they are "too crazy about dukes and such things." Her strictures

on persons and town have been so sharp, indeed, that not a few of her victims have been stung into talking back. But for all the heated indignation that her frank speech stirs up from time to time, it remains true that no sooner does Mrs. Fish issue invitations to those she criticizes than they immediately respond by their presence. Not to do so would be to put a certain surprise aside, for Mrs. Fish's affairs, both great and small, are sure to contain surprises. Also, not to accept her invitations would be to slight society's real leader, and not even they whom she has most mercilessly criticized evidently care to do that.

Why does Mrs. Fish play the social game in such strenuous, innovating and costly fashion, if she recognizes that her associates are so stupid, and so foolish as to chase after "dukes and such things"?

Not for notoriety, per se. She does not employ a press agent to give out advance information of her social doings, as some of her social sisters are in the habit of doing. Neither does she wink at the distribution of her photographs or placidly submit to being caught by the snapshot camera man. Her dislike for being pictured is intense. She is the bane of the man with the "black box." The splendid photograph of her here published was secured only recently quite by accident. The photograph of her that has been doing duty all over the country shows, not the Mrs. Fish of to-day, but her of fifteen years ago.

Mrs. Fish is much like her distinguished husband by nature and mental equipment—bold, resourceful, chock full of energy. She delights in doing things for the sake of doing them; she has lived in the social atmosphere all her life, and so she delights in playing the social game for the sake of the game itself. Then, too, she has dubbed Newport hopelessly stupid; she is undisputedly bold and resourceful; does she not find pleasure in startling the stupid ones out of their stupidity by some daring scheme of amusement or decoration?

Before her marriage Mrs. Fish was Miss Marion Anthon. At that time she was without the millions that have been at her beck and call since she became a bride, and which have made her position of society's real leader possible, giving her a splendid opportunity to exercise her ingenuity. However much any of us may think that the years could have been devoted to something better than entertaining "stupid" monied men and women, it should be borne in mind, in justice to Mrs. Fish, that society is only one side of her life. There is the philanthropic side. There is the home side; no scandal or ugly word attaches to it. There is the student side, as revealed in her work of preparation for the peace ball.

And, further, many of the things she has done first have been taken up by most of us and are indulged in by us when we crave social diversion. Consider the cakewalk, which she seized on and introduced among "white folks." Also the altogether ludicrous gymkhana races; and, to mention another, social vaudeville.

Unlike many of the Newporters and other get-rich-quickers, Mrs. Fish does not fall down and worship "dukes and such things." She has entertained, probably, nearly every titled person who has made our shores within the last decade and a half; but her phrase, "dukes and such things," tells its own story, and she has put herself on record as favoring the untitled American man every time, both in and out of society.

It is good to know that the real leader of our society, she who sets the style in social amusements for the great majority of us, whether we live in city, town or country, or have much or little money, is an American woman.