



CHAPTER V

ASIDE from the effort to keep the club rooms for the exclusive use of its members and their non-resident male guests, as related in the last chapter, the season of 1877-1878 was marked by few incidents out of the ordinary. The meetings were very well attended, and, on those devoted to business, the discussions, which were always good-natured, were made highly enjoyable by the witty sallies for which they gave opportunities that some of the members were ever quick to seize. In particular Edward Mason and his brother Alfred, or Fred as we familiarly called him, James Norton, Henry Huntington, Brooke Herford, and Dr. Charles Gilman Smith were always keenly alert, and their clever bons mots added much gayety to sessions that might otherwise have been somewhat dull and uninteresting, for in those days it will be remembered, the fourth Monday evening of each month was set aside for the business of the club, and the eating of a collation—no literary exercises being scheduled.

On the other evenings the quality of the literary work was in the main excellent, and some of it extremely good. Even after the lapse of forty-six years, the writer still retains a vivid recollection of the effect upon the audience of the exquisitely delightful phrasing and telling comment that distinguished Major Huntington's essay entitled "A Predecessor of Tennyson." Almost equally electrifying was William Macdonell's paper on "Utilitari-

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anism." Macdonell was a young Englishman of marked literary ability. His clear grip upon his subject and his forceful and effective presentation of it and of its implications as they were then understood, made a most favorable impression upon all those who heard him.

Another paper read during that season also made a deep impression, though of another sort. In the memory of those who listened to it—of whom, besides myself, only Joseph Adams, Alfred Bishop Mason, and Clarence Burley are now living—it seems almost as fantastic as the preamble to the famous draft of the proposed constitution that we cannot think of without mirth. "The New Epic," however, for such was its title, was not mirth provoking. It was merely a feeble attempt at fine writing, and, unless my recollection is grievously at fault it lacked both coherency and lucidity. When it was read it aroused no sensation save weariness. The real sensation came a little later when the putative author was sued by a young man—a former clerk in his law office—for his compensation for helping to write it! Whether he won his suit I do not know, but the defendant was never afterward asked to write another paper for the club. This incident, it should be said, has no parallel in our history.

At the annual election on June 10, 1878, Edward Gay Mason was chosen president for the ensuing season. His inaugural address delivered at the annual dinner on the 24th of the same month is a masterpiece, from which, if only to show the charm of his style and the appropriateness of his subject matter, I cannot forbear somewhat extended quotation. It ought, indeed, to be printed in full. Premising that it might be suitable to the occasion to

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dwell for awhile upon the history of other literary clubs, "about which cluster such memories as we would like our own to be," he spoke first of reputed clubs of high antiquity, then turned to the parent of all true literary clubs, that which met at the Mermaid Tavern in the days of good Queen Bess, a "goodlie companie" in which he said, "the idea of an association of authors and men of literary taste, of lovers of books and of good fellowship was perfected and left as an example for those who came after."

Then with a passing reference to the famous Kit Kat Club where Addison and Dick Steele and Congreve, and George the First's witty physician Sir Samuel Garth were wont to disport themselves; and telling an entertaining anecdote about the Beef Steak Club of the Georgian era, he proceeded to give a more extended account of the most celebrated of all literary clubs, the one founded in 1764 by Sir Joshua Reynolds, the original title of which we have adopted with only the addition of the word "Chicago."

"First known"—I now quote Mr. Mason's words—"simply as 'The Club' or 'The Turk's Head Club,' from the tavern in which it had its Monday evening meetings; at David Garrick's funeral it took the name of 'The Literary Club.' Goldsmith had not published his more important works when he was admitted as the friend of Johnson. He came unwillingly and felt that he had sacrificed something for the sake of good company, because, he said, it shut him out of several places where he used to play the fool very agreeably. This diversion, however, was still afforded him, as he soon came to entertain and astonish the Literary Club with his favorite song about

MASON'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

an old woman tossed in a blanket seventeen times higher than the moon. It was of this club that Garrick briskly said, 'I like it much, I think I shall be of you,' and Johnson growled in reply, 'He'll be of us! How does he know we will *permit* him?' and it was long before he would let his little David in. Here too the old lexicographer coined those useful words 'clubable' and 'unclubable,' and defined a club to be 'an assembly of good fellows meeting under certain conditions.' The members were proficient in the noble art of blackballing, which is another proof of *our* kinship with it. At one session Lord Chancellor Camden and the Bishop of Chester were both excluded. The Bishop of St. Asaph, who at the same time safely ran the gauntlet, might well say that 'the honor of being elected to this club is not inferior to that of being the representative of Westminster or Surrey.' The unlucky Goldsmith suggested an increase of their number because they had travelled over each others' minds, and was promptly silenced by Johnson's 'Sir! You have not travelled over *my* mind! I promise you!' How worthily the list was afterward filled, witness such members as Sir William Jones, Adam Smith, Sheridan, Canning, Hallam, and Macaulay. And when, in 1864, its centennial was celebrated, Dean Milman in the chair, there gathered to do it honor, those who bore the noblest and best names in England."

After quoting Macaulay's immortal description of the club, Mason went on to say: "It was fitting that Johnson should be in the front of this picture, for in that assemblage he overshadowed all the rest. And he is today the central figure in literary club life. Fitting too was it, that

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at the hundredth anniversary of this famous association, its ancient name should be exchanged for that of Johnson, by which it is still known. In its long history we may find much to admire and to imitate. In some matters we have already followed its example, in its exclusiveness, in its Monday evening meetings, in its first designation. And perhaps the time *may* come when it shall seem good to make it once more our exemplar—and change our name.”

The pertinency of much that Mason said in this sketch of the club of which Samuel Johnson was the most salient personality was due in part to the general recognition by his hearers of the difficulty of gaining admission to *our* club. The Bishop of St. Asaph's exclamation might well have been paraphrased by many of our members, so highly was the honor of being elected to it then regarded. And Dr. Johnson's comment upon Garrick's utterance brought to mind an incident that was still fresh in the memory of most of Mason's audience. Not long before, a gentleman who was well and favorably known to many of our members, though his name had not been presented as a candidate for admission, incautiously let it be known that he “intended to join The Chicago Literary Club.” It is perhaps needless to add that he didn't. Indeed, it may be doubted whether there was any man living so distinguished that he would have had any chance of being admitted had he made such a statement before he had been invited to join. And it was an unwritten rule that no one who declined to become a member after having been elected, should ever be given another opportunity.

During the season that came to an end with the annual

CONCERNING EARLY MEMBERS

dinner when Mr. Mason was inaugurated, only nine candidates successfully passed the ordeal of the ballot box. All of the nine became valued members of the club. Who among those that knew them can forget the dynamic personality of General William E. Strong; or the magnetic charm of the gifted but constitutionally weak and irresponsible yet altogether lovable Tom Grover; or the brilliant attainments and eminent clubableness of Melville Weston Fuller—Mel. Fuller he was to us before he became the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court? Who does not recall the solid worth of Charles Hitchcock and Edwin Holmes Sheldon, of Selim H. Peabody and Ephraim Allen Otis; the genial bearing of Lawrence Earle, of William G. McMillan as he was during the first years of his membership, and of Colonel Augustus Jacobson?

During the next year, that of Mr. Mason's administration, sixteen were admitted. Some of them never became closely identified with the club, but among those who did there were several whose names evoke precious memories. William Kelly Ackerman and William LeBaron Jenney, both active members for many years, made the mistake of resigning when untoward circumstances prevented them from coming to the meetings so frequently as had been their habit; but Albert A. Sprague and Eliphalet W. Blatchford, though they seldom found it possible to attend, never flagged in their devotion so long as they lived. Equally faithful were Azel F. Hatch and the Rev. Dr. Galusha Anderson, both familiar and welcome figures at our Monday evening gatherings. So also, were Frederick Wilcox Clarke and the Rev. Arthur Little, and

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sorry we were when they were called away to the East. Neither one of them ever forgot the pleasant companionship they found at our meetings. Often have I heard them, and other non-resident members as well, say this was the thing they most regretted and most deeply missed in leaving our city. Without doubt it is this feeling that has kept so many of our members loyal throughout the passing years.

The season of 1878-1879 was not an eventful one. It was chiefly notable for the excellence of the papers read at the meetings, and for the steady growth of the club feeling and of the spirit of fellowship among the members. Toward the end of the year we were greatly grieved by the death of William Macdonell which we all felt was a great loss to the club. The annual dinner was to have been held on the fourth Monday in June, but, as Dr. William Frederick Poole, the president-elect, had, before he was nominated for the office, engaged to deliver an address in Boston on that date, his inaugural was postponed until the first meeting in the autumn. The advantages of having it at the beginning instead of at the end of the season were so obvious that once the change was made it established a precedent from which we have not since departed.

Dr. Poole had often urged that it is a great mistake to read an address, since one can keep in touch with his audience much better if he merely talks without manuscript or notes. His inaugural, when he was to speak of the club itself to the members who formed a group of his closest friends, seemed a fitting time to put his views to a practical test. But, knowing the difficulty of pleasing such

DR. POOLE'S INAUGURAL

a critical audience unless every word were carefully weighed, every phrase neatly turned, and his thoughts arranged in orderly sequence, he wrote his address and committed it to memory. When the dinner was over and he rose to deliver his message he felt well prepared. But he had progressed only a little way when his mind suddenly became a blank, and, after vainly trying during a few *very* protracted and painful minutes to remember anything he intended saying, he had to sit down. Fortunately he had brought his manuscript with him, so the interruption was not of long duration; but it greatly amused his fellow members that this experience should come to such an old campaigner as Dr. Poole.

In March, 1880, we were deeply grieved by the death of a member who had won the affection of every one who knew him. Among all of the young men who had come to Chicago to make their homes in the city, few if any, had attracted more favorable attention in a few years than had Cecil Barnes. This was not because of prominence in business, for he was not what is ordinarily known as a business man. After a brilliant record in college he came here and established a select school for boys at Chicago Avenue and North State Street. He was a born teacher and the community as well as the club suffered a great loss when he was stricken down. His manly bearing and the inflexible strength of his character, combined with his unusually winning personality, highly cultivated mind, and sensitive appreciation of all that is finest and best in literature, art, and every form of human endeavor, made a deep impression upon all who came in contact with him.

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Perhaps the most memorable event during the year of Dr. Poole's administration was the ladies' night on March 30, 1880, when Edward Mason waived his objection to the feminine invasion of the sacred precincts of the club rooms and read his now widely-known historical paper on "Old Fort Chartres." The rooms were specially dressed up for the occasion and upon the walls a loan collection of paintings and engravings by distinguished artists was hung. This meeting and the four succeeding ones were held upon Tuesday evenings. The change was made because of the great annoyance caused by the marching and countermarching of the members of St. Bernard Commandery A. F. & A. M. whose drill hall was on the floor above us, directly over our rooms. Earlier in our tenancy we had not been troubled, probably because the drilling was not done on Monday evenings. But now the drill corps was making a great effort to be so well trained that it might capture the first prize in a forthcoming contest with other commanderies. Except for the ladies' night when seventy-five members and as many guests were present, the change to Tuesday evenings for our meetings did not prove a happy one. The attendance dropped to less than a third of the usual number despite the fact that the essayists were popular favorites. It was decided therefore to change back to Monday evenings. As our lease had already been renewed for another year it was necessary to put up with the infliction during the next season, but to bear with it longer than that was quite out of the question. Accordingly, when the annual election had been held, the new committee on rooms and finance, of which Bryan Lathrop was made the chairman, was

BROOKE HERFORD'S INAUGURAL

charged with the duty of finding more suitable quarters for our occupancy a year later. At this election the Rev. Brooke Herford was chosen to be the president, and the writer of this chronicle was constituted the recording secretary and treasurer.

The opening paragraphs of Mr. Herford's discourse will serve in a way to put before the present-day members one of the brightest and most entertaining men among all the "goodlie companie" of those whose names fill our rolls. Dr. Hyde's affectionate tribute to him as "that prince of all club-presidents, our well-beloved Brooke Herford," was well deserved.

"Gentlemen of the Literary Club," he said, "I welcome you back tonight to these classic halls, to our literary pleasures, and to our simple repasts. I am proud that it falls to me to give you this welcome. We gather here for many pleasant hours when wit shall season wisdom. And why not? The pilgrims to Canterbury beguiled the way with jests and tales. The pilgrims to Jerusalem are said to have 'boiled their peas.' And pilgrims to New England, with a subtle historical parallelism, 'baked their beans'; yet they never lost sight of life's serious end; and so I take it there is always an earnest purpose at the heart even of our lightest moods."

His second paragraph gives a picture of the Chicago of forty-four years ago as it appeared to a cultured Englishman.

"There is something peculiarly interesting in the work of a literary club in a busy city like this. Leisure may almost be said to be one of the 'lost arts' in America. If it is *ever* to be recovered, it will not be by scolding at men's

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absorption in business but by interesting them in something higher. Everything which disciplines the intellect, everything which quickens the imagination, everything which deepens and widens men's interest in this great world, is helping to mould into nobler caliber the 'coming race' of the West. At present this life is raw and bare. Newspapers diffuse a certain conventional readiness, but with little actual culture. Said a friend to one of our Chicago belles, just returned from Rome and talking glibly about Italian art, 'Did you see anything of the old masters?' 'O yes,' was the reply, 'and I took lessons from one of them!'"

This anecdote is not exactly new today, but it was then. From the earliest days of the club it was an unwritten law that whatever degree of sobriety should mark the papers read at ordinary meetings, the annual and other dinners should largely be given over to fun. The memorable dinner, only four days later than the annual reunion when Mr. Herford was inaugurated, was no exception, though, as the occasion demanded, the addresses were not all facetious. In the autumn of 1880, Thomas Hughes, who was deeply interested in an English settlement at Rugby, Tennessee, was making his second visit to the United States. Learning that he would be in Chicago for a few days, the club invited him to dine with its members at the Grand Pacific Hotel on the evening of Monday, October 8, and the invitation was accepted. The dinner was one of the notable events in the club's history. Seventy-seven members gathered to do honor to the distinguished author. President Herford made a short opening speech and was followed by Edward Mason—but let me quote the ac-

DINNER TO THOMAS HUGHES

count of his speech given by Dr. Hyde in a paper he read when we celebrated our twenty-fifth anniversary in 1899.

"I thought of one of our famous dinners year before last when I stood in the quaint old church in Chester, before the modest brass that commemorates the virtues of Thomas Hughes. As I read the inscription my thoughts reverted to the dinner we gave him when he was in our city, and to Brooke Herford who presided on that occasion with so much grace and dignity, and to Ned Mason who made the address of welcome with his usual happy effect. As the names of the boys who figure in 'Tom Brown at Rugby' rolled from his tongue with surprising glibness, one would have thought he had been playing football with them during the week preceding, but many of us believe he had been sitting up half the night before and cramming on them. In fact their recital quite took away Mr. Hughes' breath. 'Gentlemen,' he said when he arose, his fresh English face beaming with pleasure, while his hand played incessantly with the napkin on the table before him, as if from it he would gather the strength to overbear his modesty, 'Gentlemen, I confess to you that I had quite forgotten the names that have been recalled to me in the language of the gentleman who has just welcomed me to your hospitality.'"

At the October business meeting Mr. Lathrop reported that arrangements had been made to lease rooms for the club on the fourth floor of Portland Block, southeast corner of Dearborn and Washington streets, for a term of five years from May 1, 1881, and that with the consent of the owners of the building, the rooms would be connected by dumb waiter with Kinsley's restaurant in the building

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adjoining at the east. A more favorable location could not have been selected. As the new quarters involved the payment of a two thousand dollars rental, or just about double the cost of occupying the rooms in the American Express Company building, a sixty per cent increase in the dues became necessary and they were accordingly raised from fifteen dollars a year to twenty-four. But even after the advance was made they cannot be said to have been high.

As Dr. Hyde pointed out in the paper from which several quotations have already been made, "Up to the time when Mr. Herford became our president it had been a sort of fad for members to write, not of what they knew most, but rather of some surprising bit of work which they had done in a quiet way outside of their daily vocations. The ideal of those days, I am quite sure, was the dropping of 'shop' when inside of the club walls. Thus a judge of one of our courts wrote upon 'The Resurrection'; a clergyman who had never known much of bodily suffering wrote about 'Physical Pain'; a nineteenth-century lawyer wrote about 'American Antiquities,' and only Edward Waters, who had impulses in that direction, wrote on 'The Pottery of the Renaissance,' thereby securing for himself the soubriquet of 'Dish-Waters.' Brooke Herford, however, gave the club a turn in quite another direction when he asked every man to write on the work in which he was most busily engaged. From that time on, members have felt free to write on the subjects that chiefly interested them."

Apropos of this, it is worthy of note that the good doctor, though he took Mr. Herford's prescription once,

NOTABLE PAPERS

and brought forth a paper on "National Traits in Medicine," always thereafter carefully avoided another dose. That the club was a gainer can hardly be doubted, since instead of the brilliant historical essays, distinguished by imaginative insight, felicitous phrasing, and effective presentation of facts, with which he so often delighted us, it is conceivable that we might have been beguiled into listening to a paper—I am tempted to say a superficial paper but, having regard for the doctor's deservedly high professional reputation, I refrain—appropriately entitled "Hyde on the Skin."

As a veracious historian I must chronicle that despite Mr. Herford's urging there was little shop-talk during his administration. There was, however, an abundant literary feast. Conspicuous among the papers read during the year was one by Henry T. Steele entitled "The Deformed Spelling," a witty and telling assault upon the departures from orthodox English orthography that had then begun to appear and obtain currency, which kept us laughing and applauding from the opening sentence until the very end. Had we then established the custom of printing club papers it is highly probable that this would have been one of those selected.

Other papers of this year that attracted much attention at the time they were read, were Judge Charles B. Lawrence's essay on "Gouverneur Morris," and Alfred Bishop Mason's "A Man and his Money; a Moral Novellette." Encouraged by its reception in the club, Mason offered his paper to "the squeamish Atlantic Monthly" as Major Huntington called it. Mr. Howells who was then the editor declined it with thanks. Happening to meet him

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not long after, Huntington asked how he happened to refuse such a moral production. "It was too moral," was the response.

As the spring of 1881 drew near the preparations for the May moving kept Mr. Lathrop and his associates on the rooms and finance committee very busy. To have the new quarters ready for occupancy with as little delay as possible after taking possession required careful planning. Because of the large size of two of the rooms carpets for them had to be woven to order and ordered a long while in advance to get the color we wanted. Draperies for the windows and some doorways also had to be in readiness to put up when we moved in. For the reading room a large round table was specially designed and built. It had a circumvallation of triangular box-like receptacles just beneath the top, to store back numbers of periodicals. This table was a prominent feature in our rooms until the year 1904. When the first of May came around it was necessary to omit one meeting, but by the end of another week the walls of the Portland Block rooms had been tastefully papered, the carpets had been laid, the draperies hung, and the furniture put in place, and on the evening of Monday, May 9, fifty-three members gathered to survey our new home and to listen to a paper on "Army Experiences" by General Martin D Hardin.

In these very pleasant, centrally located and commodious rooms the club remained for five years, until the expiration of its lease, and it vacated them with regret, but was obliged to leave as the building had been sold and the new owner was waiting for us to move out so that he might remodel the story we occupied and add two

THE ROOMS IN PORTLAND BLOCK

more above it. The assembly room was at the east side and extended through it from north to south. It was lighted by a skylight and by two windows at the north end. The platform was placed at the north end. Adjoining this room to the west on the Washington Street side was an ample coat room. Beyond that was a large supper room, with storage closets and a pantry. Further along in the northwest corner of the building was the large reading room. This extended about half way down the Dearborn Street front. Except for three small offices in the southwest corner, we occupied the entire floor, including the corridor along the central light shaft.