

1946-1953

THE SECOND VOLUME OF *The History of The Chicago Literary Club* ends with the meeting of May 7, 1946. This chapter, the first to carry the story beyond published sources, opens upon a world reeling in the aftermath of World War II. Great cities were still in ruins, millions of people displaced, and world leaderships altered beyond recognition. Hiroshima and Nagasaki had only recently felt the devastating power which twentieth century physics had put in the hands of man.

In this atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty, the Club pursued the even tenor of its ways, providing a place for quiet contemplation of things which are permanent through the pleasures of conversation and the art of the essay. In these quiet waters, it was a major event to move the meeting place of the Club to the Woodrow Wilson Room. Although the location of the Woodrow Wilson Room of the Council on Foreign Relations has changed from 84 East Randolph Street to 116 South Michigan Avenue, we have continued to meet in it ever since. The new quarters were generally praised but provided no place for the bust of the Club's loyal member and benefactor, John Crerar. This treasured memorial appropriately was given to the library he had founded, then housed in the same building.

In spite of the Club's cherished devotion to "the long view," the cataclysms of the time were more often reflected in the Monday night essays of 1946-1947 than at most other periods. Such papers created great interest. For instance, 70 members were present to hear Paul Douglas discuss "Frontiers of the Pacific." This was the largest attendance ever recorded at a regular meeting, so large that our cateress, Mrs. Green, ran out of refreshments for the first time in our history. Other essays on current events and problems of the day included an excellent exposition

of atomic energy by Lemon, making clear to laymen the nature of the atomic bomb. Gregory discussed the legality of the Nuremberg Trials, while Nuveen told the incredible story of union racketeering in connection with the Chicago Y.M.C.A. Guest gave an account of the Sea Bees in the South Pacific. Arthur Goldberg's "From Ulysses to Hecate County" reviewed censorship of pornographic material. This paper has considerable historical value because Mr. Goldberg heard many such cases when he became a Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

However, the majority of the papers were on personal, historical, or literary topics. Among them was Carl Dragstedt's "One for the Book," a charmingly told story of a young doctor's early experiences, both humorous and tragic.¹

We had two papers on former justices of the United States Supreme Court. Willard King's "Melville Fuller's Early Days in Chicago" was the Ladies' Night paper. "It was full of interest and delightfully read" and "all agreed it was a festive and joyful occasion." In the other, Raymond's "This Above All," gave "an excellent and well written account of the philosophy of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr."

There was a delightful spoof in Krieg's "Rabelais in Italy." This consisted of imaginary letters from the great Frenchman, on whom Krieg is an authority. Another essay of literary character was Heath's on Thomas Wolfe (later published).

There were also a number of essays on interesting people unknown to fame. One such was Marx's "Monsure Daniel Conway," described as "an astonishingly fine paper, very interesting, well written and well organized." In "The Old Professor," Chauncey Maher charmed Club members with his "beautifully and feelingly told tale of a brilliant professor who sacrificed his career to an equally brilliant wife afflicted with an incurable disease."

One essay in this group merits special comment. Percival Bailey vividly described an Armenian's journey to Iran to purchase rugs. This was one in a series given by him in these years on Armenian people, customs and history; the subject was his greatest hobby, and one which he carried to professional expertise. Dr. Bailey's library on Armenia was one of the finest private

1. Comments on papers in quotation marks are from the Recording Secretary's Minutes.

collections in the United States. He later gave it to Harvard University where it has strengthened an already famous group of related volumes.

Although the Club's finances were not in good shape, publication of Wild's history was, nevertheless, unanimously voted. Within a week, two members of the Club who wished to remain anonymous (the writer knows that one of these was Lessing Rosenthal) had made generous donations to this expenditure.

To open the 1947-1948 season, President Hurley chose a singularly appropriate topic, "The Literary Club." This was "a delightful resumé of the Chief Literary Clubs in England and the United States from the 16th to 20th centuries, a masterly effort. The end of the paper consisted of a beautiful but wholly undeserved compliment to the recent Club History done by the Club Secretary who was too dumb-founded to make even a suitable acknowledgement."

At the October 27 meeting, the Cliff Dwellers' invited us to dine there Monday evenings for \$2.00. Thus commenced a most enjoyable association which has continued uninterrupted, but the cost has changed. In this year, finances were substantially improved by a bequest of \$1000 from Carlos Sawyer, a member for over 40 years.

Again, more than the usual number of papers dealt with current scientific and political matters. William King's essay was a thoughtful plea for tolerance toward minorities, while Bowden made an "intensely interesting argument" for the creation of a service in the federal government to cope with the agents of other countries. Gerard's "A Biologist's View of Society" was one of the essays on science in this season. It is described as "a paper for both the scientist and the layman, a keen and thoughtful discourse with prolonged applause."

Travel was represented by a paper on the Galapagos which "drew prolonged applause for a unique and adventurous story admirably told." It was given by Croneis, the President of Beloit College. But literature was not neglected; Kestnbaum's book review of Toynbee's history contradicted Yarros' "splenetic tirade" earlier that year. Marsh's paper on Thackeray was among the most admired contributions in this field.

Over 180 members and guests attended Ladies' Night; up to that time the largest attendance in the history of the Club. Paul Angle read "The Pleasures of History." "The essay was enthusiastically received and applauded. . . . One of the most successful meetings ever held, thanks to the thoughtful preparation of the President and to the excellence of the speaker's essay."

President Heath's inaugural paper for the 1948-1949 season was a well received memoir of William Curtis, editor of Harper's Weekly and Harper's Bazaar. The Club had a new meeting place since the Woodrow Wilson Room was moved from the Crerar Library Building to the 13th floor of 116 South Michigan Avenue.

In this season, Krieg's "It Takes a Thief" was a notable commentary on translations of Rabelais and well merited its selection for publication. Its expertise and elegance of style are still remembered in the Club, 25 years after it was presented. Frederick Test's paper gave an insight into social history by an eye-witness. It was based on his letters to his father while he was at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington from 1890 to 1894. This was a charming glimpse into life in the capital at that time.

Wild's comment on Henri C. E. David's paper "Groping Through the Pea Soup of Surrealism" was "a sententious piece of grim humor by a Frenchman." Was he using "sententious" with its primary meaning of "short and pithy" or its secondary meaning of "ponderously trite and moralizing?" No one who heard David's papers can doubt the meaning Wild had in mind.

The Ladies' Night paper by Pargellis on William Hay, an early 18th century member of Parliament, "lifted Hay from his drab environment and humanized him, but the speaker . . . failed to raise Hay to heroic size."

On March 14, the Club celebrated its 75th anniversary with a paper "Faith and the Works in the Trial of David Swing" by Charles Yeomans, "an historic analysis and members enthusiastic in its praise, the desire to have it published was well nigh unanimous . . . it was a notable occasion." This desire was acceded to. The topic was especially appropriate to the occasion since Swing was a founding member of the Club.

Further recognition of influences on the establishment of the Chicago Literary Club was given at the opening of the 1949-1950

season, when Derrick Vail was elected delegate to the Centennial of The Cincinnati Literary Club (of which he was a member). The letter of congratulation was prepared by Paul Angle.

The essays during this season had considerable diversity, ranging from President Eyler's reminiscences of his education as the son of a Lutheran clergyman to Hogness' account of atomic energy (published). It was "a marvelous discourse from an atomic expert . . . simplicity flows from exact knowledge." Historical subjects included Puttkammer's discussion of odd and contradictory laws of many nations; Shilton's "exceedingly well told" account of the Nez Perce Indians and Pargellis's essay on members of English royalty who did not ascend to the throne.

"Culture and Character" by Senator Douglas on October 17 attracted nearly 70 members. Unfortunately, he was detained by official business in Washington, but his paper was read "most acceptably by Mr. King."

Cassell's "C. S. Lewis" was "in the Secretary's private opinion (others agreed) the most literary, the best constructed and arranged paper in many a day. It was pure pleasure just to listen to the perfect English that flowed from the reader's lips." Carl Dragstedt's "Country Doctor" on Ladies' Night had wit and charm to enhance the social pleasures of the evening.

During this year occurred the death of George Packard, President in 1918-1919. He had read over 30 papers before the Club. Lessing Rosenthal, President in 1930-1931, also died during this season. Packard had joined the Club in 1893 and Rosenthal in 1898. They were the last of our nineteenth century resident members.

The 1950-1951 season opened with President Halperin's "Art for Art's Sake." His thesis was that "works of art are the only objects in the material universe to possess internal order." Another paper on art was Hammil's "Suspensions." This, his first essay in 16 years of membership, was "one of the most delightful criticisms of art that we had ever heard." Unfortunately, this is the only paper he read as he died in 1953.

Other notable essays during this season dealt with a diversity of subjects, which is one of the Club's great treasures. Gillet, head of the University of Chicago Laboratory School, in "Schooling

and Education" discussed "fluently and intelligently what schooling is and what education is . . . the crowd was delighted."

"Howe and Hummel" by McConnell delighted the crowd at Ladies' Night. It told the story of two well known shysters who had "practiced law" in New York over 50 years before.

"The Greeks Had a Word For It" was a brilliant analysis of Greek literary style. Ernest Zeisler demonstrated his devotion to the Club by filling, on short notice, a gap in the program caused by the death of a scheduled essayist. In its place, he read his thoughtful paper, "A Theory of Human Rights." Hurley's "Old Stuff" traced the recurrence of similar governmental problems in different periods of history and the similarity of efforts, usually futile, to meet them.

On February 6, 1951 occurred the death of Payson Sibley Wild, Secretary of the Chicago Literary Club since 1920. His minutes have enlivened this chapter, as his company, essays, and history of the Club from 1924 to 1946 enhanced the Club during his long membership. The quotations used may suggest universal approval. But Wild did not praise indiscriminately. Frequently he made no mention of the quality of the evening's essay and occasionally there may be found such comments as "over the heads of the great majority of his listeners" and "very poorly organized paper."

The Club's memorial to Wild included this paragraph:

Despite his classical bent, Payson Wild was fundamentally a down-east Yankee. His feet were firmly on the ground, and he hated all sham and pretense. But he was a gentle man, with no rancor in him. There was no sting in his incisive wit. Even his forthrightness was kindly and never inflicted wounds. Truly he was a bit of old earth's salt, the savor of which will linger as long as we shall live.

President Cassell opened the 1951-1952 season with a moving address on Albert Schweitzer, whom he regarded as the greatest man of the twentieth century. Other notable papers of this season included essays on autobiography, law, medicine and literature. One unusual example of autobiography was Julian Jackson's "Happy New Year," an entertaining tale of New Year's celebrated by him in several foreign countries. Another autobio-

graphical essay was Wilcox's "An Ecclesiastical Autobiography." Puttkammer, succeeding Wild as Recording Secretary regarded this as one of the best papers he had ever heard. It was "full of delightful humor but also was a piece of real Americana." The Club agreed with him as this essay was later published.

Three papers on the law merit special comment. Stuart Ball's "How to Lose a Law Suit and Enjoy It" was an account of 12 interesting cases that he had lost, each adding to his professional growth. Ooms in "And Thus is a Treaty Written" described from the point of view of an insider the conclusion of a treaty on patents while he was U.S. Commissioner of Patents. "The Early Illinois Magna Carta" by Fergus was a discussion of the anti-slavery Article in Illinois First Constitution and Governor Edward Coles's role in that connection. Fergus died just one week later.

Two essays on subjects related to medicine were notable contributions. "The Past of a Delusion" was a slashing attack on psychoanalysis and psychological quackery by McCulloch. This was published, a well merited distinction. The other was Bay's "A Mystery Partially Solved by a Member of the Chicago Literary Club," an account of Dr. James Herrick's brilliant elucidation of coronary thrombosis. This discovery is a landmark in the history of medicine, revolutionizing knowledge of heart disease. The recognition of Dr. Herrick's work by the Club is a refutation of the familiar statement about a prophet's honor. Twenty-nine braved one of Chicago's famous blizzards to hear this essay, a tribute in itself.

The 2,500th meeting of the Club fell on March 10, 1952. It was chosen as Ladies' Night. The paper on this occasion was Heath's "The Custom, Politics and Tongue," a searching analysis of Virginia Wolff's work.

The 1952-1953 season opened with President Ernest Zeisler's "The Principle of Sufficient Reason," a scholarly discourse on the will. In other notable essays, history and literature were represented by interestingly varied contributions. "My Friends, the Historians," was Paul Angle's story of what happens when historians rely on each other instead of on their own research. Puttkammer's "The Notorious Captain Blood" was the delightfully

told story of the seventeenth century thief who stole the crown jewels (published). "Nature's Unfortunate Child" by Richard Richter recounted the career of Guiseppe Balsamo, the self-styled Count Cagliostro.

Among the papers dealing with literary subjects, Vail in "The Spoor of the Sassenach," told of his trip through Scotland following exactly the route of Boswell and Johnson. Practically every landmark mentioned by Boswell was easily recognized. Meyer Kestnbaum's "The Translator General" discussed Philemon Holland, the great seventeenth century translator of Latin classics.

Outstanding essays in social science and law were: John Beatty's "Jefferson Reflects," a violent attack on Roosevelt, claiming that he was the cause of the Japanese War; George Bunge's "2000 A.D.," predicting the social structure and the world outlook that may well prevail at the end of this millenium; and John Knox's first section of "Experiences as a Law Clerk to Mr. Justice McReynolds," a "most amusing" and informative tale.

In the field of medicine, Paul Cannon's "Mixed Humours" was an interesting discussion of old and absurd medical beliefs. Another was Percival Bailey's Ladies' Night paper "Pepperpot," an account of the life of Harvey Cushing and the curious love-hate relationship between the author of the essay and the subject. Both men made great contributions independently but some of their most significant work grew out of the uneasy collaboration of these two giants in twentieth century neurology. The essay has an immediacy rare in the materials available to historians of science.

As this chapter began, the entire world was recoiling from the greatest war yet recorded and cherishing hopes of peace and prosperity. When it ends, there had been dramatic recovery in West Germany and substantial reconstruction in other countries, especially Britain and France. Yet the Iron Curtain had rung down; there was armed conflict in Korea; bright hopes of world unity and tranquility had become tarnished. In such conditions, it is heartening to look back at the role played by the Chicago Literary Club in providing a place for contemplation and scholarly endeavor where the concerns of the mass media seldom intruded.

In these tumultuous years, the Club varied in size only from 154 to 155 resident members. Attendance showed similarly minor variations. From 1946 to 1953 the average attendance at meetings reached a high of 40 for the 1951-1952 season and a low of 32 for the 1949-1950 season.

These statistics from a deeply troubled period indicate that the need for the Chicago Literary Club is at least as great in such times as in quieter days. It is well that this is so, for later chapters carry the Club's history through even more turbulent waters.

GEORGE W. GALE