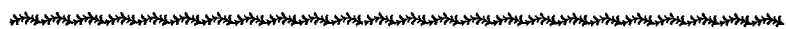




THE CHICAGO LITERARY CLUB



CHAPTER I



THAT the Chicago Literary Club has been for more than seventy years a cohesive, non-explosive structure, maintaining a steady, unbroken series of weekly meetings from the first meeting to the two thousand three hundred and twelfth (the number at present writing), when one considers the great diversity of character, training and temperament of its various members as they come and go is a social phenomenon of marked significance. From one generation to the next the membership has been drawn through a rigid "selective service," from the ranks of educated men, chiefly of the learned professions, as might be expected, the Law, Medicine, the Church, Education, Architecture, including Banking, Journalism, Accounting, and certain other vocations, wherein may be found men eagerly in search of cultural values.

At the end of his fifty-year history of the Club, Mr. Gookin, the erstwhile Secretary, wrote these words:

"The future of the Club will be largely what we make it. As we sow, so shall we reap. The destiny of the Club is in the hands of its

younger members. It is for them to carry on its traditions, to uphold its high standard, to make it the cherished meeting place where the best and most cultured men in the city will foregather. Each member in the future as in the past will need to have a keen sense of personal responsibility and be willing to give the Club of his very best. If the members do not fail in this, and it is inconceivable that they will, then at the expiration of another fifty years the Club should still be a lusty infant."

Twenty years of those fifty have passed over our heads. Have we not kept the faith? We have sown no wind and reaped no hurricane. Rather we have kept on sowing our best selected seeds of literary effort and are consistently reaping a better harvest. The "younger members" of twenty years ago are now our older members. They have been true to their trust, have carried on our best traditions, upheld our high standards. All who were members one fifth of a century ago and are still alive, will attest the fact that our Club is the "cherished meeting place where the best and most cultured men of the city" still foregather. And who is there among us today who does not feel "a keen sense of personal responsibility" for the Club's welfare, and is not willing "to give the Club of his very best?" We venture to believe that the "lusty infant" of 1924 has already passed the "mewling and puking" stage and is fast learning to eat its spinach with gusto.

So here we are, a body of men of full intellectual stature and prominent station, differing one from another politically, religiously, philosophically, but bound together year after year by love of the beautifully and correctly written and spoken word, and of the companionship of kindred minds and spirits.

This twenty-year compendium has been compiled from the written proceedings of the Club as contained in three quarto volumes, numbers VIII, IX and X, of the Club records, from the annual reports of the Secretary and Treasurer, from the yearbooks, from recollections of members, and from a memory impervious to more than fleeting impressions.

THE LIBRARY

The library of the Club was at one time an interesting, if somewhat bizarre, aggregation of books. Members who wrote books, and many did commit that indiscretion, were expected to donate copies of their works to the Club library. There were dictionaries, encyclopedias and other reference books that in their day were timely and useful, but are now obsolescent. Other books were presented to the library. The accumulation grew in size and age. But the bookcases were locked (they still are!) and few asked for the keys. There was (and is today) almost no time for reading during Club sessions, and the rooms were not open to members at other times. *Cacoethes loquendi* (an itch to talk) over beer and sandwiches was a readily acquired infection after the formal exercises, and was regarded quite properly with greater favor than dabbling in the printed lucubrations of long-forgotten authors. So it was that our incarcerated books gathered dust and begat worms. Eventually, however, a few members became troubled in conscience, and expressed the opinion that it was quite out of Literary Club character to allow such a fine library to lapse into desuetude. Something should be done about it. At the business meeting on February 26, 1923, these conscientious objectors offered a motion, promptly seconded and carried, that a Committee of Three be appointed to eliminate useless volumes from the Club library, and to arrange and catalogue the remainder. The following year that Committee worked valiantly if sporadically at reconstruction and reformation. In the Secretary's report to the Club, rendered May 19, 1924, appears the following paragraph:

"I am not authorized to report for your Library Committee, but it may not be out of place for me to say that that Committee has carefully collated all our books and disposed by sale or gift of many which are doing better and more active service elsewhere than on our own musty shelves. The books remaining have been catalogued, and will be arranged in proper order at some future meeting of the Committee."

That the Secretary spoke truly in part for that Committee, although not duly authorized, is evidenced by an item in the Treasurer's report of the same date to the effect that the really remarkable sum of \$127.25 was realized in the sale by the Committee, of old books and brochures. What choice items the Committee may have found lurking in hidden corners of the bookcases is not known, for there is no record. To the best of your historian's recollection, that catalogue, if it was made, was never mentioned or displayed. The Secretary says he has serious doubts that that "future meeting" of the Library Committee was ever held.

The above Secretarial report went on to say:

"Of great interest to the Club should be the knowledge that every Club publication issued since our birth as a Club in 1874, our yearbooks, Club papers, memorials and other brochures are all to be found in a certain one of our bookcases."

This was true at the time of that report and we took great pride in that fact. But that state of completion did not last. The case containing these valuable records was gradually filled to overflowing with an ever increasing accumulation of new documents and reports; constant handling of the contents as some one of us from time to time went in search of a special item to fill out a personal collection or for other purposes, brought on a state of confusion that broke up and practically ruined that complete collection. In our difficulty we consulted our two professional librarians, both members of the Club, Carl B. Roden of the Chicago Public Library, and George B. Utley of the Newberry Library. Many of our publications were already in these libraries. Salvaging what we could from what we had left, and obtaining stray copies from private sources, we managed finally to round up every last item, not quite in duplicate but nearly so. George Utley assures us that the Newberry now has a complete set of everything the Literary Club has ever published. Mr. Roden informs us that his set in the Public Library is almost complete, that one or two items are still lacking. Copies of every

publication issued by the Club from year to year are sent to these two libraries. Also on our mailing list are the John Crerar Library of Chicago, the Chicago Historical Society, the University of Chicago Library, Northwestern University Library, the American Antiquarian Society of Worcester, Massachusetts, and the libraries of Harvard University and Yale University.

Three times since 1924-1925 the Club has transferred its earthly possessions to different quarters. We shall speak of these moves in due course. Each one left its hallmark of confusion on our little library. Today these books languish, as they have languished for twenty years, unread, well confined and unsung.