

A BRIEF HISTORICAL NOTE

on the

HARVARD TRAVELLERS CLUB

SINCE ancient times it has been characteristic of our race to desire a knowledge of other lands and peoples beyond our own narrow sky line, to push out in search of undiscovered countries and unfamiliar things, to match skill and courage with unknown dangers, with wild beasts, and with hostile elements, until in our own time there remains scarcely a corner of the round earth unvisited or its inhabitants unknown. And just as the men of Athens gathered on Areopagus, eager to hear the tales of travellers returning from distant lands, so we in our day still meet together to hear or tell 'some new thing,' or to share the thrill of adventure or discovery with those who fare forth across the face of the earth seeking the inspiration of the unknown or the more lasting prize of an accurate knowledge of our globe and its inhabitants. Such 'intelligent travel' forms the basis of modern geographical science, the intimate study of the earth's surface, its plants and its animals, and the relation of these to each other and to ourselves.

It was thus most fitting that thirty years ago, Harvard's eminent geographer, Professor William Morris Davis, in association with Copley Amory, Roland B. Dixon, James H. Kidder, and the late Archibald Cary Coolidge, invited Harvard men and others in this vicinity, who might be interested in 'promoting intelligent travel and exploration,' to meet together on November 15, 1902, in the assembly room of the Harvard Union at Cambridge, to consider the formation of a Harvard Travellers Club. Thirty men responded to the call.*

The above lines are excerpted from the *History of the Harvard Travellers Club*, published in 1933. The 'Golden Age' of geographical exploration is now past and unlikely to be repeated—on this planet at least—but the spirit behind the founding of the Club remains intact. Today, our members still commit themselves to 'intelligent travel' and continue to be curious about other scenes and locales and other ways of life. Certainly unchanged is our enjoyment in learning of one another's travels.

In the present, as in the past, the Club's membership—currently somewhat less than 200 men and women—includes many travellers of note and ability. The breadth of experience in all corners of the earth, below and on the seas and in the air is very wide indeed.

Certainly no less impressive is the long list of those who have, as members or guests, related their journeys and researches at nearly 800 Club meetings spanning more than 100 years. The accomplishments of many can truly be described as legendary: The polar explorers Peary, Amundsen, Shackleton, Stefansson, Nordenskjöld, Greely, Bartlett, Gould, MacMillan, Wilkins, Crockett, Goodale and Vaughan . . . the mountaineers Mallory, Smythe, Harrer, Odell, Shipton, Bishop, Unsoeld, Moore, Carter, Bates, Breshears, Houston and Washburn. . .Hiram Bingham, the discoverer of Machu Picchu. . .the great central Asian explorers Sir Francis Younghusband, Sven Hedin, Owen Lattimore and Roy Chapman Andrews. . .the Persian scholar Sir Percy Sykes. . .Bertram Thomas, the first European to cross the fabled Rub' al-Khali. . .Alan Villiers, sailor and writer. . .Sir Harry Johnston, African explorer and botanist. . .President Theodore Roosevelt.

In its infancy the Club held its meetings at the Harvard Union or on special occasions at the Fogg Museum. Gatherings were held at members' homes as well, and for a time the facilities of the old University Club and the Boston Athletic Association were used. Since its opening in 1913 the Harvard Club in Boston has been the scene of most of the Club's programs.

Among the grandest and best attended meetings in recent years was the Centennial dinner held 100 years to the day after the first meeting of the Club in 1902: November 15, 2002. Members and guests, some in colorful and exotic attire, filled Harvard Hall. The speaker was Jonathan Shackleton continuing a Shackleton connection stretching back to Lord Shackleton and to his father, Sir Ernest Shackleton, who spoke to the Club at a special meeting on March 31, 1910. A similarly grand affair followed not long after: The 750th meeting of the Club, celebrated on May 27, 2003. The speaker that evening was astronaut Story Musgrave.

The first Club Year Book appeared in 1904. Although rarely issued annually it has continued to the present day in essentially the same format. An inspection of past editions highlights the changing patterns of travel from the pre-automobile and pre-aviation age to the space age of today. Place names and descriptions change, of course, as do the modes and methods of travel, but happily the questing spirit remains unaltered to link the members of today with those who came before.

