Domestic Manners

The general features of the fashionable portion of our community, are similar to those of the same class in the eastern cities, with an equal amount of refinement, if not a like degree of useless etiquette. Throughout the winter season, there are public balls, assemblies, and cotillion parties, for the gratification of those who are fond of dancing. Private parties are both frequently and elegantly given, in which cards, music, dancing, and conversation, constitute the principal sources of amusement.

Benjamin Drake and Edward Deering Mansfield,
Cincinnati in 1826

In 1828 a plump, round-faced Englishwoman, unconventional in manner, speech, and dress, made her unannounced appearance in Cincinnati. The newcomer was Mrs. Frances Trollope, whose record of her experiences in the western emporium gave the city an unwelcome notoriety for many years and made it a symbol of American crassness and materialism. Until her exposure, ironically declared one of her countrymen,

Cincinnati had gradually been increasing in opulence, and enjoying a vulgar and obscure prosperity. Corn had grown, and hogs had fattened; men had built houses, and women borne children; but in all the higher senses of urbane existence. Cincinnati was a nonentity. It was “unknown, unhonoured, and unsung.” Ears polite had never heard of it. There was not the glimmering of a chance that it would be mentioned twice in a twelvemonth, even in the Liverpool Exchange. But Mrs. Trollope came, and a zone of light has ever since encircled Cincinnati. Its inhabitants are no longer a race unknown to fame. Their manners, habits, virtues, tastes, vices, and pursuits, are familiar to all the world; but, strange to say the
market-place of Cincinnati is yet unadorned by the statue of the great benefactress of the city! Has gratitude utterly departed from the earth? 1

Cincinnatians, shocked and angered by Mrs. Trollope’s caricatures of their social life, her slurs against the so-called upper classes, and her fabrications, had no intentions of honoring the “woman of low origin.” 2 On the contrary, the savage and vindictive response to her Domestic Manners of the Americans tended to corroborate some of Mrs. Trollope’s generalizations about American prudery and provincialism.

These are the facts. Mrs. Trollope and her family, quickly disillusioned with Frances Wright’s inter-racial experiment in Nashoba, Tennessee, settled in Cincinnati for two hectic seasons. After sinking approximately $17,000 in her famous Bazaar—variously described as a “brilliant and fantastic outrage in all the acknowledged principles of taste,” 3 a “queer, unique, crescented Turkish Babel,” 4 and a ridiculous compound of Gothic, Greek, and Chinese 5—Mrs. Trollope quitted the city with relief. “The only regret,” she confessed at the time, “was that we had ever entered it; for we had wasted health, time, and money there.” 66 Timothy Flint, who knew her well—in fact he was one of the few people in Cincinnati for whom she expressed any regard—later explained 7 that Mrs. Trollope had expected to supply the fashionable gentry with merchandise which she supposed would be unavailable in the wilderness. She never dreamed that Cincinnati stores already carried special luxuries for discriminating woman shoppers, and her Bazaar, poorly located, failed to attract the upper-class clientele. Her evening “entertainments” met with no better success. 8

The “first families” of Cincinnati, according to Flint, never accepted Mrs. Trollope, and the reasons for her social failure probably throw more light upon Cincinnati society than her own derisive descriptions. Had Mrs. Trollope come to Cincinnati with letters of introduction from her celebrated European friends, had she cut a more elegant or at least more conventional figure, her social success would have been assured. She would have been

1. Thomas Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (Philadelphia, 1833), 294–95.
3. Hamilton, Men and Manners in America, 293.
6. Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (New York, 1927), 150.
8. CCLG, Nov. 28, 1829.
dined and toasted and quoted, said Flint, and her "free manners would have been perniciously contagious." As it was, the fashionable ladies of Cincinnati took no notice of the Englishwoman's wit and intelligence. Only four respectable families ever received her; Mrs. Trollope never attended any select gathering. Hence her malicious stories of Cincinnati high life, her accounts of parties where the guests stuffed themselves with "corn cake," pork, and hominy were sheer inventions. "Every person knows," said Flint, "that a party is the same thing in every opulent family in the United States, and every one understands with how much truth such an assertion could be made of a party in New-York or Philadelphia." Mrs. Trollope, shunned and frustrated, revenged herself by portraying a ludicrous and vulgar populace strutting and boasting in a frontier outpost. She even put slang into the mouths of the common people, said Flint, "entirely woven, warp and woof, from Cockney and Yorkshire," and bearing no resemblance to the speech of the western country.

Flint, the well-intentioned and naive "Gulliver of Western Literature," did not mention the chief reasons for Mrs. Trollope's unpopularity in Cincinnati. This was her reputed "liaison with a big whiskered Frenchman" and her alleged unmitigated "vulgarity." One contemporary account runs as follows:

Some of the citizens of Cincinnati know a little of one Mrs. Trollope, who came amongst us a literary pretender, and who undertook to play Turk, and erect a Bazaar, for which she had not the means enough to pay those that furnished the materials and performed the labor. She had a young Frenchman in her train whose relation to her was exceedingly equivocal. She did not succeed amongst us. Her whole appearance and conduct corresponded to her name. She was an impudent kind of man-woman, of vulgar exterior both in person and dress, of forward manners, and altogether just such a woman as no man could choose as the mentor of either daughters or sons. She speculated unfortunately, failed to make her way into society, got largely in debt, and left us as she staid [sic] with us, in discredit.\(^9\)

It is difficult to imagine this "short dumpling" of a woman, this "ill-dressed figure—war of frock and petticoat"\(^11\) carrying on an affair with August Hervieu, the pupil of Sir Thomas Laurence and Girodet and the protégé of

Lafayette. But the female aristocracy of Cincinnati, unaccustomed to continental manners and measuring newcomers by outward appearance, suspected the worst. "The truth is," wrote one irate correspondent, angered by Flint's tolerant and objective appraisal, "that Mrs. Trollope was excluded from genteel society by the vulgarity of her manners, and a very generally received opinion that she was a profligate woman."\(^{12}\)

When the citizens of Cincinnati had recovered from the first shock of Mrs. Trollope's malicious and amusing exposé, they made her name an execration in the West. Other sections of the country had not escaped her shafts, and they too joined the anti-Trollope chorus, but citizens of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia could read *Domestic Manners of the Americans* more objectively than Cincinnati's sensitive and provincial society. Here Mrs. Trollope was described as a choleric and truculent harridan, the personification of everything that a lady should not be, the un-sexed female. In order to understand some of the anger directed against this "impudent kind of man-woman," it will be necessary to say something about the place of the upper-class women in Cincinnati society. For it was they who set the tone for that society, and if manners were crude, affected, and dull, these social arbiters could be held responsible.

All the women who graced the upper brackets were not so superficial or snobbish as Flint seemed to imply; many of them, as we have seen, conscientiously devoted their time to charitable and cultural enterprises and tried to refine the commercial atmosphere of their city. And yet what one traveler referred to as Cincinnati's "embryo aristocracy" or "plutocracy,"\(^ {13}\) sensitive to eastern slurs and anxious to appear up-to-date and genteel, sought to outdo the "ladies of the Atlantic" in dress and manners. Like other American women of their class and position, they left the "coarser" kinds of intellectual operations to the men and tried to purify their tastes. The feminine mind, they were told, although unequipped to grapple with plain facts and realities, possessed a delicate sensibility\(^ {14}\) which ideally complemented the practical masculine intellect. Nature excluded them from politics and business, but there were compensations in the sewing circle, the church, the charitable society, and, above all, the home.

\(^{12}\) *CCLG*, Oct. 26, 1833. For another insulting reminiscence, see *Cincinnati Advertiser and Ohio Phoenix*, Aug. 10, 1835.


\(^{14}\) *CCLG*, Apr. 15, 1834.
These presuppositions about the nature of the female mind determined the character of women's education. Girls' schools, while not ignoring the more abstruse studies like history, philosophy, languages, and the sciences, paid particular attention to those ornamental accomplishments which peculiarly suited the feminine temperament. The ability to paint on velvet, to construct wax fruit, flowers, and trees, and to accompany oneself on the piano would be of more use to the young plutocracy of Cincinnati than algebra and natural philosophy. The best and most fashionable academies in and around Cincinnati emphasized painting, drawing, music, penmanship, and elocution. Catharine Beecher's Western Female Academy provided training in domestic economy as well, perhaps in answer to those who alleged that educated females made discontented housewives; but most of the female educational institutions strove to make their graduates virtuous, religious, and refined rather than learned and useful.

If a Cincinnati woman evidenced a genuine interest in learning and culture (and some women did), she was immediately suspected of "Bluestockingism," a term of opprobrium applied by men to any learned lady. The bluestocking apparently "comprehended all that was chilling and repulsive" in the female character. Women were expected to talk about the weather or the latest novel, a feminist declared; they might gossip about their friends, but if a young lady speaks of anything with which the idea of study or research is associated, she is thenceforth looked upon, if not as a pretender, at least as an unsexed woman. . . . It is also true that we have a feeling (I know not whether natural or acquired), that a learned woman does not fill her true place in the world . . . in general, if I mistake not, it is thought more creditable for a young woman to possess accomplishments than wisdom—to be sentimental than learned—to appear than to be.16

Timothy Flint's daughter, praised by Mrs. Trollope and described by Jewett as "the deepest d . . . est Blue on this side of the Alleghenies—a pet victim of Mad Trollope's eulogies";17 Sarah King, hungry for culture and uplift;18 Catharine Beecher, inelegant and insatiably hunting for facts;19 Caroline

16. CCLG, Feb. 16, 1833.
Lee Hentz, "‘darkly, deeply, beautifully blue’ yet not without a pretty talent"—these were typical bluestockings. "Do not seek for them in the depths of savage solitudes, amid torrents and cataracts, or upon the summit of mountains," wrote the companion of Tocqueville. "No, you will see them walking in the mud of the streets, shoes on their feet and bonnets on their heads."

Mrs. Trollope, cold, pedantic, and unpoetical, served as the classic and horrid example of the learned unfeminine woman. Not that learning in itself automatically disqualified a woman from her God-ordained role of mother, but the generally accepted notion that a woman ought to soothe and entertain her husband, not challenge him, made the average Ohioan prefer the "accomplished" to the learned wife. It was the recognition of the female's subsidiary function which promoted the Parthenon to say: "The cultivation of the female intellect cannot detract from the power, influence, or pleasure of man; it will bring 'no rival in his kingdom'; it will not render her conversation less agreeable."

The middle-class Cincinnati husband, like all good American husbands, honored womanhood and the institution of marriage. Divorce appears to have been infrequent. He had been taught to regard the opposite sex as "weak," if not inferior. Biblical admonitions reminded him of woman's fallibility, and the phrenologist assured him that the male brain was larger, stronger, and more developed than the female. The ideal husband therefore treated his wife "with delicacy as a woman—with tenderness as a friend." He recognized that she was weak and imprudent, but he pardoned her follies goodnaturedly. He employed "all his ease and industry... for her welfare" and exerted "all his strength and power... for her support and protection."

It is difficult to get any real insight into the domestic lives of well-to-do, hardworking Cincinnati families, but from the scanty correspondence that remains the historian can roughly recreate the pattern and rhythm of family life. The letters, warm and gossipy, are filled with reports of visitors, crying babies, motherly pride, politics, rambling chitchat, pregnancies, weanings, family spats, sicknesses, and health. A woman complains of the servant problem and regales her husband with accounts of the miscarriages of her

24. Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette, July 30, 1824.
friends, punch parties, and messages from her children. "I spend many lonely hours at home at the fire side," she writes, "and look forward with great anxiety for your return, my health is about the same as when you left me, sometimes sick and sometimes better. I have no hard thoughts at your leaveing in this situation. I hope we will all be well when you return home again." A young girl writes to her aunt of cotillions, parties, sermons, and deaths; another describes the bustle of business which comes with the rise in the river.25

Husbands seemed to live on the periphery of the household world. Indulgent and considerate as most of them probably were, their real interests lay in the marketplace. "The western Americans," a visitor wrote in 1818, "are not so domestic as the English. Business and politics engross the thoughts of the men. They live in their Stores and Counting houses, and associate with their wives as little as may be."26 Increasing prosperity during the next twenty years permitted more time for leisure and entertainment among the well-to-do, but the duties of home, the difficulties of obtaining servants, and the obligations of business continued to divide the worlds of women and men. Religion would seem to be the one interest shared by husband and wife, but even here the husband was apt to be lackadasical. "I feel it my duty," one of them wrote, "to accompany [my wife] to church as often as she pleases to go, but I must be candid and say to you, as I do to her, that at all times it requires some exertion on my part and frequently in the afternoon, I am in default."27

Yet in spite of the difference in responsibilities and interests, the sharp dichotomy between home and office, men and women in Cincinnati shared many social diversions, and the city very early in its history acquired a reputation for gaiety. Outside observers, anticipating a dreary frontier outpost, were astonished, if not always pleased, by the Queen City's fashionable display. The impressions of a Lane Seminary student in 1837 record the transformation society had undergone since the early days:

The congregations on the Sabbath are very small compared with our N. E. Churches. And many seem to attend, not to hear the truth but to see and

27. Lewis Whiteman to Jane Findlay, Cincinnati, Jan. 16, 1831, Torrence Papers, Box 27.
be seen. There is much more of extravagance in dress, I should judge, exhibited here than at the East. Were you to judge of glitter & finery of dress, you might see many beautiful ones here. Gold & precious stones hung around the ears & bosom, the finest silk covers the body, & to top off, a beautiful ostrich feather crowns the head. I know nothing more of the ladies than this. What kind of minds they have, I am unable to say. Still I reckon (Western dialect) they would not answer for ministers wives. Perhaps they would suit lawyers better, though I hope you never will choose a wife because she dresses prettily, if you do—

And the gentlemen, those who pretend to be such, dress much more extravagantly than in N. E. A merchant tailor in the city told me the other day, that he should be ashamed to bring into his shop an assortment of cloths as are carried into the eastern cities. But is either sex any better for this show of splendor. Surely not. It is vanity.28

Jewett’s comments on the Cincinnati ladies were less critical. He found them equal to the “Queens of Broadway or the Mall” in coquetry. “They can tie as tight a corset—and flaunt as spacious a head-piece, can talk of perfumed billet doux without sighing.” As for the men, “Ah, there we fail!” “All our Bucks roll Tar barrels, and our Dandies weigh out iron. But we have sterling men, and gentlemen too—Invincible utilitarians generally, but still gentlemen.”29 Jewett admitted that the first Cincinnati society (composed of eastern folk) equaled that of any seacoast city in polish and refinement.

Other visitors who stayed in Cincinnati long enough to observe social life confirmed Jewett’s opinions. Charles Fenno Hoffman spoke appreciatively of the “pretty faces and stylish figures” of the Cincinnati ladies. He felt it “in the highest degree absurd to speak of the Cincinnatians as a provincial people in their manners, when the most agreeable persons that figure here hail originally from New York or Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore, and are very tenacious of the style in which they have been educated.” And as for Mrs. Trollope’s caricatures, they had “as much vrai-simblance as if the beaux and belles of Kamchatka had sat for the portraits.”30 A young Bostonian in 1830 commented on the stylishness and elegance of the Cincinnati women. “I saw no difference in their appearance,” she wrote to her mother,

28. William Jones to Peter T. Washburn, Walnut Hills, Ohio, Feb. 23, 1837 (MS, Ohio Historical and Philosophical Society).
30. Charles Fenno Hoffman, A Winter in the West; By a New Yorker (New York, 1835), 127, 128.
"than what I should expect to see in New York or Philadelphia (Rather more fashionable than Boston)."\textsuperscript{31}

Most of the fashionable and elegant display in Cincinnati centered on and was inspired by the young married females, the famous Western Belles, who graced the balls, cotillions, and assemblies. At about the age of fifteen the Cincinnati schoolgirl threw aside "the sun-bonnet and the satchel" to join the revels of society.\textsuperscript{32} Even young girls of twelve or fourteen, Benjamin Powers wrote to his friend in Vermont, were "flaunting Belles, each having her little Beau," allowing him certain liberties but "keeping him under pretty good restraint at the same time, lest he should become too familiar with that, which is out of her power to grant or his to enjoy." Powers described the hoydens "dancing along the streets, constantly discoursing upon matrimony, playing with their fingers, in company, keeping silence when strangers are present, save now and then bursting into a horse laugh, and then clubbing together in a close whisper; . . . ogling the young Beaux across the meeting house, and diverse other principles of good breeding too numerous to mention."\textsuperscript{33}

Fashionable young ladies were not supposed to carry on so uproariously, and Cincinnati mentors carefully prescribed the proper relationship between the sexes. "One of the greatest advantages derived from civilization," declared an editorial as early as 1817, "is that refinement and taste and delicacy of sentiment which revolt, as it were, intuitively, at the slightest infraction of the laws of decorum." Free and unreserved conversation between men and women, far from promoting higher intellectual development, "would break down the barriers of chastity which is the peculiar ornament and virtue of women, and the true source of their delicacy and refinement; which renders them objects of our adoration, and constitutes the happiness of our domestic circle."\textsuperscript{34}

In keeping with these dicta, western ladies, like their sisters in the East, maintained the strict propriety which seemed so stilted and prudish to some

\textsuperscript{31} Peabody, \textit{A New England Romance. The Story of Ephraim and Mary Jane Peabody. 1807–1892. Told by Their Sons} (Boston and New York, 1920), 75; see \textit{A Memorial Biography of Benjamin M. Piatt and Elizabeth, His Wife} (Washington, D.C., 1887), 43–44. See also testimony of David Henshaw, writing from Louisville in 1838, about the elegance of Cincinnati. \textit{Letters on the Internal Improvement of the West} (Boston, 1839), 12.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{CCLG}, Aug. 21, 1830.

\textsuperscript{33} B. Powers to N. Williams, Cincinnati, Mar. 31, 1817 (MS, Ohio Historical and Philosophical Society).

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{LHCG}, Feb. 13, May 19, 1817.
continental observers. Romantic young New Englanders may have envisaged the “Western beauty” as racy and wild, as touching “the confines of civilization and barbarian with . . . daring grace,” but nothing so exotic could be discovered in Cincinnati. Here, so visitors reported, the ladies were no less polished or fascinating than the ladies of the East. They enjoyed the same amusements and diversions. They sailed on steam packets, they danced and walked and rode, they played the organ and pianoforte.

Very popular throughout this period were the “soirées” or evening parties, patterned after the French conversational “evenings,” at which ladies and gentlemen of the western beau monde gathered to talk and eat. Judging from contemporary evidence, these soirées did not always provoke the expected verbal fireworks. Apparently, the men were either incapable of carrying on an interesting conversation or else they deliberately talked down to the women. A guest at one of these gatherings recorded the following exchanges to illustrate his contention that the citizens of Cincinnati were not an intellectual people:

“You are a stranger to our city miss?”
“Yes sir.”
“What do you think of it Miss?”
“A very charming place indeed sir.”
“Have you been to Longworth’s garden miss?”
“No sir.”
or
Your servant miss.”
A pause
“It is very warm to night miss.”
A long pause
“Did you come here by land or water, miss?”
“I came in the Waverly sir.”
A very long pause
“How do you like the great Emporium of the West, Miss?”
“A very delightful place Sir.”
or (a great dude)
“A stranger to our city, Miss?”
“I am, sir.”
“Pray, how do you like the contour of this magnificent Queen of the West?”

36. Powers to Williams, Cincinnati, Apr, 27, 1819.
“O! I am perfectly enraptured with it, sir.”
“A good deal of coloric floating in the circumambient air this evening, miss.”
“Quite a considerable chance, Sir.”

The fact that Cincinnati hostesses provided huge quantities of food for their uninspired guests possibly explains why the soirées were more gastronomic than conversational.

We have an idea [a correspondent wrote in reference to this custom], that our parties might present quite an intellectual character, were an opportunity presented. It would be an interesting experiment, if some of our fashionable ladies would, in the course of the approaching season, give a few entertainments, at which seven usual courses of luxurious delicacies should be reduced to two or three plain ones. It would at least determine the character of our society, and settle the question, whether we would have more talent for eating than talking.

The unending stream of dishes must have made conversation difficult. Tea, coffee, sandwiches, tongue, sweetmeats, blancmange, fruits, nuts, wines, cordials, ice cream, plum and sponge cake followed in painful regularity, usually topped off with the seventh and last course: chicken salad, pickled oysters, crackers, and chocolate. The “sociable” or “teaparty” or “soirée” usually began about nine o’clock and lasted until eleven or twelve. Wives and daughters would work all day preparing the food which they later exhorted their guests to eat. The tired husband, coming home after a long day at the market, had to stay up until the last silver spoon had been locked up and the last fragment of cake removed. No wonder that some of them longed for the “plebeian” days when society was rational and comfortable.

Eating did not constitute the chief function of every evening gathering, however, and some select circles like Daniel Drake’s Buckeye-Club and the aristocratic Semi-Colon Club tried to live up to their intellectual pretensions. The latter, rather aptly described by Benjamin Drake as a “secret, social coalition,” reflected the attitudes and interests of its strongly New England membership. Its meetings, which attracted distinguished Cincinnatians of both sexes, were held at the homes of Charles Stetson, Samuel Foote, and William Greene, all wealthy New Englanders.

37. CCLG, Mar. 19, 1831; Aug. 15, 1829.
38. Ibid., Aug. 15, 1829; June 11, Oct. 1, 1831.
These reunions [wrote J. P. Foote] began and terminated at early hours, and expensive luxuries in food and drink being rigidly prohibited, the health of the members was not endangered, (nor the reputation of their neighbors);—intellectually food of a superior quality to any thing afforded by the highest style of cooking, and more wholesome than personal gossip not only for the mind, but for the body also, being served up.\(^{39}\)

Judging from the abstracts left to posterity, the Semi-Colons' intellectual food does not seem very nutritious. Most of the papers reflect a smug, opinionated, snobbish Whiggism, a contempt for the people ("the sovereigns"), and an abhorrence of anything smacking of Jacksonianism. Attempts at the "light style," such as William Corry's defense of enthusiasm or inane quips and nonsense about love, come off with little more success.

The reputation of the club, nevertheless, and the unmistakable talents of some of its members somewhat justified Cincinnati's cultural claims. Lawyers, writers, historians, teachers, ministers, scientists, and businessmen apparently contributed solid facts as well as humorous trifles, and visitors from the East usually spoke of the club with high respect.\(^{40}\)

I have, this moment, returned home from Mr. Stetson's [wrote Frederick Hall in 1837], where I passed the evening, pleasantly and profitably, in a small conversations of ladies and gentlemen. There was no badinage, or frivolity. The conversation was chiefly of a literary cast—free, easy, entertaining, instructive, without restraint, and without formality. If this, thought I to myself, be a fair sample of the state of society here, it must have assumed a higher character than it has attained in many older portions of the Union. Indeed, if I may be allowed to judge from what I have myself witnessed, I must say that Cincinnati, so far as related to refinement of manners, intellectual culture, and hospitality to strangers, is more like Boston than any other city in the United States, of which I have any personal knowledge.\(^{41}\)

The panic of 1837 virtually finished the Semi-Colon Club. Stetson, Greene, and Foote, its chief sponsors, all lost heavily in the sharp decline of land values and were forced to give up their entertainments.

If Frederick Hall had visited reunions of the Buckeye-Club, another so-

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41. Frederick Hall, Letters from the East and from the West (Washington, 1840), 110–11.
ciety which emphasized high thinking rather than high living, he might not have been so sure that Cincinnati was a miniature Boston. Dr. Drake presided over these meetings, where well-known citizens discussed civic problems, read compositions, and debated timely questions. At seven-thirty the doctor rang a little bell and the company settled down to hear Judge Hall or General Edward King or Mrs. Hentz read a paper or deliver a poem. Drake himself was always a lively participant and revived the conversation when it seemed to flag. Although the Beecher girls sometimes attended these evenings, Buckeyes, on the whole, were not recruited from the New England element and appear to have been less cliquish than the Semi-Colons.

But the “lucubrations of the Semi-Colons” and the profitable evenings passed at the home of Drake reflected the tone of Cincinnati society less faithfully than the popular dancing parties, balls, and cotillions. Even the condemnations of influential ministers (which had some influence on the theater controversy) bore little weight with the sophisticated belles and beaux who, by the thirties, were not so susceptible to clerical pressure as their parents had been. Joshua Wilson had expounded the arguments of the anti-dancing faction to a skeptical parishioner, J. K. Mead, in 1834. Mead’s sister had forbidden her daughter to take dancing lessons after learning of the minister’s opposition, and her disgruntled brother asked Wilson to elucidate his position on this issue. Wilson explained that while an epicurean might justify dancing, the Christian, who followed the biblical injunction to do all for the glory of God, could not make dancing compatible “with virtue and good morals.” The Bible, he admitted, sanctioned devotional dancing, but, he asked his correspondent,

you will not pretend that dancing, as practiced by fashionable, worldly people, under the most “wholesome regulations” yet devised ever prepared a soul for heaven. And I think upon sober reflection you must admit that it wastes precious time, dissipates the mind, nurtures pride, fans passion into a flame, cherishing improper emulations and not infrequently leads to wrathe and strife.

But Wilson and McGuffey, who corroborated him, the moderates argued, made the mistake of confusing dancing with balls; admittedly, the latter had no justification. If the tunes played at these dancing parties were “unscien-

43. Joshua L. Wilson MSS, Library of the University of Chicago, VI, 704.
tific" and "destitute of expression" and balls created jealousies and wasted time, yet dancing in itself, as a prominent teacher of young ladies affirmed, was not without value. If God had not intended men and women to dance, he would not have endowed them with the faculties which permitted dancing. Wilson did not object to music. "Dancing is but the poetry of motion as music is the harmony of sounds."

These private debates, sermons, and soul searchings apparently did not disturb the smart set, as a letter written by a New England girl to her mother in 1831 would seem to show:

Dancing is the rage at all the parties—there is no such thing as a little party. Invitations are always given the day before and they assemble at 8 in full dress—painted muslins, embroidered and in stripes, and foulards, high hair, and flowers and bandeaux, and they dance as soon as they come in till 11 o'clock. There are never private balls, but little cotillion parties at the "Bazaar" every Saturday night and a dozen publick subscription balls in the winter. If anything particularly new or striking should appear in the way of dress in your part of the world, pray give me an idea, for I have not been able as yet to astonish the natives, I assure you.

Other visitors pronounced the public balls very genteel and elegant and, at the same time, free of the formalities and constraints which marked the parties in the older communities:

There is no mistake, my dear sir, in the style wherein these things are done in Cincinnati. The social character of its citizens is most vivid, most lively, most electrical. Never have I resided among a people so universally buoyant. Each individual seems to be an extract of the condensed essence of hilarity. For myself, once arctic and icy, living here, I have become so socially electrified that, I doubt not, I could change a whole community of New Yorkers, and make every one thereof a prodigy of vivacity.

Benefit balls, subscription dances, and Bachelor's Balls (sponsored annually by a group of young bloods for the Cincinnati nymphs), kept the young people's hearts throbbing. Only the public masquerade, that "Exotic and gener-
ally licentious pastime which originated at the court of a profligate prince, and which at the present time, is almost entirely banished from the refined and virtuous circles of all European cities,"49 was rigorously tabooed.

In spite of the repeated references to the social fluidity and friendliness in Cincinnati as compared with eastern cities, the lists of ladies and gentlemen who belonged to the exclusive clubs and attended the most important and fashionable entertainments show that by the 1830s social lines were quite distinctly drawn. Jewett’s reference in 1831 to the “first society” indicates the presence of sets and circles. A few contemporary sticklers found Queen City manners perhaps a bit too free, wanting, said Hoffman, “that harmonious blending of light and shade, that repose both of character and manner”50 which he ascribed to the best Atlantic circles. But if the citizens were not so genteel, amusing, and cultivated as they liked to think themselves, neither were they unceremonious democrats. “There is here none of that damned aristocracy which we have in our eastern cities, and which keeps a man out of genteel society, unless he has wealth, or family connections, or learning or respectability or some other such useless thing to back him,”51 a satirist declared in 1832, but the facts disprove him. In Cincinnati, as in Louisville and other western cities, women were very conscious of the social group in which they moved. “You will frequently be amused,” a traveler reported, “by seeing a lady, the wife of a drygoods store-keeper, look most contemptuously at the mention of another’s name, whose husband pursues precisely the same occupation, but on a less extensive scale, and observe that ‘She only belongs to the third circle of society.’”52

By the 1830s it seems something approximating a commercial aristocracy had developed, perhaps not so exclusive as the circles existing in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, but not very dissimilar in outlook. As Mrs. Trollope and others noted, the men still considered business more important than the social diversions of their wives; some men even preferred to live in boardinghouses and hotels so that they would have more time to devote to the job of moneymaking. These were the men who took twenty minutes to eat their dinners and exhibited greater interest in the rise of the river than in

49. Daily Cincinnati Republican and Commercial Register, Jan. 17, 1837; CCLG, Mar. 27, 1830; Feb. 18, 1832.
51. CCLG, Feb. 4, 1832.
the pleasures of conversation. But if they themselves spurned the delights of fashion, they indulged their wives. They entertained celebrities and sent their families to fashionable watering places like Yellow Springs.\textsuperscript{53}

To this lively village, seventy miles north of Cincinnati, the elite of the city escaped during the unbearably hot summer months when cholera threatened and social life subsided. Here tired businessmen fished in the streams and hunted in the woods. Their marriageable daughters, resplendent in big sleeves and wire-distended petticoats, filled the promenades, keeping eyes peeled for the dandies, while the sounds of shouting children, pianos, guitars, and flutes created an interminable din.\textsuperscript{54} It was chiefly a woman’s world of fashion, scandal, and matchmaking, according to Flint, who passed through in 1833; and the ladies showed all the graces, vanities, and affectations which characterized the ladies at Saratoga.\textsuperscript{55} But Yellow Springs drew only a limited clientele from the Queen City, few of whose inhabitants could afford summer excursions. The majority of the business, trading, and artisan classes had to find their amusements in the city.

Killing time in Cincinnati afforded no problem for the pleasure seekers who found greater satisfaction in circuses than in lyceums. No other city in America supported so many “rational” amusements, the \textit{Crisis and Emporium} maintained, nor could the most fastidious discover anything offensive about them. The variety of entertainment gave the city a holiday atmosphere which attracted the southern trade. As one citizen phrased it: “We derive a benefit from their liberalty, and our leisure time is occupied in innocent recreation.”\textsuperscript{56}

The Queen City by the 1830s had become a well-known “stopping place” for New Englanders wintering in the West Indies and southern states and southern planters who visited Cincinnati (why? one wonders) during the warm months. Cincinnati’s cultivated society and excellent schools, its proximity to the spas in Kentucky, West Virginia, and Ohio made her the ideal headquarters for well-to-do planters. Although the exodus of “society” from the city took place before July and although the theater shut down, circuses, whist parties, and “sociables” provided entertainment for those who cared to remain. During the thirties, the Apollonian Garden served refreshments of

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Saturday Evening Chronicle of General Literature, Morals, and Arts}, Apr. 5, Sept. 3, 1828.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{CCLG}, July 29, 1833.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Knickerbocker} II (1833), 245.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Crisis and Emporium}, Jan. 29, Sept. 6, 1827.
all kinds to thirsty citizens who wished to enjoy themselves “after the toils of business.”

Possibly the vogue of horse racing, which came into prominence in Cincinnati during the middle thirties, might account for the city’s attractions for southerners; at any rate, it was a form of entertainment encouraged in the city by people of southern origin. New Englanders in and around Cincinnati refused to sanction the sport and a small war almost occurred when its supporters constructed a track a few miles from the city in 1838. Racing had been going on in Newport, Kentucky, across the river, some years before and, according to the Cincinnati press, had attracted gamblers, blacklegs, drunkards, and thieves. Moreover, to many Ohioans, it seemed more a suitable sport for a corrupt aristocracy than an innocent diversion for a hardworking people. As the popularity of horseracing increased in the city, moralists felt compelled to carry out a systematic campaign against this wicked, idle, and non-productive pastime. Racing, they argued, did not improve the breed of horses; it attracted only an undesirable element, it perverted youth, and it drew money out of the city. True, track crowds also brought some money into Cincinnati, but the “loss to the productive industry of the city, arising from the attendance of our citizens at the race track for six days,” resulted in an unfavorable balance.

When Cincinnati ladies in considerable numbers started to patronize the races, sober citizens with pronounced views on the place and duties of womanhood complained about wives and daughters who forsook their God-given stations to occupy themselves “with the performances, and pedigrees, and standings of race horses.” Did the ladies realize that they encouraged vice by attending the racetrack? Would historians in the future be forced to relate how Cincinnati ladies joined with the gentlemen, the blacklegs, and the hucksters to perpetuate this evil?

Editor Mansfield, who had seen Cincinnati gentlemen organize the Jockey Club and, at the same time, refuse to buy subscriptions for a public library, predicted how some city chronicler of the coming generation might describe the people of Cincinnati to posterity.

They were “an enlightened, elegant, refined, and prosperous people,” he would write, who “built palace-like school houses to increase knowledge;

57. CCLG, Apr. 30, 1831; July 11, 1829; June 9, 1832.
58. CC, Sept. 29, Oct. 13, 1838.
59. Ibid., Sept. 29, 1838.
created churches to maintain virtue, and cultivated politeness in all their social circles.” Some citizens, however, were still not satisfied and attempted to raise the intellectual tone of society by proposing that a library be established. But the majority of citizens, seeing no immediate profit in such a project, rejected the suggestion. It was time now, they said, to “cultivate manners and improve the breed of animals. They considered that Rome had improved much from the battle of beasts and the contest of gladiators. They considered that Spain and Mexico had improved much by bullbaiting. They, therefore, established the race course, that they might improve the breed of horses; and rejected a library because it improved the breed of men.”

Southern opinion in Cincinnati, represented by the Whig, attributed the opposition to horse racing to a “few narrow-minded, ignorant and fanatical asses.” But the controversy cannot be passed off as simply a local squabble between the friends and enemies of pleasure. Sectional hostility was implicit in the whole affair. Horse racing, gambling, bearbaiting, and prizefighting offended religious easterners chiefly because these diversions were non-productive and encouraged the vices most detrimental to a young community. Why indulge in the sports of aristocrats and blacklegs, it was asked, when Cincinnati provided enough innocent and amusing entertainments for the most avid pleasure seeker?

Far more wholesome and instructive than horse racing were the circuses which frequently appeared in Cincinnati throughout this period. They were immensely popular. Even Joshua Wilson, who regarded most amusements with suspicion, found the “caravans,” as he called them, rather impressive. The lions made him think of Daniel and of Paul fighting the wild beasts at Ephesus; he was reminded of the camel “on which Rebecca rode when she met Isaac.” He saw also the “folly of men in the mispending of time and squandering of money,” but the number and variety of the spectators interested him. Here were “old and young, rich and poor, black, yellow and white.” Here “Jews, Christians, and infidels promiscuously mingled together. The diversity and variety,” he thought, “were as striking among the bipeds as among the quadrupeds.” Other citizens enjoyed the strange beasts, freaks, and tumblers without indulging in such moral reflections. They gawked at the only Brazilian tiger in America (equal to the lion in ferocity and said to

60. Ibid.
61. Ibid., Nov. 3, 1838.
prefer “human flesh to any other kind of meat”).\(^{63}\) They flocked to see the live anaconda, “or Great Mountain Serpent, known by the natives of Hindustan as the Terror of Ceylon. . . . The colors of this stupendous specimen of Nature’s Works are beautiful and vivid beyond description, and must be seen to be believed.” The sea dog or seacalf, “docile and perfectly harmless”;\(^ {64}\) Mr. Williams, “whose surprising feats of activity on the slack rope, and in throwing flip-flops and somersets in the ring” excited “bursts of laughter”;\(^ {65}\) little Miss Afong May from the “celestial Empire”;\(^ {66}\) and Herr Zajonczek, the “Celebrated Polish Sampson,” performed before numerous and enthusiastic audiences and apparently delighted the citizens more than did the edifying public lectures.

Equally popular during the twenties and thirties were the museums housing collections of material more closely resembling the later exhibits of Barnum than schools of natural history. The Western Museum, the most famous in Cincinnati and widely known outside the Queen City, had been organized as a public institution for the preservation of western curiosities. For a few years it fulfilled the expectations of its founders. Under a series of competent curators, Dr. Robert Best, John James Audubon, James Griffiths, and finally Joseph Dorfeuille, the collections were enlarged. But the character of the Museum gradually changed under Dorfeuille’s ministrations until it became a kind of indoor circus stuffed with trumpery.\(^ {67}\)

Dorfeuille himself was a learned man. He is supposed to have done some research in parasitical insects, and his scrapbook reveals an interest in conchology, paleontology, and geology. But it soon became clear to him that people would not pay to see a purely scientific collection. When he took over the Western Museum in 1823, he did it with the knowledge that Cincinnati would not support cultural enterprises. He saw that Ralph Letton’s Museum, filled with mummies, wax figures, and monstrosities, drew the crowds. Citizens paid to see a mermaid (clumsily constructed), an armless woman, or an “Enormous Elk,” Dorfeuille discovered, but not to examine a cabinet of minerals. His new policy directly reversed the position of the original proprietors, who, in 1819, had sternly rejected any concessions to popular taste.

63. LHCG, Mar. 18, 1818.
64. CCLG, June 23, 1831; July 6, 1833.
65. LHCG, Aug. 24, 1819.
66. CRCR, May 12, 1836.
67. See Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel (New York, 1838), II, 235; Blane, An Excursion Through the United States, 126; Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimer Eisenach, Travels Through North America, During the Years 1825 and 1826 (Philadelphia, 1828), II, 137; Michel
How preposterous it is [one member had written], when the inhabitants of the city are engaged in forming a museum where every curiosity which may be presented, will be named and displayed with scientific skill, to call upon those very people to patronize a company of showmen who delight in the invention of new forms of ghastliness, and whose daily occupation is to caricature the solemn visage of the dead. . . . How graceless it is, to recommend the neglect of a scientific Cabinet arranged in the beautiful edifice of the Cincinnati College, for the vulgar diversion of a fiddler's requiem to a row of wax figures. 68

Such vulgar displays may have been preposterous but the "ingenious men" who molded American beeswax into statesmen and heroes for Mr. Letton understood the public. Dorf euille revived the Western Museum by supplementing the marine shells, Indian trinkets, and fossils with new attractions, and by so doing he proved himself a showman as well as a person of "taste, science, and politeness." He added the "optical Paradox, or Penetrative Perspective," which made objects visible through an opaque body. He introduced enchanted mirrors, a magical box, a kaleidoscope, and the head of a New Zealand chief, "preserved and beautifully tattooed by the Cannibals of New Zealand." 69 Finally, with the help of Hiram Powers and Auguste Hervieu, he presented a series of waxwork figures and tableaux which, according to Michel Chevalier, afforded "a delicious agitation" to the nerves of young Cincinnati girls "in quest of that excitement which a comfortable and peaceful, but cold and monotonous manner of life denies them." 70

Dorf euille's wax figures, "executed in a superior style, and dressed up with great taste and elegance," 71 showed Marat collapsing under the dagger thrust of Charlotte Corday; Charlotte Temple sitting disconsolately holding an infant in her lap and a letter in her hand; a beautiful woman sleeping on a couch while an infant, under the care of a small child, plays at the foot of the couch ("most touching sight"); the Empress of Russia in her robes of state; and various other characters. In 1828, Hervieu designed a room in the museum to house the "Invisible Girl," who responded to the questions of the audience. Hervieu painted a background revealing the "Weird Sisters," and a bandit scene. "The banditti," commented one observer, "looking with des-

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68. *LHCG*, July 4, 1819.
69. Ibid., July 6, 1819; Aug. 5, 1825.
perate resolution from their den, also add much to the gloomy and terrific aspect of the room, which indeed largely partakes throughout of the horrible and the picturesque.”

Dorfeuille followed up this triumph with his most famous presentation, “The World to Come,” or, as it was popularly called, “The Infernal Regions,” the idea for which has been attributed to Mrs. Trollope, Hiram Powers, and Frederick Franks. One Cincinnati historian explains that Franks had a penchant for depicting imps, devils, and goblins and that he alone was responsible for Dorfeuille’s hell, with its mechanical figures, snakes, demons, and electric shocks. Whoever deserves the credit, suffice it to say that the “Infernal Regions” remained popular until the Museum burned in 1840. “There is great ingenuity and taste displayed in the arrangement of the scenery,” one critic recorded, “and on the paintings . . . the view is calculated to awaken serious but not unprofitable reflections.”

If Powers did not invent or construct the “Infernal Regions” (although he must have had a hand in them), his lifelike figures of famous statesmen firmly established his reputation in Cincinnati. Most wax figures, with their cadaverous looks, glaring eyes, and stiff positions, lacked any real vitality; but Powers, so his champions maintained, had stolen a spark of the Prometheus fire and animated the ordinarily lifeless figures. Thus, one of his productions, “A Lovely Female Crowning with Laurels the Hero of New Orleans,” is described as follows:

This female who, by universal assent, merits the appellation of Beautiful, is habited a la Turque, and stands most gracefully in the attitude of placing the crown on the Heros brows. General Jackson, a fine likeness, taken from life, is dressed in the Roman Costume, and seems unconscious of the splendid compliment which Beauty is offering him.—Many reasons have induced the selection of this dress for the person of the General; in addition to the classical propriety of exhibiting him thus, as being productive of much greater effect—which propriety is increased by referring to the opinion of the immortal Jefferson, who described him as possessing more of the Roman than any man now living.

Other figures like John Quincy Adams, Commodore Porter, Lorenzo Dow, and Jeffrey Hudson (“the famous English dwarf”), were exhibited in the Museum, but Powers’s most successful achievement came in 1830 with the

72. SEC, Apr. 12, 1828.
73. H. A. Ford and K. B. Ford, History of Cincinnati, Ohio, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches (Cleveland, 1881), 237–38.
74. LHCG, July 17, 1828.
two “exquisites,” a representation of a stylish man and woman. Their beauty and workmanship, their close fidelity to life, amazed all who paid to see them and helped to spread the fame of the Western Museum.

The transformation of the Museum from a scientific institution into a place of popular amusement was completed by 1838. A small group of scholarly citizens had been unable to stir up enough popular support for science, but the addition of sensational novelties attracted men and women from all classes, people who had no real interest in geology, botany, zoology, or archaeology, but a good deal of vulgar curiosity. While art galleries languished, a life-sized painting of a “Maniac,” an anaconda devouring a horse and rider, a wax Venus (“large as life, and pronounced by gentlemen connoisseurs to be the handsomest one ever exhibited in wax”), and a picture of General Moreau at the Battle of Dresden, showing the “wound in his leg, together with the head of a Russian soldier,” attracted throngs of people. Vivid pictorial art suited the folk more than genteel imitations of European masters. Colonel David Crockett, grinning the opossum off the tree, General Jackson galloping through a “Triumphal Arch with revolving columns, on which are inscribed emblems of the General’s Victories”—these give a truer picture of popular culture in Cincinnati than lyceums and Semi-Colon clubs.

A Cleveland newspaper, disturbed that the “enlightened people of Cincinnati delight in the horrible,” commented in 1838:

> Seriously, the Western Museum is a disgrace to Cincinnati, and the whole West. Such exhibitions are fit only for the barbarous ages, and it appears strange that the proprietor should find support or countenance in a city of the reputed high character of Cincinnati, for intelligence, refinement and morality.

As if responding to this challenge from a sister city, the genteel and the respectable reasserted themselves in the fall of 1838 when the control of the Western Museum passed out of Dorfeuille’s hands. The *Cincinnati Chronicle* predicted the removal of the “horrors” assembled to attract the “groundlings” and expressed the hope that the Museum might once again become a center of “fashionable recreation and pleasant instruction.”

75. *CCLG*, Mar. 18, Apr. 4, 1829; Feb. 27, 1830.
76. *LHCG*, June 22, 1827.
Mrs. Trollope found "Dorfeuille's Hell" amusing, but little else in this mercantile-ridden community pleased her. In her book she described Cincinnati society as boorish, grandiose, and monotonous. The women seemed to her ignorant and prudish and dominated alike by their husbands and their ministers. The gentlemen ate rapidly and silently, congregated among themselves, spat, discussed the price of produce, and spat again. She made the Cincinnatians out to be a gloomy people who avoided the elegant social pastimes she had always been accustomed to in Europe. There were no dinner parties, she complained, no public gardens, no fashionable resorts, and few public balls. Theaters were poorly attended. She professed to be delighted when she left "this triste little town."

One can never be quite sure to what group or class Mrs. Trollope is referring in her amusing discussions of Cincinnati manners and customs, nor can one be certain when she is recording what she actually observed or when her anti-American bias carries her to the realms of fancy. Much of what she says is certainly true. There is no reason to suppose that she exaggerated the brashness and vulgarity of the merchants, tradesmen, and mechanics with whom she conversed. Other visitors had commented on the deficiencies of Cincinnati's society with equal candor; local critics had lamented its absence of refinement and its gross utilitarianism. But in her zeal to discredit this city of hog merchants and peasants, she made some ridiculous generalizations, as Flint pointed out, and clearly showed that her knowledge of Cincinnati society was not complete.

Admittedly she left the city several years before its social heyday, but even between 1828 and 1830, the "first society" was not so gauche or provincial as Mrs. Trollope described it. No one invited her to a dinner party, so she concluded none was ever given. She never heard a concert, but musical societies had been in existence many years before her arrival. From the letters of the period we know that there was much gaiety in the households of the well-established citizens; newcomers to the city who gained an entrée into the charmed circle of the Burnets, Longworths, and Findlays did not complain of dullness.

Nevertheless, we should not be surprised that a cultivated European, and a rather eccentric one, saw nothing attractive and glamorous about this commercial community of the West. Mrs. Trollope had interpreted the fabulous reports of Cincinnati's beauty and splendor much too literally. She found a modest little town of brick and mortar where she expected at least a modicum of grandeur. She had heard Americans extol Cincinnati as the
“wonder of the West,” the “infant Hercules,” the “prophet’s gourd of magic growth”; nothing about this badly drained, miasmic, ugly little city (“about the size of Salisbury”) suggested a bustling metropolis. She had only contempt for the education, politics, religion, amusements, and manners of its citizens.

Her book, shrewd and discerning as it frequently is, can be dismissed, finally, as simply an amusingly prejudiced impression of western urban society by a talented, opinionated, and unphilosophical Englishwoman. Had she probed beneath the surface phenomena of Cincinnati society, she might have detected faults more worthy of her acid detractions than tobacco chewing and utilitarianism. Harriet Martineau, who portrayed society and manners in Cincinnati with far greater sympathy, at the same time made more damaging judgments about the less-obvious imperfections of the Queen City.