



CHAPTER VIII

*"Auspiciis optimis, O Medice Famose, incipit te Gubernatore
noster Annus LVIII"*

THUS began the historian's epitome of events, when, on his little journey through the crisscross by-paths of the record, he came to the eighteen hundred and seventy-eighth meeting of the Clan, where four score members and guests were assembled in Curtiss Hall to dine and hear the Inaugural address of a past master in the gentle art of presiding, Dr. James Bryan Herrick. Clio was at his side as he told us about *Castromediano, a Forgotten Patriot and Martyr of the Italian Risorgimento*.

Dr. Herrick's beloved figure, though now not so often seen in the Club as formerly because of increasing years, is familiar to us all, even to our newest members, for the extraordinary medical reputation he achieved during the long period of his activity as practitioner and consultant is still well remembered. A member of the Club since 1909 he has seen us through good and evil times, one of the latter being the year when he was President, and when we and the world were in the very heart of the *Great Depression*. According to the record Dr. Herrick has read eleven papers before the Club on assorted subjects, historical, medical, rurally reminiscent, autobiographical. His two or three medical papers were exegetical essays, clear, simple, non-technical. *Why I Read Chaucer at Sixty* aroused considerable wonderment in the minds of many, chiefly his colleagues in medicine, that he could ever find time, even more have the inclination, to delve into unintelligible (sic) fourteenth century poetry; but the Doctor merely snorted, said he had given his reasons, which were valid enough, and—he is still reading Chaucer at eighty odd.

Dr. Herrick's autobiography, charmingly read, was severely handicapped by adverse meteorological conditions. Here is a part of the record under the date of January 30, 1939:

"Arrangements had been made for a Ladies' Night Dinner at the Chicago Woman's Club on East Eleventh Street. One hundred and sixty-two reservations had been made. Early that morning a violent blizzard visited Chicago and continued unabated until mid-afternoon. Fifteen inches of snow fell accompanied by a high wind. Traffic was badly jammed, streets and walks were impassable for hours. The meeting, however, was *not* cancelled. A hardy few, members and their ladies, braved the storm, enjoyed a good dinner, and listened with delight to *The Story of a Good Boy* by James Bryan Herrick."

That was a memorable storm, a veritable "Norther" straight from the Arctic Tundra. It retarded locomotion but quickened the spirits of the minority that made the grade.

Dr. Herrick had the happy faculty, when presiding, of saying the right thing at the right time, gracefully and featly. His little introductions, comments, obiter dicta, in smoothly flowing words, usually with a light touch of humor, were a real feature of that year's meetings.

At this point it may be well to record what happened to us financially in the early summer of 1931, a few months prior to the opening of the fifty-eighth season. The Treasurer wrote in the record as follows:

"On the eighth of June, 1931, the bank containing the Club's cash funds closed its doors. The Treasurer was away at the time in the East and did not return until the end of the month. Acting under instructions from the Chairman of the Committee on Rooms and Finance the Treasurer sold one of the Club bonds, one thousand dollars, at a premium of five and one quarter per cent and accrued interest. With the proceeds of this sale a new account was opened at the First National Bank of Chicago."

Dividends of thirty-five per cent on the amount imprisoned in the defunct bank were paid to us within a year by the Receiver. All together, including a final dividend paid in

December, 1945, we have received a little over fifty-five per cent. Those were parlous times, as we remember only too well. The interest on some of our bonds was defaulted, and the bonds lay dormant for a considerable period, but in time became salable. Other bonds with gilded edges were called at a good premium. In the long run the Club suffered comparatively little financial damage, thanks largely to a strong finance committee, and to the nation's recuperative power.

It was in this depressive period of June, 1931, that the death occurred of a long-time potent member, whose importance to the Club, as a writer and loyal supporter was more than ordinary, Sigmund Zeisler. He came into the Club in 1893. He wrote with vigor and a full understanding of what he was writing about on such contrasted subjects as the *Oberammergau Passion Play* and the imaginative *Mysterious Case of Kasper Hauser*. But the present generation will remember him best for his story of the famous (or notorious, if you will) trial of the so called Anarchists.

Mr. Zeisler was an active participant in that trial as a member of the counsel for the defense, the unpopular side. It is a dramatic tale he tells; the progress of the trial he rehearses in detail, and an unprejudiced reader must admit that the case he makes for the defense is a strong one. We have stated before that this paper was so well received and so highly regarded as a historical document that the Club voted promptly to publish it. Nearly six hundred copies were printed and distributed to members. Mr. Zeisler was engaged in writing the life of that talented, and Chicago's own, musician, Fannie Bloomfield Zeisler, when death overtook him. Two chapters of this work he read before the Club. They constituted his last offering. We might add that Sigmund Zeisler, at the time he read his Anarchist paper, was the sole survivor of all who took an active part in that trial.

A very special occasion was Ladies' Night, November 30, 1931. The Secretary extended himself somewhat when he

wrote the account of that red-letter evening in the Club album. His comments, if any, are usually brief. List ye:

"It was an enthusiastic, appreciative audience in high spirits. Professor Harvey B. Lemon of the Department of Physics of the University of Chicago was the reader of the evening, his subject being *Albert A. Michelson, the Man and the Man of Science*. After a proper and humorous introduction by President Herrick, the reader held the rapt attention of his audience with a significant appraisal of the great physicist, and an exposition of his accomplishments, at once sympathetic, emotionally restrained, and literary. . . . It is to be noted that after the reading members and guests lingered longer than is their wont on Ladies' Nights. The atmosphere was one of cordiality and good feeling, due in no small measure to the quality of the paper and to its felicitous rendition. It was a happy crowd. Dr. Herrick was a genial and busy host. Ralph Clarkson, the artist, had placed two portraits of Michelson on the stage and arranged the lighting of them. Mrs. Green served refreshments to more than one hundred and sixty persons."

That was only one of the Club's many "high spots," which we touch not infrequently because we have men with a long reach.

We have as yet said nothing about our long-established *Book Nights*. These are an important feature of our programs. In the early days of the Club there were *Conversations* and *Symposia* on certain evenings, generally conducted by a Leader, who introduced a topic, and then called upon various members for their individual views, or else turned the meeting into a free-for-all discussion, which often became a rather warm affair. Out of these somewhat informal occasions was developed the more formal Book Night. On the prepared program appeared the name of a Leader for a given date. It was his duty to find two or three other members who volunteered to select books of sufficient worth to justify a written review. The names of these books and their respective reviewers would then be printed on the announcement card for the given date. The Leader would preside, announce each reviewer, and read his own review last. This has been the cus-

tom for many years. As a rule we have only one Book Night a year, but at times there were two. These are profitable occasions. The reviews, carefully prepared, enable other members to acquire a fairly definite idea of the quality and scope of the book under review, and to determine its worth for ownership. Each review is timed to be read in about fifteen minutes, in case there are four reviews, and in twenty minutes in case there are three. Let us look at a typical Book Night. The reviewers are trained connoisseurs of books, skilled in the fine art of winnowing the wheat from the chaff, straining the whey from the curd, and obtaining a digestible concentrate. The time is December, 1931. The books were timely then, and still deserve a place on the front shelf of your library. Willard King is the Leader. He introduces Charles Megan, who presents Willa Cather in her *Shadows on the Rock*. Victor Yarros follows with Bernard Shaw's *Correspondence with Ellen Terry*. The gist of James Harvey Rogers' *America Weighs Her Gold* is then given by Casper Ooms. And last of all comes the Leader with an analysis of *The Epic of America* by James Truslow Adams. It is an hour of distilled information, pleasant to the taste, stimulating to book-lovers, which we all are—or are supposed to be. To review a book properly and intelligently is no easy matter. It requires both literary skill and literary acumen, besides a general knowledge covering a wide field. The Club has been, and still is, fortunate in having men of this caliber, such men, for example, as those named above, John M. Cameron, William Lee Richardson, Carl Roden, George Utley, George Packard, Theodore Buenger, Irwin Gilruth, and others, one and all of whom are good *M. B.'s*—Masters of Bookishness.

The general economic prostration of the early thirties had just about reached its nadir as the new year 1932 swam into our ken. Financial distress was general. Even Club dues were a burden to some of our members who were caught in the pecuniary vise. One evening about mid-season the Club Directors met and "voted to instruct the Treasurer to sus-

pend the dues indefinitely of members known to be in financial straits and unable to pay." This relief was duly administered, and the Treasurer's recollection is that in nearly every instance the amounts suspended were ultimately repaid. But our individual financial troubles were as naught compared with the scintillating program of that year: Dr. Reed's *Forest Phantasms*, Irving Pond's circus paper, *Hold Your Horses, the Elephants are Coming!*, George Halperin's initial Russian paper *Gogol*, Henry P. Chandler's *The State as Parens Patriae*, *Galla Placidia* by Theodore Buenger, *Uncle Americus* by George Powers, *Madame de Sevigné* by John Cameron, Professor Todd's *A New Critique of Cant* (requests to publish were numerous), and several others of homogenized Grade A rating. Unique was Lewis Stebbins' "*If a Man Die, Shall He Live Again*," a paper based on a questionnaire sent to the members of the Club to obtain their personal views of the question. The paper was mimeographed by the author and distributed to members two weeks later. At the final meeting of the year Ernest Zeisler read his first contribution to the Club, a paper on *Causality*. This brilliant young author's papers, six of which he has read since his advent in the Club, bear on their face his ideograph: a shining shield embossed with a figure of Minerva holding a scroll on which appear the words *Logic* and *Reason*. At the desk, with a lightning-like gesture, he opens a hermetically sealed can, pours out the highly condensed contents, and anon we are deluged with a shower of syllogisms, causes, effects, pure and false reasoning, and all the other paraphernalia of the logician, before we can get our umbrellas up. To the nimble-witted his essays are delightfully diaphanous.

It had been a season of financial anxiety for most of us. In his report at the last meeting the Secretary, somewhat too sententiously and sentimentally, as this recorder thinks, philosophized as follows:

"We have steadfastly gone on our literary way, pursuing our ideals, and turning—at least once a week—from sordid things to

things incorruptible, which as Tully once said, 'are the food of youth, the consolation of age, the ornament of prosperity, the comfort and refuge of adversity.' Adversity has been a blessing to us, for we have attended our meetings this year in larger numbers, as the figures show, than heretofore for some years. Be it said, however, *sotto voce*, that we are not praying for a continuance of adversity."

Professor Harvey B. Lemon became the sixtieth president of our tight little democracy, and was inaugurated on October 3, 1932, in Curtiss Hall. We listened with close attention to his exposition of *Cosmic Rays*, and went as far as our lay minds could go toward understanding that mysterious force, about which the speaker said physicists knew but little. We were still holding our larger meetings in Curtiss Hall; in late October on Ladies' Night Judge Holly addressed an audience of one hundred and twenty on the topic, *A Forgotten Governor*, namely, John P. Altgeld, the first Democratic Governor of Illinois elected (1892) since the War Between the States. Rabbi Louis L. Mann read his first and only paper, *A Study in the Philosophy of Doubt—What the Disbeliever Believes*, which held our thoughtful interest. Owing to the exigencies of his position as the head of a large congregation, as a lecturer, and civic worker, Rabbi Mann felt obliged to sever his connection with us in 1936. It is a matter of regret that we had nothing more from his potent pen. Just after the election in November, 1932, the Club voted that

"the Secretary be instructed to convey to the Hon. Henry Horner, our fellow member, the Club's congratulations and felicitations on his recent election to the Governorship of Illinois."

This was duly done, and two weeks later the Secretary read to the Club Governor Horner's gracious acknowledgment. A piece of excellent writing was Pierce Butler's *The Ancient Books of Wales*. Butler's special field was librarianship and old-book lore. Prolonged applause greeted the speaker at the close of his reading. A trinity of Book Nights

featured this season—something unusual, since, as we have already seen, two Book Nights per annum have been the rule (latterly only one). At the Book Night meeting of December 12, 1932, the author of *Remakers of Mankind*, Mr. Carleton Washburn, was present in person, and heard his book reviewed by Theodore Buenger. The other two Book Nights fell on February 10 and April 13, 1933. Edward Thomas Lee, founder and Dean of the John Marshall Law School, joined the Club in 1915. He was always loyal to our traditions and faithful in discharging his obligations. His papers, not many in number during the twenty-eight years of his membership, were either legal or historical, as a rule. On January 14, 1933, he gave us his *Reminiscences of Fifty Years*, a rich assortment of episodes and experiences, unique, varied and various, a human document, spiced with dashes of a characteristic dry wit, for which he was well known. Dean Lee's health failed in 1943, and his death occurred in December of that year. Other papers of this season that left their favorable impress on our memories were John Nuveen's *Jesse James was a Piker*, Carl Rinder's *Hew to the Viands*, *Let the Vitamins Fall Where They May* (his first), Irving Pond's *What is Modern Architecture?*, and Charles Yeomans' *Gloria in Peristalsis*, a paper that kept the audience in a state of continuous mirth, and for printing which many requests were signed. There were also Harry Robinson's *The Master of Gunston Hall*, Frederick Andrews' *A Hoosier Sunset*, Leonard Hancock's *Servants of the City* (the obligations—not to call it slavery—of a public School principal), Byers Wilcox's *Mysticism in Modern Science* (his first), and Arno Luckhardt's *An Adventure in Science*. In vogue at that time, established a short time previously, was the custom, eventually to lapse into desuetude, of awarding a medal, jovially called the *High-Cockalorum-Kudos* medal, to the member or members who had achieved a one hundred per cent attendance record for the season. It so happened that this lofty honor was conferred upon the same two members who had

won it the year before, namely, Irving K. Pond and Harry S. Hyman. At the end of the year we had only 158 members. Resignation, transfer of residence, and death had been most unkind. William Lee Richardson, one of our choice litterateurs, retired to Hingham, Massachusetts, where he wrote and taught, under the burden of failing health until his death in 1940. James Westfall Thompson accepted a professorship in the University of California at Berkeley; Seargent P. Wild went to Vermont and is now city editor of a daily newspaper; and Henry Horner established bachelor's quarters in the Governor's mansion at Springfield, Illinois. Three members died in 1932, two between seasons in the summer, and one in December. Martin A. Ryerson maintained his membership in the Club for forty-one years, but took almost no part in Club affairs. Small wonder, for his outside interests, business, philanthropy, trusteeships, were so large that his time was constantly at a premium. As a Trustee for years of the Art Institute of Chicago, he established and gave to the Institute the famous Ryerson Library of art; he was a member, and for many years president, of the original Board of Trustees of the University of Chicago; he was one of the incorporators of Field Museum of Natural History, and he gave to the University of Chicago the Ryerson Physical Laboratory. These were only a few of his many activities and benefactions. A man of this stamp who values his membership, though an inactive one, sufficiently to preserve it intact for four decades, is distinctly an asset to the Club. Jesse M. Owen was with us for only a few brief years, but, a gentle soul and a thorough scholar, he left his mark in the form of three impressive papers, two of which are especially to be remembered, his *Landmark in Early Irish Literature*, and his *John Woolman and Quakerism in the American Colonies*.

We received eight new members that season (four of whom are still with us). As the record saith: "They were cordially welcomed to our fellowship and to our *three and two tenths per cent.* refreshment table."

These were portentous times. Hitler's shrill yapping was beginning to be heard across the Atlantic; Huey Long, like a boa constrictor, was squeezing Louisiana to death; Franklin D. Roosevelt's torpedo chaser was showing its lights on the horizon; and John M. Cameron was elected President of the Chicago Literary Club.