

## **The Man Who Wore A White Coat And Orange Jacket**

by Michael Thaler

Presented to the Chit-Chat Club on October 14, 2014

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, Gentlemen:

Welcome to the final meeting of the 139<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of the Chit-Chat Club (CCC). At 10 per year, that's 1,545 dinners shared and an equal number of essays presented, stretching back to the second Monday in November, 1874, a string interrupted but once, when the evening's essayist was unexpectedly called to duty with the National Guard during a railroad strike late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I begin in a historical vein as I wish to address most particularly our recent members and our guests, who may not be aware of the archival treasures from which tonight's essay draws its material. Also, I look backwards to illustrate with contextualized examples, biographical sketches and telling quotations how much can be learned from long gone members of the CCC, from their formal presentations and the insights they offer in private, often confidential clues to the lives they led, the ideas and beliefs they were passionate about, and unreservedly shared (well, almost) with fellow members of the club. To that end, this essay will focus on members who preceded me from the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF): Chancellor John Saunders, Medical School Dean Langley Porter; above all, Chauncey Leake, the eminent Professor of Toxicology in the School of Pharmacy at UCSF.

In addition to the dinners and essays, the discussion by members that customarily follows each formal presentation was deemed by several essayists as an essential ingredient of club procedure and a defining feature reflected in the name. Perhaps the most useful comment on

this aspect of the club experience was made by Stanford professor Walter Hart in his 1951 essay "Chit-Chat": he considered "Chit" to stand for the essay read at each meeting, which is then redeemed by the "Chat" that follows. Thus, he positioned the discussion above most essays. On the other hand, there was this comment from a philosophical address entitled "Twig Bending" delivered on December 14, 1959: "And finally the ever fascinating discussion in which we can, nearly all of us, be relied to reveal each month a little more of our own rare personality and idiosyncrasies, even if we do not always add much to the sum total of knowledge of the subject under discussion."

Besides the essays and discussions, a critical component of the evening is the dinner. Langley Porter in his magnificent 1941 essay on "The Early Days of the Chit-Chat Club" described the November 1888 dinner as "a plain living feast". A bit of additional research revealed 'plain living' to be a sly reference to an essay from 1885 that described the goals of the Chit Chat Club as "plain living and high thinking". The phrase must have resonated with the members when it was adopted as the unofficial club motto on menus at least from 1890 on. In looking over the dinner menu from 1888 (tonight's handout), one sees that Porter's description of that dinner 126 years ago is at once precise and ambiguous, as may be expected from a person whose name graces the Psychiatry Building at UCSF: "The food list for the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual banquet in 1888 covers 2 pages. It begins with green turtle soup, goes on to salmon, two entrees, stewed terrapin, stuffed Fresno turkey, crab mayonnaise, roast quail, desert including champagne jelly and ice cream, all washed down with Riesling and Zinfandel and topped off with café noir." Writing on the eve of World War II, Porter

noted that “considerable slippage in the quality of the meals has been apparent since at least the Great Depression”. Porter should only be here tonight.

Porter was probably unaware that predictions of the club’s decline had been made as early as its 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary. On Nov. 8, 1897, Secretary Joseph Hutchinson announced that, over his objections, “we shall henceforward have no music”. He went on to predict “in 1897, we shall have no music; 1898, no wine; 1899, no tobacco; 1900, no coffee; 1901, no dinner; 1902, no essay; 1903, no discussion; 1904, no club.” (the sequence emphasizes the importance of discussion, its removal being the last nail in the club’s coffin). It would surely surprise and please Hutchinson to know that in the succeeding 117 years, only the music and tobacco has been tampered with. In addition, the tradition of meeting every second Monday of the month was abruptly ended 2 years ago.

As seems to happen in waves, an unusual number of new members joined the Club in recent years. For them, and for our guests, permit me to take a moment to identify my sources. Most members are no doubt aware that the club’s archives are preserved in the Special Collections Library at Stanford; few may know that most of the records prior to 1906 were destroyed in the fire that followed the earthquake. As an aside, it’s also worth noting that all but two of the members had lost their homes in that cataclysm, yet the club met on schedule exactly 33 days after the event. As Secretary Fairfax Whelan observed in his peroration at the time, “We see no reason why geology should be permitted to interfere with literature and the pursuit of truth.”

Attention has been recently focused on the essays preserved in the club archives. Unfortunately, a mere 372 essays have been preserved of the 1,500 listed as having been presented through 2010 - a mere 25% of the total. Except for essays from the first 10 years and the decade of the 1940's, they are randomly scattered in boxes and folders. But there's much, much more to the collection than the essays. The personal, often confidential letters; the formal memos and off-the-cuff notes, greetings from distant, sometimes dangerous, places, inform us about the members and their times in ways the formal essays cannot. These documents offer un-manicured insights into the writer's passionate purposes and beliefs, their individual lives embedded like uniquely cut stones in the setting of their times, two dozen accomplished, influential, cultivated men, professionals, businessmen, academics and the odd cleric communing once a month with their peers for nearly 6 uninterrupted generations. Add the detailed recordings of annual festive dinners where much of the extant information about the club's personalities is sequestered, reprints of articles written by academic and professionally active club members, press clippings of obituaries, opinion pieces, publications with references to the Chit-Chat Club or newspaper reports about the doings and accomplishments (and at least one suicide) of individual members; even the financial statements and all the intense scrutiny of prospective nominees have stories to tell that reflect as much about the moment as the man. Needless to say, this is low-hanging fruit for the historian interested in (to paraphrase the peerless Langley Porter again) the impact of passing history on the thoughts and outlook on "nature, the social order, and man's place in the scheme of things of a group of intellectual and influential men from just about every substantial sector of society".

An indication of the high repute in which the CCC was held at mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was the stiff competition for custody of the club records from The California Historical Society, The California State Library, the San Francisco Public Library, and most energetically, from the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. After a sharp and occasionally acrimonious campaign (Secretary Osgood Murdoch wrote "I am not getting in the middle of this thing") Stanford history professor and club member Edgar E. Robinson prevailed and the files were bundled off to the Green Library on October 12, 1954. I went through the entire collection 4 years ago, and annotated (made notes on) every piece of paper accumulated in 135 years. At the time, the collection stretched for 9.5 feet, 17 boxes of folders identified by dates and classified under general categories.

A search through the obscure files of the CCC occurred to me after I had joined and examined a list of former members. I was astonished to find several former CCC members associated with UCSF whose lives had touched mine directly or indirectly. The names of Langley Porter, John Saunders, and most particularly, Chauncey Leake rang loud bells. The image of an office door in the UCSF Department of Anatomy flashed before me. The door was barely large enough to contain the full name John Bertrand de Cusame Morant Saunders, spelled in capital letters and trailed by numerous suffixes. I had never seen anything like it.

Saunders had been forced to resign as Chancellor of UCSF in 1966, a year before my new wife and I moved to San Francisco. Those were the turbulent 1960's when every established institution came under scrutiny and challenge. Academic medicine could not escape the winds

of change. UC President Kerr himself was in trouble with US President Reagan over the so-called Free Speech movement amidst the student riots of 1964.

Saunders represented entrenched academic clinicians caught in the juggernaut of these epic transformations. He had been swept aside by the post-Sputnik research-driven tide in American higher education when he resisted the conversion of UCSF, along with most US medical schools, from a hospital-based center for training competent physicians to a campus supported with government grants to foster scientific work and the education of future bio-scientists. The chancellor was backed by the California and San Francisco Medical Associations but could not overcome a palace revolt staged by the new research-oriented faculty at UCSF and the mounting pressure from the AMA and the Association of American Medical School Deans. Kerr finally eased Saunders out of the chancellorship when the local newspapers gave the story front page coverage, framing the confrontation as a struggle between the forces of traditional medical "paternalism" and scientific "progress". Saunders was "a flat tire on the wheel of progress", wrote one prominent journalist.

I had researched these events in the 1990's for my master's thesis on the social transformation of American medicine in the post-World War II period, and became intrigued by the possibility that the CCC archives might yield clues to Saunders' uncensored and private thoughts during his time on the barricades (Saunders had been elected to the CCC in 1966). He had written essays on the click languages of East African tribes and white immigration to South Africa. Finally, I struck gold in a remarkable essay from 1977, entitled "Progress". It

was clear from the first few sentences this was a deeply felt, seriously researched, scholarly meditation on the issue that had driven him from high office. He wrote that the idea for the essay had been “provoked” by a discussion he had attended concerning “the advancement of science and medicine and their influence, or lack thereof, in contributing to existing social needs and order”. In looking back after 10 years, Saunders now viewed the political battlefield from a philosophical and historical perspective in exploring whether “the concept of progress is in itself no more than an act of faith”. The essay begins with a provocative yet unapologetic declaration: “The belief in perfectibility and the power of reason to bring about improvements in human relations and the conduct of men is open to serious question, enhanced by the loss of educational standards and the weakness of institutions.” After an erudite exploration of the origins and development of the idea of progress through the recorded ages, and the related meta-religious assumption of human perfectibility, Saunders concludes with: “Progress is conflict or progress is understanding. Which? Where is the middle road?”

The fog hanging over Mount Parnassus on most days is still there, reminding me of Saunders and the main character in this UCSF-based narrative. It is time to bring him to center stage. Langley Porter had retired from the CCC after stepping down as dean of UCSF Medical School in 1966. When Saunders lost the chancellorship that year, he “replaced” Porter on the CCC roster. The man who nominated Saunders was known as “Chauncey”. Even more than did Saunders, Chauncey DePew Leake looked and acted the part suggested by his name: lanky, slightly stooped, large head topped by a shock of hair shaped like ram’s horn. Chauncey had an imperial air about him that

imbued his words and gestures with Victorian grandeur. He was eminent in his field of toxicology, a published medical ethicist, a leader in professional education, a struggling but undaunted poet. As a poet, he came across romantic, sensitive, even naive; as a scientist, he was tough-minded and fact-bound. This was not surprising, as his area of special expertise, in which he was recognized as a world authority, was in toxins and dangerous drugs. He appears to me now as Gargantua the lovable giant, Gulliver held down by Lilliputians, and Don Quixote the dreamer – all rolled into one.

Chauncey was extravagant in his commitments, enthusiastic about everything he touched, and he touched on almost everything. Including everything that transpired at the CCC. Yet he was equally active and involved in the Bohemian club as stage manager at the Grove to the end of his days. Extraordinarily eclectic and sophisticated, yet touchingly idealistic and vulnerable, he was engrossed in the affairs of the club for 48 years, served as Secretary from 1936 to 1942, and stepped down only when appointed Vice President of the Medical School in Galveston, Texas. He remained at this post for 13 years, then served for 7 years as dean of the Medical School in Columbus, Ohio.

Remarkably, or should one say, typically, Leake's close connection with the club remained unaffected by his absence of 20 years. Somehow, his Chit-Chat colleagues behaved as if he had never left. He flew to San Francisco to present at least 3 essays, and a special meeting was called on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1952, during summer break, to hear his essay on Leonardo DaVinci. In preparation for this event, Leake wrote from Galveston to his close friend and successor as Secretary, Osgood

Murdock: "Will it be possible to have a screen and projector? This may add a little interest to the discussion. I hope particularly that John Saunders will be present. As you probably know, he is publishing a very fine book on Leonardo in the fall." Saunders was Leake's guest that evening.

Chauncey established an active correspondence with Secretary Murdoch which lasted for more than 10 years (1947-57) as the most effective method for maintaining his tight connection with the club. Approximately 50 of his more than 100 letters have been preserved in the archive. In turn, Murdoch kept Chauncey informed about upcoming essays and essayists and other club matters. Murdoch's reading of Leake's letters to members and guests before dinner became a routine practice at the monthly meetings. Thus, Chauncey's musings, advice and commentary serve as the perfect lens through which the small and large preoccupations and delusions of his time come into sharp focus, especially when refracted through his reactions to CCC essays and to the essayists themselves. Here I offer a sliver sampling of issues that pre-occupied him and many others in his time, and continue to percolate through ours.

My first sighting of Chauncey Leake was soon after I arrived in 1967 to join the medical faculty at UCSF. On my way to work as I braved the wind sweeping across Mount Parnassus one foggy August day of that "Flower Summer", a tall, gray man caught my eye. He was bending down to pick up litter and empty soda cans near the entrance to Moffitt Hospital and stuffing the garbage into the pockets of his white medical faculty coat. Intrigued, I inquired about him with the receptionist at the Information Desk. "Oh," she shrugged, "that's

Professor Chauncey Leake from Pharmacy. He comes by once in a while to make an example for others to keep the place clean.”

Thirty years after the encounter with Leake, I prepared for a career change, enrolling as a graduate student in History of Health Sciences in the very department UC President Clark Kerr had established at UCSF as a consolation prize for Chancellor Saunders. My master’s thesis was on the construction of a new Medical Ethics in the aftermath of the 1960’s. I found a copy of a pamphlet originally published in 1794 at Manchester Infirmary in England. This work had served in 1847 as the key source of ethical guidelines used by the American Medical Association in framing a code to regulate professional medical practices. Eighty years later, Leake added an extensive preface and published the first American edition of the Manchester manual under its original title “Percival’s Medical Ethics”. Leake published a second edition in 1975 updated with a post-1960’s introduction. I found a copy of the new edition of Percival’s work in the library at UCSF. On the fly leaf, Leake had written “Thanks for the kind help given to me by the UCSF library staff in preparation of this, the second edition of a book issued 48 years ago, when it fell flat as a mud-pie.”

It didn’t cross my mind at the time that the philosopher/ethicist who wrote the scholarly introduction to Percival’s manual, was the man in the white coat in front of Moffitt hospital. This only became clear years later from a document I found in the CCC archive at Stanford. At a memorial service held for Chauncey at UCSF on March 1, 1978, Milton Silverman, the noted science journalist for the San Francisco Chronicle and Chauncey’s close friend, attested in his eulogy that “Chauncey

taught all of us to despise pollution and litter, whether it be litter on the sidewalk, or litter in a journal article, or litter in the mind.”

Chauncey’s fascination with moral behavior, and his unblinking visionary approach to “making ethics”, were already on full display 38 years earlier in his essay “Ethicogenesis”, presented to the CCC on December 11, 1944. He reminisced about “one happy afternoon at the Grove when we amused ourselves under the sheltering redwoods with the idea of a biological basis for ethics. ...We induced such a principle: Behavior patterns by individuals or groups tend to become adjusted by trial and error toward those which yield the greatest mutual satisfaction.” He went on: “There are a multitude of historical examples of the gradual adjustment toward more mutually satisfying behavior patterns between groups of people.” Then, with stunningly unconscious irony: “Unfortunately, these have usually involved war.” After much further argumentation larded with quotations ranging from Aristotle to the German philosophers, the essay concluded: “Therefore, it is incumbent upon an individual to help make the relationship in which he participates with another individual as satisfying to the other individual as to himself.” In effect, Chauncey the secularist rediscovers the Golden Rule, and exemplifies its core message with the humble act of picking up litter in front of a hospital. *Imitatio dei*?

As a major figure in academic medicine, Chauncey was also intimately involved in training physicians and delivery of health care. Writing to Murdock in March, 1947, he commented on Langley Porter’s essay “Medical Service”: “We are up against a tough proposition with regard to getting decent medical care at a reasonable price. I see no reason why general practitioners might not take preventive medicine as their

specialty and practice on a retainer fee basis." These sentiments coincide with policy statements currently promoted by governments, media, and medical societies in all developed countries.

Continuing with the medical theme, Chauncey presented "Why Search and Research?" on June 12, 1966. The essay was a restatement of an article Chauncey published the previous year in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The gist was little changed from his presentation 22 years earlier (cited above), except for Chauncey's expressed hope that "the judgment and wisdom" necessary to implement his principle of mutual satisfaction could be achieved with "the betterment of health for people everywhere rather than making disease the primary concern." To Chauncey, this suggested "group practice, regular advisory sessions with the family, and graduated fees based on the family's situation, economically independent of professional and hospital services for the sick and injured." Eerily, Chauncey's ideas and language seem to have been imported directly into the Affordable Care Act of 2010.

Chauncey pursued the theme of health vs. disease in a letter dated November 1, 1950. "The trouble is that too few physicians want to prevent disease. The difficulty is that we have not yet worked out a satisfactory method of recompense for keeping people well. For some reason, doctors are afraid of retainers. This, however, is heresy and I have been damned by doctors from one end of the country to the other for saying it." On medical education, he wrote on October 8, 1953: "Medicine has long been called both an art and a science, and while we have greatly developed the scientific aspects in this country, we certainly have neglected the artistic phases of practice. We need to

give our students a lot more training in artistic judgment and good taste!". Again, this seems lifted from today's avant garde instruction manuals for medical students and articles on "holistic" medicine in the New York Times.

As we have seen, Chauncey's eternal optimism (his Don Quixote/Gargantua streak) comes through in his preference for intractable topics. He could also be ecstatically romantic about life. Three years before Murdock committed suicide, in a letter from November 1, 1950, Chauncey responds to his friend's pessimistic musings penned on March 3, 1954: "These are good times to be alive. Our times are as exciting as any, and our people are facing up to problems of terrific responsibility." The Korean war was at its peak. Similarly, there is Chauncey's approach to the "problem" of race. From his perspective, this was a biological issue closely related to other social health questions that could be solved with scientific manipulations of behavior.

Race had been the topic of 5 CCC essays stretching for 70 years: "American Race Problems" a 1903 presentation; "Racial Antagonisms in the US" in 1950; "Jim Crow - Whose Problem?" in 1961; and two by Julian Bartlett, dean emeritus of Grace Cathedral, on "A Christian's View of the Racial Crisis" in 1964, and "To melt or not to melt, that's not the question" in 1973. In response to the essay on racial antagonisms, Leake wrote on June 6, 1950: "There are all kinds of groups in Texas and it is amazing how clannish they are. It is this clannishness which strikes me as being one of the unfortunate aspects of any kind of minority group. It always leads to pressure endeavor of some sort or another. I think we ought to mingle more! Certainly, I

think the answer to the problem of racial minorities is more interracial marriage. This is a biological approach, and therefore it is not usually a popular one!"

However, the archival record demonstrates that even an ultraliberal iconoclast like Chauncey cannot entirely escape the general *Weltanschauung* of his times. On Nov. 6, 1947 he writes to Bartlett about the situation in Galveston, where Chauncey is in charge of medical education: "You will be interested to know we have Negro nurses in our hospitals and Negro students in our nursing aid courses. We also have accepted Negro physicians in our postgraduate courses. We have not yet had the problem of deciding what to do if a Negro student applies for admission to the medical school. You can appreciate therefore that gradually there are improvements." His optimism was prophetic in this one instance.

On January 10, 1978, Chauncey put on his beloved orange coat, the same he had worn for his graduation from Princeton in 1916. The occasion was "An Evening with Chauncey Leake" presented in his honor at the Bohemian Club. The program involved readings of Chauncey's poems to a captive but friendly audience gathered for the occasion. The finale, carefully staged by the honoree himself, had him standing in the glare of lights at center stage as he recited a favorite sonnet entitled "Advice to a young poet". Just as he proclaimed the final stanza -  
"So let your words await the mystery of conception, when gestation can begin,  
When growth occurs, repeating history in all you have experienced within.  
Then you will find that all you want to say  
Will flame in all the sacred ancient way."  
- the man in the orange jacket slid heavily to the floor. He regained consciousness for a moment, and those bending over him heard a

whisper "I just hyperventilated, that's all.". He slumped again and was rushed to the hospital. It was his last visit to Moffitt.