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## CHAPTER IV

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THE fourth season, which opened on October 2, 1876, when Alfred Bishop Mason read a paper on "The Abolition of Poverty," was even more successful than its predecessors. The long struggle to get a constitution that would ensure the smooth working of the machinery of the club had very nearly come to an end, and with the conduct of its affairs placed in the hands of standing committees, much less time than formerly was required for the consideration of business by the club as a whole. There was a steady growth in the membership and at the close of the year there were one hundred and forty-nine names on the resident list. Only one member had died during the year, Charles True Adams, whose early death was greatly lamented. Two among those admitted, Elbridge G. Keith and the Rev. Edward F. Williams, should be mentioned specially, as to the end of their lives they were actively identified with the club and constant in their attendance at its meetings.

It was not a season of many notable incidents. The records show only a few occurrences out of the ordinary. Among these was the first occasion where an essayist failed to keep his appointment. There was no lack of entertainment, however, for William M. R. French came forward and gave an impromptu talk on "Graphic Art," which he illustrated with drawings made in the presence of the audience. This was received with such marked approval that Secretary Furness put the statement on

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record that only "after a few very pleasant hours" did the meeting adjourn. Another episode that occurred a little later in the season serves to show how devoted to the club the members had become. On the evening of January 15, 1877, a blizzard was raging that had forced an entire suspension of the street car service,—horse-car service it then was; yet eleven members plodded on foot through the wind and snow and gathered in the club rooms with the prospect of listening to or taking part in a conversation on "Tax Legislation." But when they were gathered about the open fire in the smoking room, they merely swapped stories for awhile, voted tax legislation a bore, and then cheerfully set forth to trudge homeward through the deepening snow.

To me personally this season is memorable, as it was the one in which I was elected a member. I have often wondered at my great good fortune in being admitted into this choice circle of which I was for a long time the youngest member. The first meeting that I attended was that of March 5, 1877. Edward Mason was in the chair, and Dr. Charles Gilman Smith read a paper on "The Physical Basis of Character," in which he held that climatic conditions here in America have marked influence in amalgamating immigrants and natives into a homogenous stock having very similar physical characteristics. I shall never forget the cordial reception with which I was welcomed when I was introduced to the group of members gathered in the smoking room before the paper was read. It may be of interest to have me call the roll. Besides Ned Mason and Dr. Smith, and Secretary Furness who was my next door neighbor and with whom I had come to

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## A REJECTED OFFER

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the meeting, there were present Daniel L. Shorey, Murry Nelson, John G. Shortall, James A. Hunt, Judge John G. Rogers, Joseph Adams, General Alexander C. McClurg, General Joseph B. Leake, Major Joseph Kirkland, Edward D. Hosmer, Dr. James Nevins Hyde, Dr. Henry Hooper, Alonzo Abernathy, Bronson Peck, William H. Barnum, George F. Harding, Samuel Appleton, Horatio L. Wait, Samuel P. McConnell, Horace W. S. Cleveland, Leroy D. Mansfield, Dr. William F. Poole, Samuel Bliss, Max Hjortsberg, William H. Clarke, Cecil Barnes, George Howland, William Macdonell, Frederick B. Smith, Rev. Dr. John C. Burroughs, John Wilkinson, John J. Herrick, Major Henry A. Huntington, Henry D. Lloyd, Albert M. Day, Edward O. Brown—who was not then Judge Brown. With the possible exception of Samuel Appleton, about whom I have heard nothing for many years, all these men save Joseph Adams have passed away. Most of them I then met for the first time. To me the recital of their names means a great deal. Many of them became my very dear friends, and most of our older members could make the same assertion for themselves.

About the time I was admitted to the club one of the leading photographers in the city offered to take the photographs of all of the members for a very small price, assuming that enough extra prints would be ordered to make the transaction profitable. The offer was referred to the executive committee, of which Dr. Poole was the chairman. I recall quite distinctly the business meeting when he reported that the committee regarded the proposition favorably and he moved that the photographs be taken and kept in an album or albums to be a part of

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the archives of the club. It is much to be regretted that the club did not agree with the committee. We can now see clearly that such a collection of the portraits of the members would be a possession we should greatly treasure. But the wits of the club were at that time ever eager for an opportunity to poke fun at anything and everything that offered a fair target. And when Dr. Poole had moved the acceptance of the report, Samuel Appleton, who was something of a wag, made a humorous speech pointing out the chagrin we should feel at seeing a lot of photographs grouped in the photographer's window and accompanied by a placard reciting in large letters that these were the portraits of the distinguished gentlemen calling themselves The Chicago Literary Club, special emphasis being placed upon the "The." Charles Gregory, who had seconded Dr. Poole's motion, came to the rescue and tried to make fun of Appleton's fanciful objection, but he only succeeded in setting off Ned Mason, Harry Huntington, Brooke Herford, William Macdonell and Jim Norton. Then the fun became "fast and furious." I do not think there was any real objection to the proposition, but it could not stand the ridicule and the flippant jibes that were bandied back and forth, and no one ever afterward had the hardihood to bring it up again. As for the jokers, when they had slain the bugaboo they sat down to a collation and the merriment was prolonged until the time for home going arrived.

This episode had a sequel which is not mentioned in the club records. Fortunately, however, a few years later Dr. Nevins Hyde set down his recollections of it in black and white for our benefit. "There had been," he tells us,

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## PORTRAITS BY BROTHER WAIT

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“some talk of collecting the photographs of members, and Poole had put forward such a proposition. For some of us the plan was not without a vista of delightful possibilities. Those of us who were very little known, might thus be enabled to appear in the company of the relatively great. Questions of minor importance did not fail to suggest themselves. Should the attire be full evening dress for those who at that early day were fortunate enough to be provided with such garments? Or was the idea rather a presentation of the membership of the club as it appeared on ordinary occasions, say with a pepper-and-salt suggestiveness in the coat, and a collar not too closely assimilated to the style adopted by the average Wall street broker? It was then that Brother Horatio Wait appeared in the rôle of the ‘God from the machine.’ At the next meeting after that at which Poole’s proposition had been wrecked, he presented himself before the club with the statement that he had been thinking over the matter of photographing the members, and this opening sentence caused our hopes to run high. But he went on to add that the idea had occurred to him of reproducing the faces and figures of the brethren of the club, not as they actually were, but only as they *wished* they might be. On this he exhibited a series of sketches which he had made of certain selected individuals, selected not so much for their mental acquirements as for their physical peculiarities. Thus James High was portrayed as an exceedingly short man; and your present reader, by way of contrast, was depicted in the elongated proportions peculiar to Mr. High. Norman C. Perkins, the clever writer of verses, who had a sufficiently ample girth measure, was delineated as

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one of the slender order of Byronic poets, with long hair and a rolling collar. But the *pièce de résistance* of the collection was a portrait representing our present master-in-chancery—the artist himself—in a character which he declared was the ambition of his heart. It was that of a corsair with drawn scimitar.”

It is a pity that these suggestive pictures, which were of good size and done in colored crayons, were not presented to the club.

As the winter of 1876–1877 drew to a close, it became evident that the club rooms were no longer sufficiently commodious. Accordingly, on May 1, two rooms across the corridor to the north were leased, and these rooms which were identical in size with those already occupied by the club were thrown into one, making an assembly room much better adapted to our needs than any we had had hitherto. To enable the club to meet the increased rent without further increasing the dues, which had been raised to fifteen dollars the year before, it was arranged that The Fortnightly of Chicago, the ladies’ literary club that had been founded largely through the initiative of Mrs. Kate Newell Doggett, wife of William E. Doggett, about a year before our club was organized, should have the use of the rooms for their meetings. This was strenuously opposed by Edward Mason who never could bear the thought of anything but the exclusive use of the club rooms by the club itself, and who maintained that this was essential to the home feeling that was an important factor in keeping the members’ affection for the club deep and strong. He was, however, outvoted and I do not think the club suffered in consequence. Still we all must

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## A STARTLING INNOVATION

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sympathize with his feeling, though we may regard it as somewhat overwrought.

The new room was not ready for use until the end of the season when on June 25, 1877, the annual dinner was served in it, and Daniel L. Shorey, the president-elect for the ensuing year, delivered his inaugural address.

When in October the meetings were resumed, it was found that the committee on arrangements and exercises of which Dr. Charles Gilman Smith was the chairman had ventured upon the startling innovation of making October 29 of that year a ladies' night. Mason was in arms at once, but there was no business meeting before October 22, and until then he could only fret and fume. When October 22 arrived it was too late to prevent the holding of the reception, but he made haste to offer this resolution:

WHEREAS, the constitution of The Chicago Literary Club provides in Article VI, Section I, that no resident of Chicago or vicinity shall be invited to attend a meeting of said club; and

WHEREAS, it is understood that a large number of persons who are residents of Chicago or vicinity have been invited to attend such a meeting,

RESOLVED, that the members of the club here present are of the opinion that any violation of the constitution is to be deprecated, and that hereafter all of its provisions should be strictly observed.

As this, after considerable discussion, did not meet with favor, Mason withdrew it and offered as a substitute:

RESOLVED, that the members of the club here present are not in favor of inviting ladies to attend the meetings of the club.

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This resolution fared no better than the other. When it was ordered laid upon the table, Alfred Bishop Mason proposed an amendment to the constitution having the same effect, but this also failed of adoption when it came up at the next business meeting. And so the reception was held and it proved to be very enjoyable. It was attended by sixty-seven members and, in the words of Secretary Furness in the club records, "by a brilliant assembly of ladies, including a delegation of The Fortnightly Club, making in all a meeting of some hundred and fifty." Thus was inaugurated the custom of holding ladies' night meetings. Notwithstanding the success of this meeting the opposition of some of the members was so persistent that Dr. Smith was in doubt as to what he should do about the second ladies' night that was scheduled for the twenty-ninth of April. Accordingly at the meeting held on March 25, 1878, he asked for instructions from the club. Abram M. Pence, a member who stood high in the esteem of his fellows, moved that no ladies be invited. Major Kirkland moved to amend by striking out the word "no." This amendment having been carried, and the motion carried, each member was permitted to invite one lady guest to attend the meeting on April 29.

To the ladies of The Fortnightly we were indebted for sundry embellishments to the large room, among them the plaster cast of the statue of Dante and the bust of Homer that we have kept in all of our migrations until they have become so much a part of our essential belongings that without them the club rooms would hardly seem to be *our* rooms. Shortly after these casts were presented to us, a veil dropped by one of the ladies at a Fortnightly



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## AN AMUSING INCIDENT

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meeting was picked up by the janitor, and wishing to put it where the owner would find it when she again visited the rooms, he draped it over the head of Homer so as entirely to conceal the face. There it remained when Monday evening came and our members filed across the hall from the smoking room where they had gathered. Charles Gregory espied it and when Alfred Mason's proposed amendment to the constitution had been voted down, and a special committee on the advisability of changing the name of the club of which Alfred Mason was the chairman had reported against it, Gregory made a facetious speech which caused much laughter. Having gravely moved the appointment of a committee to unveil the bust, he was promptly appointed a committee of one and loudly applauded as with mock solemnity he proceeded to perform the task. At the time this was more amusing than it seems in a dry recital. It is mentioned to show how ready the members were in the early days of the club to seize upon every opportunity for wholesome fun.

One of the milestones in the club's history, its one hundredth regular meeting, was held this season, on January 21, 1878. At the business meeting a week later a rule was adopted forbidding smoking in the assembly room where the papers were read, and requesting the president to announce this at each meeting or whenever it should appear to him necessary. And at this meeting two amendments to the constitution were proposed, which were adopted at the next business meeting. These were:

1. No announcement of the result of any election shall be made until all the candidates to be presented the same evening shall have been balloted for.

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2. All proceedings relative to either the proposal or the election or non-election of candidates are to be regarded as strictly private and not to be mentioned except among members of the club.

A few quotations from the reminiscences of Dr. Hyde, Judge Brown, William French, and Major Huntington, read at the meeting to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the club, will show the need for these rules.

Dr. Hyde said: "The air was heavy at times with storm and stress when we were engaged in barring out new members by a process of general election that did not elect. Even Mason's stock joke about copies of the Bryant memorial being at hand for those desirous of securing them, failed to pour oil on the troubled waters. There was 'blood on the moon' one night when we were all together, each slaughtering every other fellow's candidate for membership because his own man had been rejected. It was then that Judge Doolittle stalked into the middle of the arena with a big stick in his hand and in portentous tones read us a lecture."

Judge Brown's testimony runs thus: "When the constitution making had been completed the real fun began. It consisted in blackballing during the first year or two of our existence, I should think on an average, about five out of six of the persons proposed. In those days we were not ruled by committees, and each member, upon the presentation of a name, was presented with the fateful box with its black and white symbols and allowed to express secretly his choice. Three black balls were sufficient to defeat a candidate, as I remember, and it seemed to be

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## AN ORGY OF BLACKBALLING

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rarely the case that a man could not count upon at least three enemies in our body. The proposal was made in open meeting, and proposing and seconding speeches were made setting forth the qualifications of the candidate. That particular class of literature which may now be distinctly recognized and differentiated from every other and entitled nominating speeches, which the political conventions of the country during the last quarter of a century have developed, I sometimes think had its feeble and insignificant beginning in our club. But the skillful manner, however, in which the virtues of the candidate are first depicted in glowing words and the climax reached in the announcement of his name, was not known in our early efforts, and a certain amount of sameness was apparent too. The proposer would arise, announce the name of his candidate for admission and proceed, in a great majority of cases, to say that his qualifications consisted in his being 'a cultivated man, a clubable man, and of genial disposition.' The statement that he was 'a lawyer and a graduate of Yale' was so frequently added that the phrase became a byword among some of the younger and more irreverent members of the club. Then the seconder would say 'ditto to Mr. Burke' and the box would be passed. I remember that on one occasion when it was brought to the president, Mr. Collyer, for inspection and opened, it having fallen to me on that occasion to carry about the fateful urn, there appeared an almost unbroken array of black balls. Violating for once the unwritten rule that the presiding officer should only say whether the candidate was elected or not elected, without further detailing the result, Mr. Collyer remarked: 'Gentlemen, if

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the black balls elected, the candidate would become a member.' That was pretty hard upon so 'genial and clubbable' a gentleman as the proposer and seconder asserted the candidate to be; but it might be explained to some extent by the fact that the seconder had previously spoken to me and I suppose to other members of the club, insisting that he had been actually dragooned into lending his name to the application, and that he was extremely anxious that two others at least should be found, who with himself, should vote in the negative."

Mr. French said, "I do not remember that there was such wholesale blackballing of candidates as indicated in the remarks of Mr. Brown, but I do remember that there were some very awkward situations. We never felt safe. It is my recollection that, on the occasion alluded to when a certain candidate was unanimously rejected, the president, in announcing the result, said: 'Gentlemen, I think you must have mistaken the black balls for white.' But perhaps it was on another occasion."

Major Huntington's recollection of this incident, which he regarded as the funniest in our history, differs from both of the others. This is his account of it: "But the lowest depth of humiliation was reserved for Candidate C, who reached the last stage of electoral procedure. Powers was in the chair, the club was in gracious mood, and, without the casting of a single black ball, had elected all the candidates but the last. Against him Powers knew nothing, and having arranged the ballot-box, he said in his hearty way: 'Come up, gentlemen, and elect Mr. C.' When the balls had been deposited, the doctor smilingly opened the box, gave a start of comic horror, and ex-

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## A HUNTINGTON BON MOT

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claimed: 'Gentlemen, the decision is *unanimous*, Mr. C. is *not* elected.'"

This episode happened before I was a member of the club. I shall not attempt to reconcile the discrepancies between the several narratives; but I have a clear recollection that the blackballing of the other members' candidates had become more rather than less frequent at the time the amendments to the constitution proposed by Mr. Herford were adopted. The members knew each other so well that when a candidate was rejected, his friends were able to guess with reasonable certainty by whom the black balls had been cast; and by deferring the announcement of the result of the balloting until all the candidates had been voted upon, it was thought that any consideration other than the qualifications of the candidates would be eliminated. Judged by the results of the balloting I am of the opinion that there was not at any time nearly so much spite voting as was commonly supposed. Harry Huntington's tale of the deadly effect of Judge Hibbard's commendation of a candidate as "a learned man who always spoke in a dead language which he murdered as he went along" was pure fiction evolved to get off one of the bons mots with which he was wont to delight us. And notwithstanding the fact that two of the candidates who were unceremoniously turned down, were later admitted to full membership and became presidents of the club, from my familiarity with the proceedings and my knowledge of the candidates who were proposed, I cannot think that more than a very few of those who were excluded were men whom we would have been glad to have as members of our family circle. The method of

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election in open meeting was, however, both cumbersome and faulty. One might have grave objection to a candidate, yet hesitate to hurt the feelings of his proposers by making a speech against him. And because any suspicion of faint praise on the part of the proposers was almost certain to be fatal to a candidate, the stock phrases that Judge Brown commented upon came into general use. Moreover, it was awkward to pass a ballot-box around when from fifty to seventy-five members were present, and only a little less so was the plan adopted later for members to form in line and march up to the secretary's table to cast their votes. Not until 1881, when the last general revision of the rules was made, was the responsibility of passing upon the qualifications of candidates entrusted to an electoral committee.

This chapter may be ended by the relation of a little incident that will signify more to the older members of the club than to those who are too young to remember the reputation of Leonard Swett and Emory A. Storrs, two of the best known lawyers in the city, both men of brilliant intellect and highly gifted as orators. Neither of them, it may be said in passing, could by any possibility have been elected to membership in the club. One evening, shortly after the writer was admitted to the fold, a few of us who had arrived a little earlier than the others were seated in a semi-circle about a blazing fire in the grate in the smoking room, when Professor Swing joined us. He was always a very jolly comrade, but that night he was in high glee. "In the street car in which I came to the meeting," he quietly remarked in the dry and deliberate manner that he made so effective, "Leonard Swett

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TOLD BY DAVID SWING

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and Emory Storrs were seated opposite me. They were eagerly discussing what constituted eloquence and both of them agreed that no man could be truly eloquent unless he were a person of the highest moral character."