CHAPTER II

AFTER seven preliminary meetings devoted to most careful consideration of the basic structure of the club, the first regular meeting of the club as such was held at the Sherman House on Monday evening May 4, 1874. It was attended by twenty-two members, none of whom is now living. Their names, however, mean much to those who remember Chicago as it was then and for some years after, and although fifty years have elapsed since the meeting was held, to many of our present members most of them are still much more than mere names. This is the list, in the order in which the names appear upon the record: Judge John A. Jameson, who, in the absence of President Collyer, occupied the chair; Dr. William F. Poole, then librarian of the Chicago Public Library and always one of the most clubable of men; Daniel L. Shorey, lawyer, public-spirited citizen, and apostle of literary culture; William E. Doggett, merchant and polished gentleman, deeply interested in everything making for the higher life; William M. R. French, then a landscape architect and then as now dear to the hearts of all who knew him; Horace W. S. Cleveland (Mr. French's senior partner), the distinguished landscape architect to whom the cities of Chicago and Minneapolis are indebted for the beautiful planning of their parks, a charming writer and one of the most gentle and lovable of men; John M. Binckley, a well-known lawyer, who had been assistant United States attorney general under President

Johnson; Thomas S. Chard, a business man of intellectual tastes who was a devoted member for nineteen years and whom we were sorry to lose when he resigned, as he did with much regret, because he was unable without resulting illness to attend meetings in rooms where there was much tobacco smoke; George Howland, of blessed memory, principal of the West Division High School, classical scholar and all-around good fellow; David Swing, eloquent preacher, man of letters, gifted and witty writer, and of such winning personality that no one who knew him can ever forget it or him; William Henry King, one of the most cultivated of Chicago's early citizens, whose genial manner made him a general favorite, but who was already feeling the weight of years which caused him to drop out of the club in 1880; Lyman Trumbull, distinguished United States senator and statesman; John Borden, lawyer of high standing; John V. LeMoyne, then one of Chicago's prominent citizens; John Wilkinson, hardware merchant but not so deeply immersed in business that he could neglect the intellectual life; Josiah L. Pickard, then superintendent of the Chicago schools, and later president of the Iowa State University; Rev. Simeon W. Gilbert, a man of the closet-student type as I recall him; Frederick B. Smith, then and for many years thereafter, of the firm of A. C. McClurg & Co., whom we all remember, as he lived until only a few years ago; Rev. Dr. Leander Trowbridge Chamberlain, a widely-known clergyman who was one of the most enthusiastic of the founders, and who, although he removed to Brooklyn two years later, continued to cherish the warmest interest in the club during all of the succeeding thirty-seven years of his life;

James L. High, whose attainments as a lawyer, whose worth as a man, whose gracious and kindly bearing are a part of the club's heritage of which we may well be proud; Dr. Hosmer A. Johnson, eminent physician, deeply loved and revered—a "world-wide man" as David Swing called him; and lastly, the secretary, Edward Gay Mason, lawyer—the brilliant and witty speaker and writer, who was one of the most conspicuous figures in the galaxy of notable men that constituted the club membership, and who was ever indefatigable in his efforts to make the club the center of the intellectual life of the city.

It was these men, and such as these, that gave the club the deep hold upon the affections of its members which it developed at once and has held for half a century.

At the first regular meeting a plan of literary exercises was reported and adopted, an amendment to the constitution was offered, and six candidates were elected members of the club after their qualifications had been duly discussed. Not until the next meeting which was held at the same place two weeks later was the first paper read. The author was the Rev. Leander T. Chamberlain and his subject was "Physical Pain; Its Nature and the Law of Its Distribution." Of the twenty-eight members who gathered to hear it read, fifteen had been present at the first regular meeting; the other thirteen were President Robert Collyer, William Hull Clarke, Judge Henry Booth, Henry W. Bishop, Dr. Edmund Andrews, Rabbi Bernhard Felsenthal, Rabbi Kaufman Kohler, William Eliot Furness, Samuel S. Greeley, Joseph E. Lockwood, Franklin MacVeagh, Rev. Minot J. Savage, and Edward Osgood Brown.

It is a curious circumstance that, although the avowed purpose of the club was the promotion of literary and æsthetic culture, the first paper read before it should have been upon a topic neither literary nor æsthetic. Without doubt the paper that was read was the only one available upon short notice, and the Committee on Exercises had only "Hobson's choice" in the matter. Nevertheless at the outset, a precedent was established of catholicity in the choice of subject, thus broadening the scope of the club and making it a forum for the expression of views upon any subject whatsoever. This was quickly interpreted to signify also that one need not necessarily be a literary man in the narrow sense of the term, to be qualified for membership. But it may be noted in passing that while the rules from the very beginning left the essayist free to select his own subject and to express any opinion thereon that he may wish, no member is under compulsion to listen to any paper that he does not find interesting. This, however should not be construed as an argument for abstention from meetings because the topic announced does not make an insistent appeal. The members who have formed the habit of regular attendance soon discover that any subject can be made interesting if presented in an effective way; and, besides, the paper is not the only thing, as we all know. Realization of this soon found expression in an amendment to the constitution in which the object of the club was declared to be social, as well as literary and æsthetic culture. After all what is more precious in this world than the fellowship of men of intellectual tastes? And does it not add to the delight of coming together that they should have different interests and thus

be able to present fresh thoughts and to divert each others' minds from their accustomed grooves?

Two more meetings brought the first short season to an end. At the first of these—the third of the club's regular meetings—held on June 1, 1874, the officers and committees for the season of 1874–1875 were elected. The other meeting was held at the Sherman House on June 15, 1874, and was the first annual dinner. How many members gathered does not appear of record. The custom of excluding reporters from the club meetings had not then been established, so the secretary adopted the long account, including the text of President Robert Collyer's inaugural address, which appeared next day in one of the newspapers, and, pasting the clippings upon the pages of the record book, signed it as the official record of the meeting. I cannot think, however, that in doing this he meant to imply that he was the author of the following choice paragraphs which I venture to transcribe for the delectation of the club members:

"The Chicago Literary Club which began its life several weeks ago, and numbers among its membership the most notable scholars, wits and poets we have among us, by last evening came to the time when it seemed proper to inaugurate its serious labors by a social meeting in which speeches should be made, a feast should be eaten, and a time of good fellowship generally be had. For this purpose the Society met at the Sherman House, where a banquet was laid (*sic*) in the ladies' ordinary.

"At 8 o'clock, a full attendance being present, the members sat down to the feast. This was all that it should be and needs no description. It might be remarked in

passing that the literary men displayed an epicurean taste and delicacy that presages that they will live long to confer the benefits of their labors upon us.

"When all had eaten heartily and a modest glass of pure wine had been added to the inward stores, the literary character and talents of the organization"—not of the members, it should be noted, but of the organization—"found expression in speeches."

After this demonstration of the possibilities of reportorial English it was decided that in the future the meetings of the club should not be public functions. For several years, however, reporters persisted in coming to the meetings and sometimes it was difficult to turn them away.

"Literature and Great Cities" was the topic which Mr. Collyer chose for his address. The opening paragraphs reflect so well the feeling that animated the founders of the club at that time that they may well be quoted here. He said:

"If ever the time comes in which it will be worth any man's while to write a literary history of Chicago and the Northwest, and this club should then put in a claim to be mentioned as one of the signs of a prior and larger life, which succeeded the rude, stern fight of the first forty years, I trust this fact may be stated as quite the most notable, that The Chicago Literary Club was the result of a feeling those who became members of it had in common before they came together, that the time had fully come when all true lovers of books in our city should enter into a league through which whatever each man had of special worth to his fellows should be brought to the exchange, so that there might be a common wealth

of culture which had come to any ripeness, together with a company of men eager and anxious to welcome every new sign of such culture either among those of their own community or those who might come to us from otherwheres. For this is to me the best thing about our society so far as we have come, that each man among us seems to have been moved by this inward impulse, so that all we needed in order to get a fair start was to pass the word to fall into line, and then see what could be done to carry out our common purpose in the best fashion. In all my experience I have never seen a society formed with such a cheerful spontaneity, or one that in my opinion had a truer or more unselfish purpose, or that met as we meet tonight under fairer auspices of a large success; and this is just as it should be, for of all things I can think of for which men league together, there is not one which depends more entirely upon such a spirit as we have witnessed than the companionship of men who gather for a purpose like this with the risen presence about them of those who have given to the world a glorious gift of thoughts that breathe and words that burn in immortal books.

"And if we shall think a moment of our position, we shall see how imperious the call must be to men of a genuine literary instinct and aspiration to enlist in some such company as this we have formed."

After this opening Mr. Collyer proceeded to show that the homes of literary productivity have been for the most part in the great cities of the world. Then after presenting a glowing vision of Chicago as he foresaw it would become in after years, he said:

"If our city, with her wonderful future, is remembered in a future still more wonderful, these are the conditions of her immortality. Not alone that she shall be great, but that she shall have writers, thinkers, poets, and historians greater than herself."

Mr. Collyer felt this deeply, and it was therefore not an empty rhetorical flourish, when, after referring to certain pictures of Chicago that he held in his heart, he added: "Still, as one generation passes away, and another takes its place, there will be chapters full of wonder in its own way, and still we must depend on this we are seeking to cherish and ripen; not on our Historical Society, not on our Academy of Sciences, not on our schools, churches, hospitals; not on the noblest things besides or the most imposing; all of these are of incalculable worth, but that which is of quite singular, separate, and unique worth is this literary quality, this power which can tell the whole story of it to future ages." A little earlier in the address he had said: "It is to literature that we are to look, not only for a great place in the world's history, but for any place. These pens catch our thoughts and deeds on the wing as they are flying swiftly toward forgetfulness and old night, and if the pen is tipped with the gold of genius they are touched with immortal youth."

Turning his thought again to the Chicago Literary Club, Mr. Collyer, as was the custom fifty years ago, closed his address with a florid peroration. It is too long to quote in extenso, but his "anticipation that beside the pleasure and profit each man of us will receive from these gatherings, there will be this solid purpose at the heart of all, to build up in our young city a society of

men who will do all they can for the development of literary culture," well expresses the enthusiasm that animated the men who brought the club into being. And in these decadent days when the finer flowers of literature have been largely submerged in a welter of rapacious greed and luxurious living, it may not be unprofitable to let our thoughts turn backward for a moment while we contemplate that enthusiasm. The need for a like stimulus is apparent when on every hand we hear men say that the agonizing events through which we have lived in the last decade have made it almost impossible for them to think of or to care for literature or art, or to turn their minds to things eternal when temporal things are so insistently engrossing.

After this dinner adjournment was taken until the autumn. Seventy-three members had been enrolled and the list includes the names of many of the intellectual leaders of the community. Some of these have already been mentioned; others are equally worthy to be held in memory. Let us recall for a moment the eminent clergymen, William Alvin Bartlett, Arthur Brooks, John Curtis Burroughs, Leander Trowbridge Chamberlain, William Jacob Petrie, and Minot Judson Savage. Though all of these men except Mr. Petrie soon moved away from Chicago, as long as they lived they never forgot the club nor what it stands for. The legal profession was well represented among these early members. The list includes the names of Benjamin Franklin Ayer, general counsel for the Illinois Central Railroad Company; Edwin Channing Larned and Julius Rosenthal, both highly revered and beloved; Henry Walker Bishop, the well-known master

in chancery; ex-Senator James Rood Doolittle; Judges Henry Booth, John Alexander Jameson, Charles Burrall Lawrence; John Gorin Rogers, and Lambert Tree, all men of marked ability and strong personality. Judge Lawrence in particular was a man who would have been notable in any community. And who of those who were privileged to know them will ever forget the genial Major Joseph Kirkland, or Major William Eliot Furness, another most clubable man, or the courtly General Alexander Caldwell McClurg?—soldiers all three when their services were needed to save the Union from disruption, but all devoted to literature throughout the span of their lives. Then there were Horace White, whose fame as an editor is nation-wide; Henry Demarest Lloyd, brilliant writer, radical thinker, earnest student of social problems, and philanthropist, who, as an editorial writer on the staff of The Chicago Tribune was just beginning his career; David Swing, most lovable of men and fearlessly independent thinker in a day when it took courage to combat orthodox religious views; Leonard Wells Volk, the sculptor; Dr. Charles Gilman Smith, distinguished physician, witty writer and prince of good fellows; Dr. Edmund Andrews, founder of the Chicago Academy of Sciences; our dear friend Judge Edward Osgood Brown who has so recently been taken from us; and Henry Thornton Steele, lawyer, master in chancery, one of the most devoted members the club has ever had,—a gentleman of the old school whose innate refinement is well reflected by the delightful pocket edition of the Latin text of Horace which was his daily companion, and which, as it was his favorite book, he bequeathed to the club that he so dearly loved.

Other first year members whose names should be held in remembrance were: Rev. Dr. Horatio Nelson Powers who, as a graceful writer and a poet had achieved more than a local reputation, and who, alas, was one of the first of our number to have his name enrolled upon the non-resident list; Daniel L. Shorey, who from the beginning was unflagging in his devotion to the club, of which he became the fourth president, and who, for twenty-five years, was one of the most faithful attendants at the meetings; Dr. Isaac N. Arnold, widely known and greatly revered physician, whose later years were given over to literary work; Judge Homer N. Hibbard, who often enlivened our meetings with his pungent wit; Norman Carolan Perkins, genial comrade and facile writer of verse; Moses L. Scudder, all-around good fellow, clear-headed student of and lucid writer upon economic subjects in years when erroneous views regarding them were the rule and sound thinking the exception; William M. R. French, beloved by his fellows, highly esteemed for his character and rare personal charm, as also for his exceptional gifts as an entertainer which always insured for him a large audience whenever he favored us with one of his cleverly illustrated papers; and Franklin MacVeagh, who, we rejoice to say, is still with us.

On October 5, 1874, the meetings were resumed after the summer recess, and thereafter during this second season two meetings a month were held; on the first and third Mondays, save in June, 1875, when the dinner scheduled for June 21 was omitted and the season was ended with the meeting held on June 7. In addition, the club on the evening of Tuesday, November 3, 1874, celebrated the

eightieth birthday of William Cullen Bryant by a dinner, which was attended by thirty-six members, and, as guests of the club, by the poet's brothers Arthur and John H. Bryant, of Princeton, Illinois, both of whom made addresses. Besides these there were addresses by President Collyer, the Reverend Dr. Horatio Nelson Powers, James Rood Doolittle, the Rev. Dr. Hiram Washington Thomas, and Thomas Septimus Chard; and a poem written for the occasion by Francis Fisher Browne. As a memorial of this celebration, the record of the meeting with the full text of all the addresses was printed for the club in pamphlet form by Jansen, McClurg & Co. early in 1875. With the exception of a leaflet giving the "scheme of exercises" for the season of 1874–1875 and a list of the members as of October 1, 1874, this is the earliest of the club's publications. It is the only one bearing an imprint other than its own. From this pamphlet and the club records we learn that the dinner was served at nine o'clock, the members and guests having met in the club room of the Sherman House an hour earlier to listen to an essay on "Thomas De Quincey" by William Mathews, after which they "moved in procession to the dining room" to hold the birthday celebration.

The club was now firmly established and had begun to take the hold upon the affection of its members that has been so notable and so constant during all the succeeding years that have elapsed. The meetings were made attractive by the personality of the members and by the quality of the papers that were read. Dr. James Nevins Hyde has given us the following account of one of these meetings:

"One of the great events of the Sherman House era was

the reading on April 15, 1875, of a paper on 'Financial Crises' by Horace White. We all of us had an acute interest in his subject and for reasons that need not be particularized were exceedingly anxious to know when the financial crisis of which the effects were then painfully evident would be over. Mr. White did not tell us; in fact he told us that he did not know, but the essay, much to our satisfaction, was published in full on the other side of the water, the first of our club papers honored with a transatlantic reproduction. As the financial crisis soon after passed away we have since entertained the conviction that the work of its undoing was begun and accelerated by the co-operation of this club in conclave assembled."

During the first season it was customary to follow the paper by an informal discussion which was often extremely pungent and sparkling as might be expected in a gathering of exceptionally gifted men among whom were an unusual number of brilliant and witty speakers. This custom, however, came perilously near to ending the career of the club. The last essay of the second season was read at the meeting on May 17, 1875, by Judge Henry Booth. His title was "Evidences of the Resurrection Examined," and he subjected the evidences to the searching analysis of a trained jurist, thus reaching the conclusion that they were inadequate. In these days when agnosticism is common and conventional religious views are so often lightly held, it is difficult to realize the intensity with which they were believed half a century ago. Judge Booth was then regarded as a misguided atheist. Among his hearers were several clergymen and a number of other

members, who were greatly grieved and incensed by his argument. The discussion that followed became decidedly acrimonious and so heated that Judge Jameson, the vice president who occupied the chair, had to intervene and bring it to an abrupt end.

This incident which caused much feeling at the time, despite the desire of most of the members that the club should be an open forum where men of the most diverse opinions could meet in friendly intercourse and exchange their views, led a little later to the adoption of the rule that "no paper at the time it is read shall be open to adverse criticism in the club." It was not intended that this rule should put a stop to discussion, but merely that the discussion should not be permitted to become offensive. In practice, however, as we all know, it has operated to make discussion of the papers read before the club most unusual. On the whole such loss as there has been, has been fully compensated for by the resulting harmony. And every essayist has felt that he could express his thoughts with the utmost freedom.

Major Henry Alonzo Huntington, who was elected a member in November, 1874, has given us his recollections of some of these early meetings. "The first meeting of the club I attended was held at the Sherman House December 21, 1874, and the paper I listened to was by Rev. C. D. Helmer, whose subject was 'The Ring,' the finger, not the political variety. The next essay I heard was Bonney's 'American Antiquities,' in announcing which Mr. Collyer humorously supposed it would be largely autobiographical. Then came the ever-welcome Edward Mason with his sympathetic appreciation of Arthur Hugh Clough whose

lines beginning: 'Say not the struggle naught availeth' must so often have been in his thoughts in later years. Poole's 'The Origin and Secret History of the Ordnance of 1787' followed and is worthy of remembrance, not only for its instrinsic merit, but also as the first contribution by a member to a leading periodical. Booth's paper on 'Evidences of the Resurrection' was the occasion of many obvious pleasantries suggested by the author's emaciation which, however, fell to silence as soon as the scoffers discovered that a death's head is not necessarily empty. My own debut was made on December 4, 1876, with an essay entitled 'A Neglected Author.' There was a large attendance and it is worthy of notice, in view of Peacock's growing fame, that the only person present who had heard of him, and he had not read him, was William Mathews, an old librarian. When I closed my manuscript, Judge Jameson asked how I accounted for the obscurity of such a man as I had described and quoted. My reply, 'I don't account for it,' was received with uproarious delight, which is explicable on no other ground than that wit is less startling than such a stroke of unpremeditated art as speaking the truth."

At the meeting held on June 7, 1875, Judge Charles Burrall Lawrence was elected president. His inaugural address was delivered at a dinner at the Sherman House on June 21. No account of this dinner appears upon the club's records. But, at the meeting that followed it—the last of the season—the secretary reported that one hundred and eight regular members were enrolled, and one honorary member, the Honorable George Baldwin Smith of Madison, Wisconsin, who had been the guest of the

club on February 1, 1875, and had read a paper entitled "Was Bacon the Author of Shakespeare?" Two members had died during the year, two had resigned, and four had removed from the city. Although some of those who were enrolled had never achieved more than a nominal membership, the attendance at the meetings had averaged twenty-eight, an excellent showing when we consider that three of the eighteen meetings were devoted solely to business. Such business meetings were necessarily somewhat frequent until the machinery of the club could be got to working quite smoothly, but they did not greatly attract the members; so in the next year the expedient was adopted of serving a collation at the close of the session. The first meeting marked by this feature was held on March 25, 1876, and, although there were no literary exercises, forty-two members were present and one guest. In a paper read in 1894, at the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the club, Edward G. Mason said:

"I do not remember when we began to enliven our exercises with a collation. But I still recall, though many years have past, the flavor of the beverage served at the first of these. Some guileless member of the committee on arrangements who must have been himself a prohibitionist, was persuaded to furnish the table with an alleged product of the domestic vine. Not one of all the wines famed in song or story had such staying power. It was equaled only by that draught mentioned in the Bride of Lammermoor which Caleb Balderston concocted from the lees of the expended hogsheads, who found no encouragement to renew his first attack upon this vintage, but

contented himself, however reluctantly, with a glass of fair water. We followed the example of the Laird of Bucklaw, and ever after branded this disappointing beverage as 'collation wine.' A label from one of the bottles has been preserved in the club's 'Archives.'"

This chapter would not be complete without recalling the names of a few of the members who joined the club between October 5, 1874, and June 7, 1875, and whose devotion to the club makes it especially imperative that they should not be passed over without particular mention: Generals Joseph Bloomfield Leake, John Leverett Thompson and Joseph Dana Webster; Judge Mark Skinner, Ezra Butler McCagg, and Abram Morris Pence, were among those whose names come to mind when we think of the club as it was in its first year. So also and with greater insistence do we think of Major Henry Alonzo Huntington, Edward Swift Isham, Colonel Huntington Wolcott Jackson, and Dr. James Nevins Hyde. Each of these men should have a chapter to himself to tell of his rare personal qualities and his part in building up the club. It is impossible to think of them without a swelling of the heart and a realization that the intimate association with such men, as fellow members of an organization as dear to them as to us, is one of the most precious experiences in life. From the very beginning it was perceived that the mission of the club was not only the fostering of literary and æsthetic culture, but also the upbuilding of friendships between men of congenial tastes.