



CHAPTER IX



THE second season in the rooms in the Art Institute Building opened propitiously on October 1, 1888, with the annual reunion and dinner. One hundred and two members were served at tables spread in the assembly room, the supper room which was not large enough to accommodate so many being appropriated for the use of the caterer. President High's inaugural address was an entertaining one, and, as was then customary, it was chiefly given over to club affairs and reminiscences. As the early custom of furnishing copies of presidential addresses to be recorded or placed in the archives of the club had already become obsolete, no excerpts from it can here be given. Few of our members have inspired deeper affection than did James Lambert High. It is difficult so to picture him in words as to call up the image that must forever remain impressed upon the minds of those who knew and loved him. His tall thin figure, his bearded face with its always gracious yet dignified expression, his gentle bearing and unfailing courtesy were the outward manifestations of the inner man. After his death, Mrs. Ellen K. Hooker in whose school in a little village near Madison, Wisconsin, he was prepared for college, wrote these words which well sum up the qualities that gained for him the respect and warm regard of all who came in contact with him:

“That the manly boy who thus early sought instruction in studies far beyond his years should have become

THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB

the critical scholar, the eminent jurist and the successful man of affairs, is no matter of surprise to me. . . . Earnest, impetuous, persistent, often self-confident, his daily mastery of himself was occasion for frequent remark among those who knew him best. Never have I seen one more prompt to acknowledge and correct a fault when he believed it to be his own. . . . Gentleness, courtesy, conformity to law, reverence for truth, all combined in him to form such a character as man may covet and God approve."

Mr. High's professional attainments as a lawyer are set forth in the memorial biography printed by the club and need not be recited here. But, as is well said in that biography:

"James L. High, the man, was greater far than James L. High, the lawyer. . . . What he was but few were privileged to know: What he did is a common possession. His activities found expression in a great contribution to the literature of his profession and in an active career that will remain a cherished tradition of the Chicago bar. All this, however, is apart from what he was. The memory of his rare personality and noble character is the precious possession of his family and friends."

To this it may be added that it is also a precious possession of the Chicago Literary Club to which he was strongly attached and of which he was intimately a part so long as he lived.

The year of Mr. High's administration was not marked by any notable occurrences. The literary feast was an excellent one, and there were two ladies' nights when papers were read by Dr. Frank H. Gunsaulus and Franklin H.

A TRIBUTE TO DR. NOYES

Head. And, in response to the suggestion of Horatio L. Wait, a beginning was made in forming a collection of books and pamphlets written by members of the club. Among the fifteen members elected during the year were several who became actively identified with our organization. Three are still with us, Dr. William T. Belfield, Irving K. Pond, and Denton J. Snider. Others who should be mentioned are Lewis H. Boutell and George Driggs; and, although to our regret they terminated their membership by resigning some years later, so also should George K. Dauchy, Dr. Nathan S. Davis Jr., Allen B. Pond, Lorado Taft, and Abram Van Epps Young.

In January, 1889, the club suffered a severe bereavement in the death of Rev. Dr. George C. Noyes, which was deeply felt by our members. He had been elected less than six years before, but in that time had made an enviable place for himself in their affectionate regard. As was said by Dr. William F. Poole in the memorial spread upon the records of the club:

“Perhaps no member ever more keenly enjoyed the privilege of social intercourse with its members and of contributing to its literary exercises. He never missed a meeting when it was possible for him to be present. His broad catholic spirit, his genial manners and joyous warm sensibilities made him a universal favorite in the club. In whatever circle he was, there were happy faces, animated conversation, the humorous assault, the sharp repartee, and much sportive laughter. Every one felt that he was a true friend and a safe counselor. He enjoyed humor, he loved music, painting and sculpture, he loved his friends and would go far out of his way to serve them.”

THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB

For the next club year, that of 1889-1890, Dr. James Nevins Hyde, the ever genial comrade of whom every member was fond, was elected president. It is especially regrettable that his inaugural address which abounded in witty sallies has not been preserved. He was a firm believer in the importance of injecting the element of wholesome fun into the literary work of the year, always provided that it should be of a high order. In recognition of this, his address contained much that his hearers found highly entertaining. Alas, not even its title, if it had one, has been preserved. But the theme was The Club and cognate matters. At the annual reunion and dinner one hundred and one members were present, and one guest, Mr. Frederick Cope Whitehouse of London. When Dr. Hyde asked Mr. Whitehouse who, as a son of Bishop Whitehouse, had spent his boyhood in Chicago, to say a few words, he responded with an after-dinner speech which he said he had prepared for another occasion but had not delivered. Strange as it may seem it was not only felicitous in expression but as well suited to the time and place as though it had been designed for it instead of for a gathering in London, and it was accordingly given much applause.

One familiar face was sadly missed at this dinner, that of John Crerar. At the next meeting the announcement of his death brought sadness to the hearts of all. Realization was very keen that without his cheery presence our meetings could never be quite the same. At the ladies' night held a month later, when Frederic Root read a paper entitled "A Study of Musical Taste," a memorial of Mr. Crerar was read by Edward G. Mason. It expresses

IN MEMORY OF JOHN CRERAR

so feelingly the relation of Mr. Crerar to the club and the regard of the members for him that, as it has not heretofore been printed, it is fitting that it should find a place here.

“In many ways respect and esteem have been shown for the man whose name is upon every tongue and in every heart. John Crerar, the leading merchant, the director in great corporations, the philanthropist, the strong pillar of the church, the good citizen, has been most appropriately honored by all who knew him in these relations. But it is *our* John Crerar, our own good friend and brother of whom his fellow members in the Chicago Literary Club wish to say a loving word tonight. For he belonged to our organization from an early day, he is associated with each of its places of assembly, and to its meetings which he attended so faithfully and enjoyed so much, he ever brought good fellowship and sunshine. His dignified bearing, urbane manner, and strong individuality always made his presence conspicuous there. Those who used to meet him in our former apartment in Portland Block will well remember the familiar figure in that seat in the audience room which he so regularly occupied. And how readily we recall him as he used to enter these rooms, throwing back his coat with that characteristic gesture as he came forward to greet you. We see his kindly face lit up with a pleasant smile, the gleam of his honest blue eyes, and his courtly bow. We feel the warm grasp of his hand, we hear his hearty laugh, and we repeat the cordial welcome which was always his.

“He joined our club in the second year of its existence and from that time on his influence has been felt in its

THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB

affairs, his aid and counsel have never been wanting. He advocated the change to better quarters which was the turning point in its history, and he was one of those whose assistance enabled it to remove to its present home. As chairman of our committee on officers and members he was the first vice-president of our club in 1877 and 1878, and more than once was spoken of for its presidency, but modestly declined to be a candidate. His name appears upon our Scheme of Exercises in March, 1876, in May, 1879, and in February, 1881, and few more interesting papers have been presented at our meetings than that which contained his reminiscences of Thackeray. He made the acquaintance of the great author in connection with the latter's course of lectures delivered in this country under the auspices of the Mercantile Library Association of New York, of which Crerar was a member. How much service he was able to render their English visitor and what a warm friendship ensued this letter from Thackeray reveals.

36 ONSLOW SQUARE, BROMPTON.
LONDON, May 9th, 1856.

MY DEAR CRERAR:

I ran away in such a hurry from New York that I forgot to shake your hand—perhaps purposely forgot—for it's a weary task, that taking leave of good fellows. And now I write you a word of thanks and farewell from my own house which looks just as if I'd never left it, and, but that the leaves are bright green wh. were yellow yesterday, I might fancy that I had dreamed the last 7 months. Before I came off I told Tiffany's people to send a pencil case for you to M. L. [Mercantile Library] and pray you to keep it as a memento of a friend whom you have very much obliged and who will always remember the great kindness wh. you & Felt have shown him. When you come to England mind & keep my address in your recollection. I shall never be able to do for you what you have done for me, but

IN MEMORY OF JOHN CRERAR

I and the girls whose future life you have helped to make comfortable, propose to remember for many a long day the cordial welcome and aid you gave me.

Believe me

Yours, dear Crerar, always sincerely,
W. M. THACKERAY

“This letter and the pencil case which it mentions were among our friend’s most cherished treasures. Another letter which he highly prized shows how opportunely his warm heart and ready pen came to the aid of this community at its time of greatest need. It read as follows:

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
INSTITUTED A.D. 1868

NEW YORK, October 25th, 1871.

MR. JOHN CRERAR,
Chicago.

MY DEAR SIR:

At a meeting of the Executive Committee held this day at the Chamber of Commerce, I read your letter of October 15th, and was especially instructed as follows: “On motion of Jonathan Sturges, seconded by A. A. Low, the secretary of this meeting be requested to address a letter to Mr. John Crerar expressing their thanks for the very important, graphic, and touching letter which Mr. Crerar had addressed to this body, and to respectfully request him to further oblige the Committee by continuing to write them on the condition of matters in Chicago.” Please accept my congratulations and assurances of respect.

FRANK E. HOWE, Sec.

“Accompanying this letter is the official document making John Crerar the accredited representative of the committee appointed by the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York for the relief of the sufferers by the conflagration in Chicago. And in that capacity he was of inestimable benefit to this city in those days of sorrow and suffering.

THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB

“With another institution in his native City of New York his name is likewise honorably connected. On the day of John Crerar’s funeral the flag hung at half-mast above the hall of the Mercantile Library Association of New York in memory of his connection with it as director, vice-president, and president, more than thirty years ago. And one of its officers has expressed the hope that it was his early association with that library, and the ideas then inculcated that were instrumental in influencing him to perform the act of munificence for the benefit of the people of Chicago whereby his name will be venerated for all time. We who knew with what pride and pleasure he was wont to refer to his early connection with that institution may well believe this to be true, in part, at least. And perhaps we may claim some share in the shaping of his purpose, for the associations and influences of our own organization which he has honored by the selection of so many of its members as directors of the great library he has founded.

“He has honored us too by the mention of our club in his immortal will. And that gracious farewell gift to us we receive in the spirit in which it was given. We do not need his legacy to remind us of John Crerar, nor did he for any such reason bestow it. But it is a token of his affection for the club and of his recognition of the many happy hours he passed here, which as such we reverently accept. And it will not only be the best memento of him but that which he would most desire, to so apply it as to extend the influence and increase the usefulness of this association in the line of the objects for which it was founded.

“There is no reason why this occasion should be one

JOHN CRERAR'S LEGACY

of gloom. Our sorrow for the loss of such a man is mingled with a solemn joy that he has left so glorious a name and memory. We do not even say farewell, since his spirit and his works are to abide with us. But in tender remembrance of a rare companionship which his death has ended, in high appreciation of the splendid qualities which made us proud and glad to have known him, and in affectionate acknowledgment of his generous bequest to us, we inscribe this memorial to John Crerar on the records of the Chicago Literary Club."

Mr. Crerar's legacy to the club was the sum of ten thousand dollars. Litigation over the will prevented the executors from carrying out the bequest until December, 1893, when payment was made with accrued interest.

For the ladies' night meeting in April, 1890, Robert Collyer came from New York and delighted the assembled members and guests with a paper on "Friend Jacob Bright and his son John." This was only one of many excellent papers that were read during the year. At the last meeting of the season the portrait of Dr. Noyes that now hangs upon our walls was presented to the club by his daughter, Mrs. Arthur Orr. Earlier in the year the large carbon photographs of Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" and Rembrandt's "Portrait of a Russian Nobleman" had been given to the club by Henry Field, to whom we were already indebted for the gift of the large engraving of Paul Delaroche's painting "The Hemicycle of the Beaux Arts" that has so long been a familiar adornment of the club rooms.

Although there was no slackening in the devotion of the members during this season or the next when Franklin

THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB

H. Head was our president, there was a marked falling off in the attendance, clearly attributable to the location of the club rooms. For the members who lived on the south side of the city it was ideal. But many more were residents of the north side or of the suburbs, and they did not find it so easy to get to the corner of Michigan Avenue and Van Buren Street, especially when, as often happened, the weather was inclement. In those days the North State Street cars ran only to Lake Street, and taxicabs were unknown. Consequently, when in the spring of 1891 it became apparent that the Art Institute would need to sell its building to provide a part of the funds to erect the building it now occupies, and had begun tentative negotiation for the cancellation of the club's lease, the committee on rooms and finance was instructed that, in the event of our removal, quarters nearer the center of the city should be selected for our use.

At the meeting held on December 8, 1890, General McClurg read a paper entitled "An American Soldier—Minor Milliken." A recital of the names of the forty-five members who listened to the paper affords such a vision of the meeting as nothing else could bring to mind. Named in the order in which they appear upon the record these were: Franklin Head, Fletcher S. Bassett, Henry H. Belfield, Clarence Burley, Thomas Dent, Henry Field, Dr. Charles Fuller, Charles W. Fullerton, Edward I. Galvin, Frank Gilbert, Daniel Goodwin, Frederick W. Gookin, Frederick Greeley, Samuel S. Greeley, Robert J. Hendricks, Porter Heywood, Homer N. Hibbard, Charles S. Holt, George Howland, Walter M. Howland, William H. Hubbard, James A. Hunt, Dr. James Nevins Hyde,

A MEMORABLE FISH STORY

Elbridge Keith, Walter Larned, Bryan Lathrop, William McAndrew, Edward Mason, Henry Mason, Roswell H. Mason, James Norton, Ephraim Otis, Dr. William F. Poole, Rev. Theodore Prudden, Moses L. Scudder, Edwin Burritt Smith, David Swing, Lorado Taft, Charles H. Taylor, James J. Wait, Aldace F. Walker, Judge Waterman, Arthur B. Wells, Arthur D. Wheeler, and the Rev. Edward F. Williams. Truly it was a gathering of the faithful and what men they were! Almost without exception they were regular attendants at our meetings. Myself alone excepted, they seem to rise up before me as I write their names.

After the paper adjournment was had to the supper room where they grouped about the small tables in friendly intercourse. One of the groups made up, as I recall it, with Norton, Dr. Fuller, Ned Mason, Fred Greeley, Fletcher Bassett, and General McClurg as its nucleus, soon attracted many others until a large circle was formed of eager listeners to amazing fish stories. Norton, Fuller, and Mason, all three lovers of the Lake Superior and the Nipigon regions, vied with each other in relating their piscatorial adventures and achievements. Others joined in the recitals and the merriment was contagious. When the laughter evoked by one astounding tale after another had subsided and there was a moment's stillness, then it was that Thomas Dent told his famous fish story; his small voice was heard as he said very softly and slowly: "*I went fishing once! I had a willow rod and a bent pin for a hook. I didn't catch anything!*"