



CHAPTER VI

IF ONE were to select a member of this Club as a composite typical representative of our ideals, principles and high purposes, the choice would rest on a man who has served the Club in various capacities officially, has been a steady attendant for years, has written original papers on divers subjects, a man with a classical background to his professional knowledge, widely informed, and always ready with sound advice when asked for it. The Club has had such men in days past, and it has them now. We may call them "sustaining members." One man of this kidney was President of the Club during the season of 1928-1929, Charles P. Megan. His Inaugural address of October 8, 1928 was a keen analysis of the unusual will of Dr. Norman Bridge, a wealthy member of the Club who had died shortly before. The season offered us again a goodly array of exemplary papers. To particularize: there was Thompson on *Shakespeare and the Politics of His Time*; Packard on *Eugene O'Neil*; Roden on *The Epic of the Prairie Schooner*; Rabbi Stolz on *Jewish Classics*; Henry P. Chandler on *Whether and How Can Democracy Attain Intelligence?* (question still unanswered in 1946); William E. Dodd on *History and Patriotism*; and Norman Hapgood, a member of the Club (1894-1937), author, editor and scholar, whom the Club imported from New York to discourse on *The Modernness of Shakespeare's Women*. There is seldom a gap in our list of creditable papers, and there was none this year.

We ended the year, after balancing the gains and losses, with one hundred and eighty resident members, five more than we had the year before. Two resident members died, one of whom was Professor Albert H. Tolman of the University of Chicago, a Shakespeare expert and President of the

Club in 1920-1921. A memorial to Professor Tolman said of him:

"He was an industrious, careful, exact scholar . . . a high-minded citizen, standing firmly for what he conceived to be right; a friendly spirit among his fellow men. We shall not forget the charm of his personality and humor."

Dr. Emilius Clark Dudley was a physician of note in Chicago's medical annals. He became a member of the Club in 1881. During his membership, broken by resignation in 1916 and renewed in 1919, he read many papers, his final one in 1924 after returning from a trip to China. Shortly after that he was obliged to seek a warmer climate because of failing health. He died December first, 1928.

Somewhat amusing is the excuse for resigning given by a member with a one-track mind. The Secretary's report of May 20, 1929, says:

"He alleged as his reason for desiring to effect a disjunction that he thought the Club papers lacked unity and coordination, meaning, if we interpret correctly his elaborated and considerably in-spissated letter of resignation, that a single theme of political or economic interest should be treated by all the essayists, thus affording the Club a broad basis for the discussion of a single subject from many angles."

"That fellow evidently doesn't like variegated topics by variegated members," was someone's comment at the time.

WE MOVE AGAIN

Toward the end of the year mysterious meetings of the Committee on Rooms and Finance had been held. What that Committee was considering came to light at the meeting on May 6, 1929, when President Megan announced an important matter of business for immediate attention. The record reads thus:

"Although not a regular business night the question of moving to other quarters next year was deemed so important that the Directors thought it necessary to have the Committee on Rooms

and Finance present its report for discussion and action at this meeting. Accordingly Chairman Osgood of that Committee recited the history of the negotiations and finally recommended and moved that the Club transport itself to the Medical and Dental Arts Club, twenty-second floor, 185 North Wabash Avenue. The motion was duly seconded, and with very little discussion carried. It was also voted to hold the final meeting of the present season, May 20th, in the new quarters."

We had to move fast to make this change, but under Mrs. Green's able superintendence our entire outfit, furniture, books, pictures, everything mobile, was freighted across the Loop to the Medical and Dental Arts Building, set up in the Club room, and ready for the final meeting of the year—a notable achievement. This move was precipitated in part by what seemed to be a general desire for a change, in part by the lure of a much lower rental, which, including the expenses of transport, would still be less than what we had been paying, and partly because the proposed new Club room looked wonderfully attractive and convenient when the Committee and various members first inspected it. Mr. Curtiss' death the year before, and a possible unfriendly change of management of the Fine Arts Building may also have influenced our decision. At any rate we bade a fond farewell to the Fine Arts Building in our final meeting on May 13th in *Curtiss* Hall. At this meeting officers for the following year were elected and Charles D. Lowry read his paper on *John Rankin, Black Abolitionist*.

On the 20th sixty-four of us assembled in the new Club room, after taxing the elevator service to its groaning limit, admired our newly polished furniture, and freshly purchased (by us) curtains and draperies, and prepared with smug satisfaction to enjoy the paper of the evening, recking little of the troubles and petty annoyances that were to beset us in the future. Dr. J. Wendell Clark christened the occasion with his essay *Fashion*, requests for printing which were sufficiently numerous to justify its appearance later as number XXXVII of our published papers. In his annual report

that night the Secretary announced a net gain of five for the year in resident membership. The evening ended in jubilation, and only the Electoral Committee in secret conclave knew that a disgruntled and wholly unfit member had been jettisoned owing to the extreme exiguity, which finally reached total deficiency, of his dues payments.

Came the autumn of 1929 and the shattering debacle of national and world finance, and of our dreams of a peaceful haven of rest and intellectual recreation. With regard to longed-for quietude we were speedily disillusioned. What we thought after the first two or three meetings might prove to be only a minor tribulation, euphemistically so called, became permanently a major affliction. Cacophony reigned in that multisonous hall. Round about us were half-open spaces whence drifted in upon us, despite our magnificent heavy draperies, splitting earfuls of culinary clangor, disquieting applause not intended for us from raucous rioters in noisy session, cash register symphonies, the jangling of elevator doors at inopportune moments, loud echoes from careless footsteps on the stone flagging, and other deafening alarums of divers sorts, all most embarrassing to both reader and hearer. Our beloved Gallic member, Henri David, was President of the Club during that frenetic year, a distressing job unwittingly wished upon him but faithfully performed. His Inaugural address, *The Destiny of the Soul*, was delivered with difficulty. He confessed later to this narrator that he had a vivid recollection of shouting himself hoarse that night trying to convince us that our souls had not already reached their final destination in the *Place de l'Inquisition*, forever condemned to bedlam.

But there were extenuating features to this season. It was by no means all gloom and sour disappointment. We tacitly agreed to banish Erebus, enjoy ourselves despite untoward circumstances, and cultivate that fellowship which is peculiar to this Club.

A large majority of the papers read during this season were full of literary vitamins. We were well nourished. There was

Packard again with a story of travel in the Sahara; Thompson, who drew a deadly parallel between the Roman Empire and America Today; Victor Yarros on *Letters and Literary Standards in Bourgeoisie*; Edwin A. Munger with a sprightly tale of his early days in the country, *As Told by the Survivors*; Llewellyn Jones on *John Dewey's Philosophy*; George Marsh, whose scholarly papers on early nineteenth century literature, and its minor authors in particular, have so acceptably been heard on our programs—his topic this time, being *Spoon River a Century Ago*; Dr. Anton J. Carlson on *Hunger*, illustrated with charts, and afterwards satisfied at Mrs. Green's sandwich table; Dodd on *The First Integrated Social Order of the South*; O. J. Laylander on *The Genesis of Pedagese*—and here we pause for a special comment. This paper was unique. It coined a new word in the American language. An educator for years, a former school superintendent, and later a member of a school-book publishing firm, "O. J.," as he likes to have us call him, has had ample opportunity to become familiar with all existing educational theories and methods of Schools of Education. His paper excoriates the flummery, the excess verbiage, the complicated methodology, the useless courses of these Schools. We quote his own words:

"Pedagese is the verbal coin of the pedagogic cult. It is the jargon of educational psychology parrots. . . . It embraces all the mysterious terminology used by the educationists to confound the uninitiated and to exalt the leaders above the common herd of plain, everyday school teachers. It is the verbal cloak used, not to conceal thought, but to cover the hole where thought is not."

This was a timely message to teachers everywhere. O. J. had it printed and distributed it. Some years later he sent a copy to H. L. Mencken of Baltimore, and received the following reply:

"Dear Mr. Laylander: You are kind indeed and I offer my best thanks. Your little essay is a masterpiece and I hope to quote from it in my book now under way.

Sincerely yours,
H. L. Mencken"

Upon the Club, where this novel paper originated, is faintly reflected the glory that is O. J.'s.

In February, 1930, we enticed a distinguished non-resident member from New York, William L. Chenery, Editor (now Publisher) of *Collier's*, to our platform, to tell us about *The Modern Magazine*, which he truly did to our great enlightenment. At the next meeting Dr. Luckhardt, of the University of Chicago Medical staff, discoursed, with the aid of lantern slides, on *High Lights and Shadows in the Discovery of General Anesthesia*. A qualified expert in the field of anesthetics, himself an originator of a new variety, the Doctor gave us a not too technical paper that was most informative to those of us who were not versed in medicine. An historical document that aroused wide interest was Bernadotte Schmitt's *Interviewing the Authors of the War* (World War I), a paper read on St. Patrick's Day, 1930, and later published by the Club. Schmitt had just returned from Europe where he had had *vis à vis* conversations with the Ex-Kaiser and several other prominent war potentates. Two papers were our entertainment on Ladies' Night, with an audience of one hundred and thirteen ladies and members present, one by Clarence Hough, *The Wild Nineteen-twenties*, the other, *The Dreaded Nineteen-sixties*, by Morris Fishbein. Since only half the time has elapsed between 1930 and 1960, it is too early to conjecture whether Dr. Fishbein's gloomy forebodings for a period fifteen years hence have any chance of fulfilment. A glance at what has happened during the last fifteen years would frighten any ordinary prophetic instinct into silence, if not extinction. Before the Ladies' Night meeting adjourned a motion was made by Lessing Rosenthal, duly seconded, and carried, to the following effect:

"that the Chicago Literary Club add its petition to the petitions of many other bodies and individuals that Congress purchase for the United States a well known collection of incunabula (including a Gutenberg Bible)."

Although the Literary Club adheres strictly to its rule never as a body to give expression to its views or opinions on

political or other extraneous matters, or to urge legislators to take certain action, in this instance, since the question was a purely literary and bibliophilic one, it seemed fitting and proper to add the Club's name to this petition.

A lively little debate on the question of Socialized Medicine was that between Holman Pettibone and Dr. Reed. Each speaker had an evening to himself, Pettibone advocating Socialization, Dr. Reed the *status quo*. The question is still a wide open one at this present.

Willard King's *Notes* (not mites) on *Cheese* tickled our olfactories by suggestion, and caused us to approach the refreshment table with a discrimination theretofore unexercised save by experts. The following Monday night, against the usual din, which had become a streperous constant, augmented by the unrestrained conversations of otologists, laryngologists, and various other votaries of Aesculapius wandering in and out of our bailiwick supremely indifferent, Professor Todd raised his voice and successfully put over his sociological essay, *Our Vanishing Family*. At the next meeting, on May 12, 1930, after the formality of electing the new officers of the Club, expectantly we greeted Chairman Pettibone of the Rooms and Finance Committee, when he rose and with ill-assumed gravity announced that he and his Committee had made satisfactory arrangements, on the strength of which he was able to recommend that the Club move from the Medical and Dental Arts Club back to the good old Fine Arts Building and into Suite 825 on the eighth floor, on a five-year lease. The recommendation was ratified *vive voce* before the President could put the question. Our high spirits were tuned just right then to hear John Heath's characteristically humorous story on *Life at Dear Old Saint Swithin's*. Carl Roden ended the year's literary program with a "Western," *Overland Stage and Pony Express*.

It was a case of quitting Bedlam for Beulah Land. No one was more highly gratified than Mrs. Green, who had the requisite stamina not only to oversee the details of moving us

both ways in one year, but also to endure without complaint the inconveniences and racket of a kitchen not her own.

From the outline of the year's program, cited above, it will be seen that our papers maintained a high level of human interest and literary excellence notwithstanding the sordid and confusing environment. *Belles Lettres* was still quoted at par when we got back to our new stockade in the former Anna Morgan studio, which during the summer that followed was redecorated and refurnished. Blind Homer's impassive bust occupied its wonted position, our familiar portraits and pictures were hung, our traditional "atmosphere" was revitalized. Our gravid fiscus groaned with gold, for, as the Treasurer had reported, in the matter of rent alone we were twelve hundred dollars in the black (after deducting the nominal rental charged us and the very considerable cost of moving, much of which had been imposed upon us by the powers that were in the Medical and Dental Building), and the Great Depression had not yet started the banks on their lethal pathway. Our financial condition was sound, and we were ready for a new era in the autumn of 1930, under the presidency of our well known philanthropist and public benefactor, Lessing Rosenthal, whose life, as a member of the club, added to his father's before him, as a member, spans the entire history of the Chicago Literary Club. Before closing the story of this 1929-1930 season, we should note the loss of two members, Dr. William T. Belfield, who died only three days before the season opened, after forty-one years of membership, and John D. Wild, whose death occurred on August 6, 1929. Both men were closely identified with the Club intellectually, and both read papers that the Club published afterwards. It may be interesting to recall the time when the rules for printing papers were formulated. In his history Mr. Gookin states that at a certain meeting held during the season of 1893-1894 several short stories were read, among them David Swing's *A True Love Story*, a delicate and amusing satire, and Henry S.

Boutell's *A Deserted Village*. An urgent desire to see these two papers in print started the Club in the publishing business; the rules were drawn up forthwith, and these two papers appeared in print simultaneously in November, 1894, as numbers I and II on our list of Club publications. Dr. Belfield's paper, *The Value of Mental Impressions in the Treatment of Disease*, was printed a little over a year later as number III on our list. It was Dr. Belfield's first contribution to Club programs. (These regulations for printing papers have been in effect for fifty years, and have worked fairly satisfactorily. Latterly, however, we are discovering that these regulations have rusted in a broken mold, and need recasting in sounder metal. This parenthetical observation is made for whatever it may be worth.) Dr. Belfield's papers were few but cogent and practical. He was a clear and forceful writer. John Wild's paper, *Pseudo-Humanism*, was printed in December, 1915, and is number XX on our list. He read three other papers to the Club, all philosophical in character, for in philosophy he was a "natural." Of him James Westfall Thompson, a close and understanding friend of many years, wrote in a highly sympathetic *laudatio funebris*:

"His human interest in all sorts and sides of things, his keen imagination, his cheerfulness made him the soul of stimulating friendship. He could be gay without frivolity, he could be serious without being solemn. He was interested in men and events, in current social and religious problems, in the march of knowledge; he had an aptitude for new ideas, a singular freshness and clarity of thought. But his private reading and his most serious conversation was about philosophy. For he was born with a naturally contemplative, reflective mind. . . . He knew the history of philosophy not as an amateur but as a scholar."

Thompson concluded by saying that John Wild, like the ancient Stoics, "found in the progress toward virtue a sufficient end of existence. But his was not an austere, but a sunny stoicism that may still be vivid to help in the forward groping of humanity."