



CHAPTER VIII

THE season of 1886-1887, when our meetings were held at Kinsley's or at the Union League Club, was marked by few noteworthy events. The honor of the presidency for that season had been bestowed upon General Alexander C. McClurg. The choice was a most fitting one. Among all of our number there was no one who better merited the distinction. In the best sense of the phrase he was a polished gentleman. He was dignified in his bearing, loyal, modest, unassuming, and always courteous in his manner; upright in thought, word, and deed, loyal to his friends of whom he had a host, and deeply attached to the club of which he was one of the oldest members, having been elected at its first regular meeting, on March 31, 1874. His military record in the Civil War had been a brilliant one and had gained for him the brevets of colonel for "efficient and meritorious services" and of brigadier general "for gallant and meritorious services during the war." Though small in stature and never physically strong, he always "looked the soldier," and Generals Sherman, Thomas, Mitchell and Baird all advised him to make arms his profession. Disregarding this, when the war was over he returned to Chicago where he became the leading bookseller and publisher, and as such was a prominent figure in the intellectual life of the city. What the club meant to him is well shown by a few paragraphs which I quote from his inaugural address as president.

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After thanking the members for the honor that had been conferred upon him he said: "Not easily could any compliment come to me which I should appreciate more highly. It is here in this club that my best thoughts and sympathies are drawn out; and here my best and most trusted friends are found. While our club is not yet, perhaps, as no other club has ever been, the *ideal* club, it is, I believe, heading fairly and strongly in the right direction.

"In no age of the world and in no city have those who loved books and letters, who had some desire to turn to 'plain living and thinking,' who would at least in some degree 'live in the spirit'—in no age and in no country have these been in the majority; they have ever been the remnant; and it is not, therefore, a special condemnation of Chicago that most of our citizens are occupied with other thoughts and pursue other ends.

"The falser lights of wealth, power, and display are perhaps not more eagerly pursued here than they have been elsewhere, but they are far too eagerly pursued, and it is well for all of us that we have one organized band whose object it is to foster the higher and better side of our everyday life—one club which, without regard to wealth, or so-called social standing, seeks for its membership men of intellectual and moral culture—one place where we are sure to meet others who sympathize with our best impulses and our best aspirations; and where by association and companionship these impulses and aspirations may be cherished and strengthened."

The meetings held during General McClurg's term of office were on the whole well attended, but the lack of

TWO NOTABLE MEETINGS

what I may call a home atmosphere was felt by us all, and toward the end of the season the letting down in enthusiasm began to be quite apparent. Two only of the meetings of this season call for special mention in this chronicle. On November 26, 1886, Frederic W. Root read a paper entitled "An American Basis of Musical Criticism." This was the first of his remarkable and exceptionally clever expositions of musical expression and structure, enlivened by deft touches of humor and made clear by instrumental and vocal illustration so simplified as to be readily grasped by any ordinarily intelligent person however lacking in knowledge of musical composition. The forty-seven members who listened to the paper were greatly delighted by it and were not backward in extolling it to others. Thenceforward Mr. Root's popularity among us as an entertainer was assured, and we were always happy when he could be persuaded to take a place upon the programme.

At the ladies' night meeting, held on January 31, 1887, one hundred members accompanied by one hundred and seventeen lady guests assembled to listen to a paper by James Norton. The fame of his flashing wit made every one of his auditors eagerly expectant and the title of his paper, "The Rise and Fall of the Devil," suggested untold possibilities of amusingly whimsical treatment. But Norton did not want to be known merely as a humorist. His paper was a minute and careful study of the demon myth in its various manifestations—a scholarly performance entitled to serious consideration. Its merit was appreciated. Nevertheless there was disappointment. Both members and guests had expected to hear something quite different. This was the only meeting which one of

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our members who joined the club in 1876 ever attended during the entire period of thirty-nine years when he was on the resident list. I have sometimes wondered whether he would have been tempted to favor us with his presence at other meetings had Norton diverted us on this occasion with the pungent wit of which he was so capable.

At the business meeting held on June 14, 1886, the executive committee was instructed to take steps to have the club incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois providing for the incorporation of societies not for profit. This instruction was carried out with as little delay as possible. The certificate of incorporation was issued by the secretary of state on July 10, 1886, and on August 3 it was duly recorded in the office of the recorder of Cook County. At the meeting held on March 28, 1887, the corporate organization was completed by the election of all the members of the several classes in the voluntary association, to full membership in corresponding classes in the corporation of the same name and a code of by-laws was adopted. The annual dues were raised to thirty dollars and it was provided that new members should pay an entrance fee of twenty-five dollars. Then, as Bryan Lathrop, the chairman of the committee of rooms and finance, had reported that approximately five thousand dollars would be required to pay for the furnishing and fitting up of the new rooms in the Art Institute Building, the directors were authorized to borrow that sum upon bonds to be issued by the club, to bear six per cent interest and to run for ten years, but to be subject to call after one year. These bonds were

DR. NOYES ELECTED PRESIDENT

readily placed with members of the club and were all redeemed or presented to the club by the holders before their maturity.

The season ended with the meeting held on June 13, 1887, when the Rev. George Clement Noyes, D.D., was elected president for the ensuing year. Fifteen members were admitted during the season, among them Arthur Dana Wheeler and Pliny Bent Smith who for twenty-five years thereafter belonged to the little coterie of faithful ones who never missed a meeting if they could help it. And greatly to our grief one of our early members, George Clinton Clarke, was taken from us by death after a protracted illness.

During the summer of 1887 the rooms in the Art Institute Building were made ready for occupancy and the first meeting held in them was the annual reunion and dinner, on October 10. The number of members, one hundred and fifteen, who attended this meeting, is the largest in the history of the club. It is to be regretted that no copy of President Noyes' inaugural address has been preserved, either in the club's archives or upon its records. Few of the men whom we have admitted to our circle have taken such firm hold upon the affection and esteem of their fellow members in such a short time as did Dr. Noyes. As I try to call him up before my retrospective vision, the salient traits that seem to stand forth are his bigness of mind and heart, his freedom from bias and from everything petty or mean, but above all his magnetic personality, his unfailing good nature and the quick and intelligent sympathy that enabled him to comprehend and enter into other people's point of view and to

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share their feelings. Such a man could not help making a deep and abiding impression upon all who were privileged to know him and to realize the truth and sincerity that were the foundations of his character.

The season of 1887-1888 when Dr. Noyes presided at our meetings is notable for the marked renewal of interest in the club that was manifested. In point of the attendance it was the banner year of the first fifty of the club's history. The average number of members present at each of the thirty-five meetings was sixty. As the number of resident members on the roll at the close of the season was two hundred and thirteen, and the rooms were in a location far less conveniently accessible than it is today, the average for meetings held as often as one every week during eight months of the year is certainly remarkable. Without doubt the attractiveness of the new rooms and the fact that we had been without a home for seventeen months did much to stimulate the attendance. A description of the rooms that was printed in one of our evening newspapers on the day after we took possession will, I think, be found entertaining.

"The Chicago Literary Society opened its new rooms last night with a reception." This sentence, it will be noted, contains two errors. "The rooms are situated in the third story of the Art Institute Building on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Van Buren Street and are marvels of beauty and tastefulness. They occupy the whole of the third floor. At the right as one enters the hallway is situated the dining room, and on the left the directors' room. The dining room is a remarkably handsome one, the decorations being terra-cotta hand-painted. The floor

A NEWSPAPER "WRITE-UP"

is of hardwood. At the end of the hall is the large reception room, elegantly furnished and finished, and off of that opens the assembly room which is the largest of all and was last night used as a banquet hall. The reception room is light gray and is also hand-painted. About two hundred persons were in attendance last evening and" (note this) "*the principal feature of the program was the banquet.*"

The reporter who produced this masterpiece of misstatement must have written it after interviewing the genial colored man who had been employed to take care of the rooms, and who probably permitted him to make a hasty inspection of the premises when no members were present. Then as now the club used every possible effort to keep out of the newspapers. As a rule it has been successful, but some "write-ups" could not be avoided. The mistakes in the notice from which the quotations have been made are merely laughable.

Let me now tell what the rooms were really like. The doorway through which the rooms were entered from the elevator hall opened upon a corridor running north and south. At the left was a coat room, and beyond that a small committee room. At the right was the supper room. This was situated on the Michigan Avenue front of the building. Its axis was north and south. At the south end a storage room and serving pantry were partitioned off, and at the north end there was another storage closet, and at its right, a doorway that led into the reading room, a spacious apartment on the Van Buren Street front, extending from the Michigan Avenue corner west to where it opened through a wide portal into the commodious assembly hall. The latter room extended across the

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west end of the building, had a large stone fire-place in the middle of the west wall, and at the south end of the east wall a door opening into the committee room. The reader's platform was usually placed against the south wall. All of the rooms were lofty and were well ventilated. They were very simply decorated. The walls of the dining room were tinted a dull Venetian red, with a slight stenciled border in a darker tone of the same. That was what the reporter called "terra-cotta hand-painted."

At its north end the entrance corridor opened into the reading room near its west end. The carpets and window curtains in this room were dark red. The walls were tinted a neutral gray. Besides the large round table which was placed near the eastern end of the room and covered with periodicals, there was a plentiful supply of comfortable chairs and cushioned benches attached to the north and west walls. The cushions for these benches were covered with very dark green corduroy. The bench on the north wall directly opposite the doorway from the corridor was a favorite gathering place for a group of the regular attendants. Of these George Howland was usually the first to arrive. As a rule he would soon be joined by Henry T. Steele, Samuel Bliss, Philander Prudden, Pliny Smith, Homer N. Hibbard, George P. Welles, and others until so many came that they separated into several smaller groups. As I bring the scene before my mind's eye, I seem to see Edward Mason saunter in. Then Colonel Huntington W. Jackson comes into sight, erect in bearing, quickly followed by vivacious Major Joseph Kirkland and the tall spare figure of James L. High. Before they have greeted the first comers I hear the

A DISTINGUISHED COMPANY

incisive tones of Dr. Nevins Hyde's pleasantly resonant voice as he enters, talking to Bishop Cheney who walks beside him. Dr. Hosmer A. Johnson and William K. Ackerman are only a few feet behind them. Horatio Wait, Dr. William F. Poole and Henry D. Lloyd are the next comers; then General McClurg, Franklin MacVeagh, Norman Williams, Franklin Head, Bryan Lathrop, David Swing, James Norton, President Noyes, and James A. Hunt arrive together. For a minute or two no one else appears. Then the portly figure of John Crerar is seen as he reaches the doorway and pauses for a moment, his broad countenance overspread by a smile as he greets the assembled members, and steps forward to drop into a chair, giving the lapel of his coat as he does so a characteristic flip that spreads it wide and throws it partly across his left shoulder. In quick succession other well-known figures now stream in. William Eliot Furness, Dr. Charles Gordon Fuller, and Melville W. Fuller are in the van. Then I see Dr. Clinton Locke and hear his hearty laugh, then Frank Gilbert, Clarence Burley, Rev. Dr. Arthur Little, Eliphalet W. Blatchford, Judge Brown, Walter Larned, John W. Root, Frederick Greeley, Rev. J. Coleman Adams, Dr. Emil G. Hirsch, Lewis H. and Henry Sherman Boutell, William H. Ray, Charles L. Hutchinson and Charles S. Holt. A few minutes later Elbridge Keith, Moses Scudder, Daniel Goodwin, Norman Fay and Dr. Charles Gilman Smith come, followed by others whom I fail to note, for the president is pounding his gavel as a signal for us to file into the assembly room where a literary feast awaits us, for tonight we are to have the pleasure of listening to a delectable paper

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by Professor Swing read as only he can read, quietly, slowly, and with such carefully modulated cadence that the beauty of every word and every incisive phrase will be fully brought out.

Although many excellent papers were read during this season, only a few of the meetings need be singled out for special mention. Three ladies' night meetings were held. At the first of them David Swing read a paper on "The Greek Literature"; at the second Edward G. Mason discoursed upon "Two Men of Letters: Edmund Spenser and Sir Walter Raleigh"; at the third one hundred and six members and about a hundred and fifty guests listened to a brilliant paper on "Jack Cade" by Melville W. Fuller, which James Norton facetiously referred to afterward as "one of our little compositions." Besides these papers several others attracted so much attention when they were read that it may not be amiss to recall them to memory. James Norton's "Some Proposed Rules for the Regulation of Story-tellers" scored such a hit that it is regrettable that it was not included in the memorial volume of his "Addresses and Fragments in Prose and Verse" published shortly after his death in 1896. Those of us who heard "The Philosophy of Fashion" as expounded by Dr. Emil Hirsch, or "A Business View of Classical Studies" by Franklin MacVeagh, "Broad Art Criticism" by John W. Root, or Dr. Hyde's "Some Consequences of Eating Historical Strawberries" will readily recall the reception they received.

In connection with a paper on "The Old Masters of Japan" read on January 16, 1888, by the writer of this history, an exhibition of paintings by eminent Japanese

ANOTHER "WRITE-UP"

artists of the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries was made in the club rooms and was the first exhibition of such paintings ever held in America. Through the courtesy of the well-known connoisseur Tadamasa Hayashi, then a resident of Paris, who was fortuitously in Chicago at the time, the showing was a notable one. He attended the meeting as the writer's guest and kindly lent for the exhibition pictures by Sesshū, Kano Masanobu, Kano Motonobu, Kano Eitoku, and other renowned masters. But, as he arrived in the city only two days before the meeting, descriptions of these could not be included in the catalogue which had already been printed.

At the meeting held on the following Monday Murry Nelson led a Conversation on "The Gangs in Politics." The next morning the members were greatly surprised to find in one of the columns of *The Tribune* the heading "Murry Nelson on 'Gangs in Politics,'" and the sub-heading, "A Discussion of the Subject by the Chicago Literary Club." This was followed by a fairly good summary of Mr. Nelson's remarks, which it was said "were chiefly confined to the Republican party as he said he knew more about Republican gangs than he did of those in the Democratic party." And the article closed with the statement that "the subject was fully discussed by members present who seemed to agree generally with Mr. Nelson's presentment of the case." As no reporter had attended the meeting, this notice caused much speculation and adverse comment in the club, and at the next meeting a resolution proposed by Henry D. Lloyd, then or recently one of the editors of *The Tribune*, was adopted, stating

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"that it is the sense of the club that the members be cautioned not to communicate its proceedings to the press." For a time, however, the city editors of several newspapers made attempts to have our proceedings reported, and we frequently had to turn from our doors reporters who had been detailed to attend our meetings.

A few months later David Swing contributed an article on "Literary Clubs" to one of our dailies. In it he said there were "probably fifty of these societies" in Chicago, and he described several of them, but his reference to our organization was very brief—only this: "In importance and dignity the Chicago Literary Club and the Fortnightly stand at the head of the invisible procession—the latter being a woman's society." The author of the article on the "Chicago Literary Club: an Institution that Enrolls a Large Number of Brilliant Writers," that was printed in The Chicago Evening Journal on Saturday, October 27, 1888, was not named, but it is generally understood that it was written by Miss Caroline Kirkland. Much of the information given in the two and a quarter columns that it filled must have been supplied by some of our members. It was quite free from anything objectionable, and was one of a series of articles on prominent Chicago clubs.

In November, 1887, we were saddened by the death of James St. Clair Boal; and in January, 1888, by that of General John Leverett Thompson. Both of them were prominent members, and men of the highest type, personally and professionally. By his agreeable manner and sincerity Boal has won many warm friendships among his fellow members. Thompson's law practice was too

A SUCCESSFUL SEASON

engrossing to permit him to come to our meetings as often as he wished, but he was fond of the club and he came when he could. He was an eminent lawyer and a man of fine literary taste. In the Civil War he had distinguished himself and won merited honor. I cannot let this mention of him pass without recounting a remarkable incident of his military career in which he displayed intrepid bravery and resourcefulness. Wishing to gain a better view of the enemy's line he ventured into a little outlying wood and came upon a group of four confederate soldiers, two of whom were mounted. The mounted men called upon him to surrender and asked him to hand over the handsome revolvers that he carried. Apparently complying, he drew both weapons, one in each hand, fired as he did so, dropping both men from their horses, then turning quickly he shot one of the infantry men, while the other fled.

Before the end of the season twenty names had been added to our membership. Of these new members six only, Rev. Dr. John H. Barrows, Edward I. Galvin, Rev. Dr. Frank W. Gunsaulus, George H. Holt, David B. Jones, and Rev. Theodore P. Prudden, ever became active participants in the club life. Viewed in retrospect our first season in the rooms in the Art Institute stands out as one of the most successful in our history. The revival of the club spirit was marked. It was a contagious enthusiasm that spread throughout our ranks; and, when in June adjournment was had until the autumn, there were few of our members who did not feel with greater intensity than before that nothing the city had to offer was more uplifting or better worth while than the fellowship of the Chicago Literary Club. There were then

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two hundred thirteen names on the resident list. And at the annual election held on June 18, James Lambert High was chosen president for the ensuing year.