

An Early Literary Club

Inaugural Address
by
President Payson Sibley Wild
Read before the
Chicago Literary Club

At the Annual Dinner
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Silhouette Portraits by
Earl Howell Reed



Chicago Literary Club
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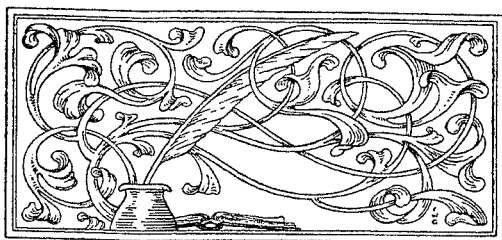


PERPETVVS SVM SCRIBA, MEHERCVLE, TEMPVS IN OMNEI
DI FOVEANT ME, POL: NAMQVE DIES VOLITANT.

SILHOUETTE PORTRAITS

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AN EARLY LITERARY CLUB

“CONCENATORES, CONFUMATORES, COMBIBONES,
CONSCRIPTORES, VOS OMNES SALVETE!
POST DIES VERO INERTES, CALIDOS, FRIGIDOS,
PLUVIOS, ET OMNIS DAMNATI GENERIS, AD ONUS
MUNDI LITTERARIUM SUSTINENDUM ITERUM
TANDEM CONVENIMUS.”

Or, in our own tongue: “Fellow diners,
fellow smokers, fellow drinkers, fellow writ-
ers, greetings!

“Vacation days, hot days, cold days, rainy
days, and every other damnable kind, are
supposedly over, and at last we are again
met to take up the literary burden of the
world.”

In the words of this ancient formula, used
successively in the first century by the pre-
siding officers of the *Sodalitas Romana Lit-
terarum Servandarum* (The Rome Literary
Club) at each annual reunion after the fall
rains had begun, I greet you, fellow mem-
bers of *this* Club, and invited guests.

If anyone present is harboring in his

private sceptical compartment the notion that the apparently anachronistic term "fellow smokers" (*confumatores*) in the above excerpt tends to prove its spurious character, let me dispel his doubts instanter by citing Cicero's letter to Atticus, wherein we read:

"Served on platters adorned with ferns, or in marvelous baskets, it is your custom to regale us with *little cabbages*."¹

The history of the Rome Literary Club, as it may be fragmentarily determined, is a seething mass of fascinating detail. If our attention is not too closely riveted upon what to finite vision appears to be a faltering and indeterminate trend in the affairs of men; if we stand not too much aghast at the present day murderous combat of ideals; if we are not too greatly discouraged because philosophic and ethical problems seem more insoluble than ever, if that were possible; and if for the time being we can forget our despair over the state of our nation, which mournfully we behold sucking the bitter pap of unrest from the desiccant dugs of "Freedom and Equality," then let us turn for a little with relaxation of mind and body to a consideration of the vicissitudes of an ancient yet ever contemporary organization, like our own never finding yet ever seeking the grail of beauty in a sordid world.

¹"In flicatis lancibus et splendidissimis canistris, holusculis nos soles pascere." (Ad Att. VI, I, 13.)

In venturing into this somewhat misty realm, I may say: "*Nemo scit praeter me ubi soccus pressat.*"¹ That is to say, the incompleteness and the imperfections of this sketchy account are fully recognized. My sin is ever before me. But it should be remembered that many of the sources are contaminated, that many an isolated fact admits of more than one conclusion, and that the temper of one interpreter differs from that of another in epexegetical power.

It may seem to be a singular fact that this Literary Club of the first century has been so uniformly ignored by both the literary and the political historian. But this, I think, is easily explained, in part by the fact that literary clubs, with but few exceptions, prefer to keep their proceedings chiefly to themselves, and disclaim policies of publicity; and in part because as a rule professional writers and famous or notorious *literati*, touched with the aura of popular adulation, avoid such organizations as beneath their dignity — fearing perchance for their reputations. So it was with the Rome Literary Club. Its membership comprised not so much the culturists as the cultured; not so much the makers as the partakers. That is why we have heard so little about it.

There are, of course, as the slender rec-

¹No one knows but myself where the shoe pinches.

ord shows, instances of other than submerged or little known names appearing on the roster. In the year 39 Gaius Cæsar, or Caligula the Emperor, became a member of the Club. We do not know what his alleged qualifications were, or why the Club took him in, or who signed his application. But we do know that of all the Julian Emperors he was the only one who never published any works of his own. It may have been this fact that secured him the entrée. In the light of our present information regarding the quality of the literary product of first century royalty, such a negative qualification doubtless would have had great weight with a membership committee, aside from any pressing and unliterary influences flowing from the operation of the law of self-preservation. In this connection we must not neglect to recount the little tale that has come down to us of Caligula's singular stewardship of the Club's finances during the last year of his membership. His well-known profligacy in public expenditures was carried into his management of the Club's frugal resources. Although only a junior member of the finance committee, his exalted position outside enabled him to exercise an absolute control over the committee, which, at his instance, is said to have reduced the annual Club dues of all *grammatici* and *rhetores* (professors and teachers)



DVRVM EST CONTRA STIMVLVM
INERTIAE HVMANAE SEMPER CAL-
CITRARE, SED ALITER VIVERE NOLO.

from one thousand sesterces per annum to two hundred and fifty, which so depleted the Club's revenue that less commodious quarters had to be found down in the *Subura*, a very undesirable locality for a club having such noble traditions. There was a rumor current that Caligula yielded to the importunities of the *Collegium grammatodidascalorum* (a sort of teachers' federation); but the evidence for this is scanty.

The general sentiment of the Club seems to have been averse to this Caligulan policy, for a gleam of glee at the untimely dissolution of Caligula has survived the long night of mediæval quiescence. A *graffito*, or wall scribble, done by some daring literary catechumen in the Club reads thus:

*Iste Gaius in cavum
Dedit nos et imperium.
At nunc ibi ipse iacet,
Nobis quod ecaster placet.¹*

This lacks the sublimity and sententiousness of Augustan verse, and displays nakedly the degenerate tendency of the day to indulge in mannerism and epigram. But at least it is "popular stuff," and reflects the *sermo vulgaris* in all its Menippean directness. Martial would doubtless have turned it more neatly, Martial, that master of the inferen-

¹The State and us that Gaius cuss
Has put in the hole both body and soul.
Now he himself lies on that shelf,
Forever pickled, and—gods!—we're tickled!

tial sting, that kindly scorpion of invective, who could scarify without lacerating, and make his point with keen indirection. But he could not have struck the nail more squarely. Of the metrical peculiarities of this scribbled relic, an eminent classicist says: "The lines are not *scazons*, but alas, they limp!"

It is fairly inferable from the evidence that the Rome Literary Club flourished, existed, became moribund, revived, and died, as circumstance or exigency dictated, within a period of forty odd years. The *terminus a quo*, in so far as has yet been discovered, seems to have been the death of Drusus, the unimportant son of Tiberius. His end was compassed through the machinations of the notorious Aelius Sejanus, Tiberius' viceroy, who devoted his perverted talents most heartily and energetically to the scuttling of the Ship of State. Having disposed of Drusus, with a view doubtless to securing for himself the succession to the throne, Sejanus' next act was to subsidize one of his court *dilettanti*, an unaccomplished verse maker with an overweening sense of his own importance, and belonging to the tribe derided a few years later by a noble-minded satirist of standing as one who might or might not know, but was not satisfied that he knew "unless he knew that others knew that he knew." This literary pretender at the



NON MODO OMNES RES IPSAS SED
ETIAM RVMORES RERVVM VOLO COG-
NOSCAM.

behest of Sejanus produced a sycophantic panegyric in most murderous hexameters extolling the defunct prince *ad sidera altissima*, and — I may add — *ad nauseam maximam*. That this performance, designed by Sejanus primarily to cover his own tracks with dust, to becloud the true issue in the eyes of Tiberius fuming in melancholy state in Capri, and to compose, if the gods willed it, the emperor's shattered nerves, — that this performance might have a wide circulation, and impress upon the *élite* of Rome a favorable sense of the usurper's turpitude, Sejanus formed a so-called Literary Society (chartered under the laws of Alexandria — these being more liberal to corporate bodies organized not for profit than the laws of Rome), opened the season with a ladies' night and a huge free dinner combined, and caused his henchman, the author, Pomposus Asininus Adulator, to read publicly his sickening *Drusiad*, to the accompaniment, at regular intervals, of hireling applause.

The grammarians tell us that Asininus' work abounded in metrical solecisms, and cite such examples of his ignorance as I'xion for Ixi'on, Iby'cus for I'bycus, O'rion for Ori'on, Aeo'lus for Ae'olus and the like, errors which neither time nor culture has been able to eliminate. In such unpromising soil during the year 23 of this era the Rome Literary Club had its roots.

But better things were to come even in an age more and more terrorized by the wantonness and cruelty of absolutism; an age characterized in general by a lack of new ideas; an age whose creative faculties, only now and then of a high order, were lulled by these deadening influences into a state of delitescency.

Until the downfall of Sejanus the Club continued its parasitical existence under his personal domination, although on two or three occasions, so we are told, some good things "got by" both Sejanus and his Club censor. That literary and intellectual anarchy, Victorius Varrus, a refugee from the North but a naturalized Roman, delivered himself of a tirade against autocratic abuses and literary degeneracy that warmed the blood of the few timid radicals present, who had not forgotten their best family traditions, and shocked almost into insensibility the then presiding officer, Maccus Variabilis (Keeper of the Imperial Fiscus), who though at heart a sympathizer, nevertheless felt impelled on the ground of personal safety to adjourn the meeting *sine die*, which he did deftly, suavely, smilingly, and with carefully chosen words, having first adjusted his toga that all might not fail to notice its broad purple stripe. But the delators were present, and the unhappy Varrus was compelled next day by viceroial invitation to open his



DOMINVS ET CONDVCTOR HABITA-
TIONIS SVM VNO ATQVE EODEM
TEMPORE—QVAM IVCVNDVM!

own veins in his private bath. At another time Tomsonius Vestfalis, who seems to have been the only historian of the time altogether free from the bondage of rhetoric, and the first-known exponent of what we call historical criticism, electrified the Club by reading, not what he had prepared and had had accepted by the Club censor (doubtless some fulsome extravaganza), but a stinging thesis entitled "*De Regum Divinitate*," wherein with uncommon courage he tore the heart out of the deification theory; denounced the gods as creatures of man's primitive imagination and therefore non-existent; excoriated formalism, ritualism, and occultism; scored Stoicism, in that imperishable phrase of his, as "that sour ringmaster in the emotional circus"; insisted that Lucretius was right in his unshaken belief that "the ordinary lives of men, their hopes, fears, and behavior generally, are a mass of error, and that religion in particular is a gratuitous and horrible aggravation of human distress"; and ended, in a peroration that moved his hearers deeply, with a statement of his own conviction that "the sole satisfaction really open to man is the perception of the facts—the comprehension of that fortuitous and temporary concourse of atoms, our world, in which man, as a still more ephemeral combination, plays so singular a part." We do not know what, if anything, was done to

Tomsonius as the result of this defiant deed for owing to the lapse of Sejanus' régime, an unbridgeable lacuna appears in the chronicle. But it is a relief to us to record that his name occurs prominently in the subsequent transactions of the Club. Either his daring or the well-known religious toleration of his time saved him. A religious heterodoxy might be forgiven, but never a political.

Barring these exceptions, as has been stated, the Club was unworthy its name until, in the last years of Tiberius, a little group of men devoted to literature and the arts met secretly in a villa by the Tyrrhenian Sea and determined to revive the organization. It was agreed that literature was in need of both uplift and stimulus; that there had to be at least a private forum for the propagation and development of free ideas, where a man would not be confronted with a disconcerting vision of his own death mask if he uttered his true convictions; and that a co-operative literary drive then and there might be the means of saving unborn generations from an unlettered fate. Such were the chief motives that actuated these idealistic rebuilders, who came from all walks in life, and of whom it was well said by a later Club historian: "In most of them 'technical brilliance was tempered with a penumbra of liberal culture.'" They called



RES GESTAS VETERES NVNC MEMORO LIBENS !

themselves "*Duumpercentumviri*" (two in a hundred men), an unusual compound word in the later Teutonic style, which was perhaps designed to be a play on the *Duumvir* of their own political history; and the Club device agreed upon consisted of two capital I's and a C (IIC). The meaning of this term outside the Club was for a time unknown, until in a moment of unrepressed wrath Aulus Fuscus Iudicialis, *praetor urbanus*, a dignified and conservative member of long standing, who bulks large in the Club annals, openly denounced in court a scurrilous lampooner as a "*Nonaginta octor*" (ninety-eight). This became at once a popular term of reproach, and was at last connected with the self-styled "*Duumpercentumviri*" (or two percenters) of the Literary Club. It is sad to relate that this flattering appellation was at all times during the Club's existence more or less of a misnomer. Self-appointed saints seldom find themselves in the Calendar.

For a few *denarii* the reorganizers purchased the defunct charter first obtained by the fallen Sejanus, enlisted a respectable membership, and began regular sessions.

The Club now entered upon its *floruit*, which extended to the early sixties. The entrance of royalty into its membership rendered secrecy no longer necessary, and, until the influence of Seneca and Burrus

over the adolescent son of Agrippina began to wane, the Club enjoyed an unbroken period of various degrees of prosperity. In the year 64 we may disinter its *terminus ad quem*. In the fanatical clutches of Nero the little life that was in it was strangled out of it. Free spirits were ousted or poisoned. Independence of thought, such as there was, succumbed to the waves of imperial blandiloquence that overwhelmed it, and the Club at the last degenerated into a royal concert hall wherein Nero occupied the stage exclusively, packed its benches with servile admirers and informers, and rehearsed his falsetto melics to the Schönbergian strains of his golden lyre. An ignominious end, we may say, but we are to be reminded that in the Club's ashes reposed incombustible gems of human wit, wisdom, and experience, which time and flux have rendered only more valuable to the uses of posterity.

Although many a gap in the meager chronicle must ever remain unfilled, there are still left sufficient data from which we may reconstruct interesting and striking portions of the Club's internal history while it was yet in flower.

At an early date the Club adopted a definite secretarial policy. The conviction became established, and developed into a tradition that the Secretary should hold office for life, or during good behavior. Even this



“VNDE ILLA PRIORVM
ENDI QUODCVMQVE ANIMO FLAGRANTE LIBERET
ICITAS?”

last restriction, however, was in time suspended and in the annals we find the name of but one incumbent of the sacred office, Gugianus Singularis, surnamed by his colleagues, because of their respect for his peculiar fitness, Secretarialis. He continued to serve even when Nero was the Club *Prima Donna*, and was often addressed by the latter with fear and trembling as "*Perpetuus*." No greater compliment than this could have been paid Gugianus. It was practically an apotheosis. The order of "*Res Tota*," an honor never bestowed save by the Emperor himself in person—and then usually upon himself—was most worthily conferred upon Gugianus by Claudius; and in many other ways the Secretary was honored by his contemporaries both publicly and privately. His annual election from a mere form grew into a ritual, and nominating committees are said to have mentioned his name with reverence. He was acquainted with all who were worth knowing in Rome, and could call by name every member of the Club, resident or absentee, past or present, though that member might never have attended a single session, an accomplishment which won Gugianus high praise, and aroused in his associates much friendly envy.

As keeper of the Club *fiscus* his experience as a *publicanus* and money-lender made his services invaluable. Notwithstanding the

exiguity of his stipend, he yet so honestly and skilfully conducted the finances in his charge that an enormous amount of wealth accumulated, which brought into the Club an annual income of several hundred thousand sesterces. Tempted by this evidence of well being, certain members of the Club who had houses or palaces for hire schemed with more or less success to induce the Club to seek costlier surroundings, the most notable achievement in this direction being that of one C. Curtius, the Crassus of his day, who housed the Club sumptuously for a consideration more nearly approximating its available income; thus contributing in material fashion to the solution of a vexatious problem, and, at the same time, thwarting the witless suggestion of Pomposus Asinius, a suggestion which might else have grown into a plot, that a clique of the younger members work for the Club's dissolution by causing all the older members to resign or be strangled, and then proceed to divide the Club's resources amongst themselves. It is a satisfaction to be able to record this great though unwitting service of C. Curtius.

The record is clear that Gugianus knew more of the Club's workings and affairs than any other member, and that accordingly each new administration sought his advice and counsel with eagerness and humility. In this



IN ALITE PEGASO
ADVOLO
AD MYSTICOS MONTES
ET CARMINVM FONTES!

way and in this way only could the Club traditions have been preserved unsullied.

As a compiler, artist, and critic Gugianus was unsurpassed. His monumental family history, the "*Gens Gugiana*," was a marvel of accuracy and detail. Like all, or most, of the publications of Club members, if the record is to be considered reliable, the only copy besides the author's own to find bibliothecal lodgment was the one that reposed in the dusty containers of the Club's private collection of books and manuscripts, probably the most remarkable aggregation of literature ever assembled in one place; for here was a treasure-house of the unread and the unreadable, of unrolled scrolls and unopened tablets, of mouldy parchment and decaying *umbilici*, that drove many an antiquarian and *librarius*, seeking to effect a rational classification, to his final sleep beneath the spreading ilex on the Via Appia.

It would be a glaring omission to fail to mention that Gugianian stroke of genius, the *Libellus Annuus*. We must content ourselves, however, with the brief and wholly insufficient statement that this eighth wonder (*octavum mundi miraculum*), an epitome of all that was chaste and simple in decorative art, Syrian in design, Babylonian in coloring, Greek in beauty, and Roman in conciseness, was *facile princeps* of its kind. Its imposing and engaging lists of Club offi-

cials and dignitaries, of which it principally consisted, let us into the secret of the Club's great vogue, and clearly indicate that Romans of every station, high and low, sought membership and office in the Club that they might acquire at least one variety of fame, the enrollment of their names in Gugianus' immortal Codex, which we may well believe, had it survived in any form, would have far outranked the finest monasterial product of a later age in point of illumination.

But what of the Club itself, its activities, its personnel, its social life? Would its membership have included, as beyond peradventure it would include to-day, the opposite, the diverse, the lettered and semi-lettered, the songster, the owl, and the magpie? The evidence, though it is but a wisp of fact in a bale of silence, gives us but one reply — an undeniable affirmative. Lo, the nature of man altereth not with the seasons, nor his instincts with the years. In this ancient Club were giants and pygmies, plutocrats of mind and the mentally indigent, doers of equity and workers of iniquity, the venerable *sapiens* and the youthful *stultus*, the radical and the conservative, the philosopher and the cynic, and — always — the individual, some C. Bubo Sycophanticus perhaps, whom neither learning nor experience, nor god nor man could ever make over into a silken purse. This much our Chronicle tells us.



"DOCTVS, FIDELIS
SVAVIS HOMO, FACVNDVS, SVO CONTENTVS, BEATVS,
SCITVS, SECVNDA LOQVENS IN TEMPORE, COMMODVS, VERBVM
PAVCVM .". "

Its mention of names, however, seems to be confined almost altogether to those of men whose achievements both in and out of the Club were more or less worthy of note, or to those whose personalities were strikingly dominant. It is a privilege to be able to piece together out of the fragments a few rough mosaics, in the order in which the names were found.

Rivalling Domitius Corbulo and Servilius Nonianus, historians of the Claudian régime, was that venerated member Horatius Cunctator Veteranus. As the years drew silently over him his presence in the Club became more and more a benediction. He had fought under Augustus at Actium, and from the storehouse of his keen memory, or from drawings made by himself on the trireme during or just after the battle, was able to visualize that memorable sea fight in a way that stirred the imaginations of his younger colleagues. Having survived the intervening period of deterioration Cunctator was a connecting link between the gold and the silver, and doubtless often felt in his heart what another Horatius of an earlier day had said of Antony's conqueror:

*"Io triumphe, nec Iugurthino parem
Bello reportasti ducem
Neque Africanum, cui super Carthaginem
Virtus sepulcrum condidit."*¹

¹ "Hail, O god of triumph! Neither in Jugurtha's war didst thou bring back so glorious a captain; nor

Among the famous *advocati* who belonged to the Club during its years of success, were two men strikingly similar, and yet wholly dissimilar, who, judging from the record, must have left a powerful impress upon the Club. Both were men of parts; learned in the law; adherents by instinct of the discursive Asiatic school of rhetoric; brilliant conversationalists, owing to "high word pressure" (as Moierius, the intellectual wag, once said); deliberate of utterance; steeped in the earlier and richer literature of their nation; and, under the gentle stimulus of Special Club Falernian, worthy antagonists in argumentative logomachy. Fuscus Iudicialis, the one, was a staunch Stoic, clinging to the logic, the ethics, and the theology of the Zenonic era; while the other, Stellatus Mirificus (sometimes surnamed Meritus, because he deserved so well) whatever else he may have been, was a mystic of the mystics, a lover of Persian lyrics, highly colored Oriental poetry and Vergil's Sixth Aeneid, and an able and sententious expounder of the cults of Zoroaster and Mithra. Both Fuscus and Stellatus held briefs for what the rhetors called the "lofty and chaste style of speaking" or writing (*grandis et pudica oratio*), and both were its purest exemplars. Fuscus' Boswell has preserved in our chron-

was Africanus such,—he whose valor reared for him a shrine o'er Carthage." (Epod. IX, 23. Bennett's tr.)



"FLOS DELIBATVS POPVLI SVADAEQVE MEDVLLA."



CAVDAM GALLI, CENAM, HOLVSCVL-
VM NIGERRIMVM, LONGISSIMVM, PIN-
GVISSIMVM—QVID DESIDEREM VLTRA?

icle a fragment of a banquet conversation in which Fuscus protests against the bombastic language of declamation. This utterance, we may say in passing, was subsequently confiscated verbatim by Petronius in his attack upon similar abuses. A comparison of the texts has given a true reading.

"Rising from his couch, Fuscus said: 'Permit me to say, O declaimers, that chiefly through you has real eloquence come to its untimely death. For, as the result of your concoction of mockeries out of vapid and empty sounds, what actual substance your effort may have within it has lost its sinews, and, pleonastically speaking, falls "prone on its back." By no false rhetorical palisade were young aspirants hedged about what time Sophocles and Emerson found undying words exactly suited to their purposes. No obscure sciolist had smothered the spark of his native talent in effusiveness when Pindar, Lowell, and the lyricists were loth to essay the Homeric strain. And beyond cavil neither Plato nor Lincoln ever stooped to this accursed affectation. The lofty and chaste style is neither spotted like the Bryan leopard or the Congressional giraffe, nor turgidly opulent like the Lewistonian turbot, but rises aloft on the pinions of its own beauty. This wind-jamming, pot-bellied loquacity hath lately arrived from the East, that hotbed of verbal floridity, and

filled the ardent minds of our youth with a certain pestilential efflatus, so that correct speaking, robbed of its virginity by an unscrupulous super-regulation, lies prostrate and mute with shame. In a word, who can approach to the standards established by Thucydides, or our own Chenerius Episcopus? Nay, even Poetry hath lost its natural glow of health, and all your feverish lucubrations stuffed as it were with the same chestnut dressing, can never hope to reach the hoary dignity of senescence.'"¹

His Boswell's only comment upon this outburst is the marginal note: "*Quam lepidum hoc! 'Similia similibus curantur!'*" A judgment quite undeserved, if we may say so.

But besides these pillars of Club idealism, whose integrity and unswerving loyalty contributed so largely to make their beloved organization the tower of strength that it was, others must claim our attention. Another *advocatus* lent a quiet dignity all his own to the proceedings of the Club, C. Burleius Barbatulus. We are advised by our chronicler that Burleius probably represented what was known in the history of speculative thought as the New Academy. The dogmatic teachings of the Old Academy had been abandoned by Arcesilas (third century B. C.), "under whose headship the school became the home of scepticism, by which is

¹Adapted from Petronius. Sat. sec. 2.



"NVNQVAM POETOR NISI SIM PODAGER."

meant free inquiry, unbiased by any undigested positive conviction." (I am quoting the record.) "As much could be advanced for, as against, any opinion under discussion, and the wise man, renouncing absolute knowledge as unattainable, held his judgment in abeyance." Whether this characterization be altogether true or no, it is certain that Barbatulus enjoyed a well deserved reputation for impartiality, poise of manner, weighty utterance, carefully prepared opinion, fairness of attack, and uniform courtesy and kindness. He was sought by radical and conservative alike for his views on Club policy; and if any measure was being considered by one faction against some opposing group, as for example a proposition to abolish the use and enjoyment of dried cabbage during a formal performance because of its deleterious effect upon the apperceptive faculties of certain sensitive members, who could not endure and doubtless did not require fumigation, Burleius was ever the chosen vehicle for its presentation, for his smooth voice and persuasive tongue never failed to convince even an overwhelming majority against him.

Of the rhetors and teachers of Greek of the first half of the century in question, it can be most authoritatively stated that by far the most brilliant, the most scholarly and the wittiest was he, whose sole appear-

ance at the Club during each year, when he declaimed in his own inimitable manner on the supernal vitality and utter superiority of Greek culture over every other, was always a marked occasion, and the sure sign of an intellectual debauch. The distinguished career of Paulus Sorius Rhetor baffled the best literary biographers and critics of his time. Even Seneca's choicest performance in the realm of satire and wit, the "*Apocolocyntosis* (*pumpkinification*) of *Claudius*," that mordant synthesis of Claudian pusillanimity, which as a guest the philosopher once read before the Club and its assembled *hetairae*, was quite overshadowed by Sorius Rhetor's marvelous dilucidations of Greek life and thought. From his many faceted mind scintillations emanated with the precision of a machine gun and the rapidity of the alpha rays of radium. One always felt when his periods, pregnant with unknown possibilities, o'erleaped each other in fantastic play, as though one were being whelmed in an avalanche of cut diamonds and amethysts. To have heard him once was a rich experience; to have heard him twice a liberal education; to have heard him thrice—but here the chronicle suddenly ceases, and we shall never know into what state, beatific or otherwise, a third hearing would have brought his listener. No conjectural reading



"CVRENTVR DVBI MEDICIS MAIORIBVS AEGRI."

could possibly do justice to this eloquent hiatus.

Sorius Rhetor's connection with educational extension was important. He not only taught the Platonic and Aristotelian systems continually in Rome, but he also filled important lecture engagements before culture clubs and societies for the study of antiquity, in Capua, Mantua, Massilia, Syracuse, Tarentum, Brundisium, and other cities, speaking as freely in Greek as in Latin, and displaying perfect familiarity with the popular tongue and its various dialects. But his crowning glory was his appointment by Nero, through the influence of Seneca, as "Exchange Rhetor" at the Academy of Athens. Here for a time his theories almost broke down, for the research savants and learned doctors of Greece had no dealings with their, as they thought, lesser known brethren in the West, and fostered a chilling and provincial indifference to Roman scholarship amounting almost to complete disdain. But Sorius was a true Roman as well as a scholar. He recovered his balance, compelled attention by sheer force of intellect, and soon demonstrated to the smug Athenian academicians that though the

*East was East and the West was West,
The twain must sometime meet!*¹

Upon his return to Rome he prepared an

¹ With due apologies.

account of his year's experience which became even more classic than everything else he had written. This he not only delivered before the Rome Literary Club, to a tumultuously applauding assemblage, but before every club in Rome, including the exclusive First Century Club, whose presiding and guiding genius was that immaculate writer and reviewer of the time, Mortonius Dolor Criticus. Of him it is said that, unlike those of great volubility but attenuated inspiration, he thought much and said little. Taciturn, grimly humorous at times, keen, incisive, this descendant of Cato the Censor either sat in terrible judgment on the contemporary poetasters of his generation, or brought to public recognition and honors those in whom the gods had implanted the true gift of song. He was impatient of innovation. Behind his polished brow lurked the belief, which he could not shake off, that Song had reached its zenith in mid-Augustan days. His friends often chaffed him for this; but Dolor was not to be weaned from his conviction, for he was certain in his mind that more beauty was inherent in the riot of color of a simple garden of flowers than in all the horticultural abominations adorning the grounds of retired proconsuls, or newly rich Equites. It is not for us to say that his position was untenable.

In the latter days of the Club, before



HOMINES IN MELIORA SEMPER
PERVENIUNT: SIC EGO UTIQUE
CREDO.

it was swallowed up in the Neronic maelstrom, there flourished in its purlieus a bold and untrammelled spirit, a man of rarest intellectual texture, and highest attainment, Calamus Mordax. He was modest but pertinacious, eager yet not bold, never insipidly cheerful, never morose. He was genial to all, intimate with few. His subtle wit beside that of a Pomposus Asininus was as a Damascus blade to a bludgeon. He was conspicuous for his regular attendance, never absenting himself save when "*necessario aeger*" (unavoidably ill), and by virtue of this regularity won for himself many public encomiums and private compliments. To Calamus Mordax a "Ninety-eighter" was an abhorrence, willful mediocrity an unpardonable crime, the smugness of egotism beneath contempt. His contributions to science and history were large. In an age when the practice of medicine was little more than a series of incantations, or an appeal to supernatural powers; when, as Pliny says, "the Romans, like many other nations, died without physicians," it seems strange to us to find a *medicus* who, out of such primitive materials, was able to fashion and rationalize a theory that to-day is a commonplace in neuro-psychology. Calamus advanced and defended successfully in a brilliant thesis his entire belief that deadly poisons if taken in sufficient quantities would convert the dolt

into a genius and enable him to double the quantity and treble improve the quality of his mental output, whether he were poet, philosopher, or scientist. This thesis was the work, so the chronicle says, "of an original mind well informed in natural science, earnestly and intelligently bent on disseminating a theory superior to the popular view, and sparing no pains to cast the intractable material in a literary mould." The theory naturally met with scornful rejection on the part of all dyed-in-the-wool pharmacutists, and few had either the intellect or the courage to acknowledge its truth. It brought upon the author many calumnies, a word which the writer of our chronicle, with true Varronic or Johnsonian naïveté, ascribes etymologically to Calamus! But Calamus Mordax only fattened on this opposition. The more he was scorned, the more imperturbably he pursued his own course, knowing, as every *spiritus liber* knows, that truth, if ultimately to prevail, must ever, to the great horde who are serfs to tradition, seem to be subversive. His famous reply, illustrative of supreme indifference, to a would-be sympathizer has come down to us. Asked by this disciple what ought to be done to the herd of calumniators squealing at his gate, Calamus answered: "Administer a cerebral anthelmintic to the scatophagic swine!"



ET ROMANI SINE MEDICIS
MORIEBANTVR.

Among the precursors of the great Galen, besides Calamus Mordax, is prominently mentioned the name of Moierius Humorousus, the leading mind healer, wit, and exploder of vagaries of the Claudian period. If we remember that what we now can regard only as charlatanism was the seriously accepted method *de rigueur* in antiquity, we shall be able the better to understand the real contribution of Moierius to modern applied psychiatry. He believed not in the casting out of devils by stern and peremptory means, but through mock persuasiveness and the silent eloquence of facial expression. In the ingenuous words of our recorder: "Before Moierius no evil spirit in possession of a man's soul could hold his place, but straightway came forth and perished with laughter" (*sed statim exibat et violenter ridens peribat*).

Another practitioner of medicine as then known was that gentle soul Ionsonius Benignus, also an exponent of the power of mind over matter. Popular at the imperial court, beloved by his numerous and widely scattered clients almost to idolatry, his genial greeting was the signal for illness to depart, and the touch of his hand was always a half cure. Though evolution as a working theory was quite unknown to him, Ionsonius yet felt instinctively that humanity was bound upon some supreme mission, that its goal was perfection, whatever that

might be, and that it was achieving that goal by mighty leaps visible to the naked eye from the outermost bounds of the Cosmos. Had he lived in these parlous times, and been able to survey with a modicum of critical accuracy, but at best with an obfuscated eye, that infinitesimal fraction of human history contained in a cross section of only three millenniums, how had he been disillusioned!

Completing a distinguished quartette of *medici*, we discover the name of Scotianus Harpolites Hanamoricus. The significance of this cognomen is not clear to us, though the chronicle alludes to it apparently as something ordinarily well known. Our only conjecture can be that it embodies or suggests, after the manner of so many Roman cognomina, some notable feat or accomplishment either of brain or arms. If of the former, as in Scotianus' case is much the more probable, then without doubt it records some great literary success, won perhaps in the Club itself. It is known that Hanamoricus was an avid reader of the best literature, and that his private *scrinium* was a choice one, and filled with well-thumbed scrolls and rare volumes. As a fabricator of Milesian tales, as a dispenser of stories current in the Forum and at court he had no equal, for his innate narrative power, combined with histrionic gesture and voice,



"FACIENDI PLVRES LIBROS NVLLVS
EST FINIS." CVI BONO? LIBRARIJ
FAME NON PEREVNT.

caused all alike to gravitate toward him as toward no other during the aftermath of Club sessions ; and when he announced that it was time to summon his litter and depart for the baths or his house, many followed him unable to endure the *ennui* of his absence.

It seems that many *librarii* (librarians) were among the honored ones of the Club, their dean and chief spokesman being an Ephesian, Andronicus Clemens, who, an exotic in the foreign atmosphere of the West, to which he never became fully accustomed, was ever prone to discourse feelingly yet agreeably touching his former connection with an academy of renown in Ephesus, and his often startling experiences as *Curator librorum* in Athens. As an expert on rare tomes dealing with natural science Andronicus had no superior, and his name was a household word among librarians and collectors from the Indus to the Tagus. It is said that Pliny the Elder's mausoleum of curious gleanings, the *Historia Naturalis*, would have been impossible but for Andronicus, who had paved the way. One of his terse sayings has been preserved. Some one having broached the subject of Pan-Romanism, a widely current topic at that time in private circles, Andronicus, carefully adjusting the stub of his very little cabbage between his fingers, observed

wearily: "How tedious and tasteless is this topic! It is 'pan-this' and 'pan-that' on every side until I would that the whole mess might be panned, and the diversities of human nature reduced by about ninety-eight per cent." This apothegm was much quoted and oft repeated.

Leglerius Immaculosus, so called from the spotlessness of his intellectual equipment, was another *librorum expertus*, who had made his triumphant way to Rome because no one else could be found in all the provinces equal to the task he had to perform. An indefatigable worker both in the great imperial library and in the Club, where his declamations on the rare and bizarre in the world of books never failed to attract many eager listeners, he yet found time to conduct night schools for embryonic librarians throughout Italy, Gaul, and Spain. His frequent absences on this account always produced in the Club a certain sense of viduity, for his agreeable and unassuming personality, his mental integrity, and his bookish diligence evoked an unusual and universal appreciation throughout the membership.

It has already been hinted that most writers, whose works were known and discussed in a wide circle of readers, or were written for the general public, were not members of the Rome Literary Club. That there was an occasional exception to this rule is



QVID? VIR INGENII, ELOQVENTIAE,
TOLVTILOQVENTIAE—NVM EST
MIRVM ME CALLIDIS IPSIS PERSVA-
DERE POSSE VEL ANSEREM CYG-
NVM VEL CYGNVM ANSEREM ESSE?

proved by the presence on the Club's list of the name of L. Mastersius, the Cynic.

It was not recognized in the First Century, as it is to-day, that the poet's legitimate field is the entire range of human experience, and should include the most commonplace and trivial things in life, for that these in the hands of *masters* of song are capable of being transformed by their touchstone into rare and beautiful gems; no, the poetry of the Julian dynasty was almost wholly the warmed over hash of other days, garnished and varnished until its ancient and honorable lineage was completely disguised, and dealing in labored fashion with the threadbare themes of mythology, demigods, and supermen. "No wonder that Scaliger branded Lucan as '*pater taedii*,'" and that the extravagances of Vergil and Ovid were "but a faint track to the high road" traversed by their unworthy successors. If it be true that Ovid "killed the music of the hexameter" and leveled it to the rhythmic monotony of a psalm-tune, at any rate "he did not mangle the corpse" with metrical absurdities. In such a state of affairs it is refreshing in the extreme to discover an original motive and an original writer. There is nothing in all Roman poetry like the "*Anthologia Columbariaria*" (Anthology of a Columbarium). As hardly need be explained, the Roman Columbarium was a com-

pact, highly concentrated repository, partly above ground but chiefly below, for the ashes of the dead. Tier upon tier of niches, in which were set the funeral urns, extended from top to bottom.

In Mastersius' fertile mind was conceived the idea of reconstructing, from the epitaphs and inscriptions over the hundreds of urns in one of these sepulchral chambers, the daily life, character, habits, occupations, and vicissitudes of the people, mostly freedmen and the poorer classes, whose *spoonful* of dust reposed in silence undisturbed. A daring undertaking in an age of servile imitation, but Mastersius executed it boldly and well, and with a highly sympathetic imagination. Octavia, Nero's wife, is said to have wept long over the poet's beautiful word-picture of her favorite eunuch, whom she had had buried alive for some slight malfeasance and later exhumed and cremated.

There is but one fragment of this literary novelty known to present day scholarship. From this must be drawn all our conclusions regarding the nature of the general metric scheme of the entire work. Our solution of the problem would seem for the most part to agree with that of Mastersius' contemporary critics, although there is some divergence of opinion. All held in common that a certain linear arbitrariness was a basic principle, and that the narrow school which



"ME DEVS IPSVM
LVDERE, QVAE VELLE, CALAMO PERMISIT AGRESTI."

Mastersius headed was quite right in having dubbed the line arrangement "*Versus liberatus*," liberated verse, "for poetry acquires a greater power and intensity," says one ancient believer, "if it be freed from the trammels and shackles of prescribed verse-lengths; from its traditional metes and bounds, whereby it is now so sorely hampered, and allowed to pursue its own verbal course at will." Some professed to be able to feel instinctively an agreeable, satisfying, and as it were rhythmless rhythm as they either read the lines with the eye or heard them declaimed. Others scoffed, and averred with vigor and heat that rhythm to be rhythm must be regular, marked, and easily anticipated, and that verse, if it would hold its charm and thrill the reader, must pulsate like the earth beneath the feet of legionaries marching in review. If these were reminded by their opponents that mechanical rhythm was ever the delight of primitive man and inherent in him, and that the gale in the pine or the oak, or the zephyr swaying the lily, were the *measureless* symphonies of Aeolus and Pan, they replied that it was enough for them that they had Homer and Sappho, Vergil and Catullus. And so the controversy raged, while Mastersius, declaring, when besought for some definite expression of his own views, that the matter was one for each reader to decide for himself, reclined at ease

in his Alban villa, and basked in the sunshine of his own originality.

Mastersius was the apostle of optimism, happiness, and good cheer. His characters, with few exceptions, are the chaste, the upright, the noble, the heroic, the sweetly moral, the devout. The sex instinct, and the disastrous consequences of a blind or misdirected yielding thereunto, are never suffered to mar the beauty of his saintly portraits; and although he confessed to a belief that the seamy side of life might well exist, there is scarcely an allusion to it in his "*Anthologia*." The connection of poetry—if it be that—with such sweet and homely vignettes of simple communal life, was perhaps surprising, no less to the author than his critics. "But poetry," he used to declare (quoting his favorite author Lucretius, whom it was his wont to read for the meat and not for the meter), "poetry is 'the honey at the edge of the cup,' by which childish humanity may be beguiled into swallowing the medicine of truth." Had the medicine he sought to administer been bitter, or a purgative, or an astringent, and not an emollient, this favorite saying of his had had more point.

The fragment already alluded to, which is still extant, must be quoted before we leave this imperfect discussion of Mastersius and his revolutionary work. Its existence has



VITRVVIVS NIL IN ME HABVIT!

stimulated the hunters of ancient manuscripts to feverish activity in the search for the remainder of this lost treasure, which it is confidently believed Roman literature would not willingly have allowed to perish.

The fragment is the prologue, and, as our chronicler states explicitly, strikes the keynote of the entire anthology.

IN URNIS (In the Urns)

*Ubi sunt Aulus, Marcipor, Gaius,
Sextus, Nicomachusque,
Lippus, bestialis,
Fornicator, vino languidus?
Omnes, omnes, dormiunt in urnis.*

Or, if you prefer an English version:

*Where are Aulus, Marcipor, Gaius,
Sextus and Nichomachus,
The blear-eyed, the brutish, the fornicator, the sot?
All, all, are resting in their urns.*

*One passed in a brothel,
One was drowned in a sewer,
One died in the bloody arena;
One was crucified,
One was mutilated by his master—
All, all, are resting, resting, resting in their urns.*

*Where are Quartilla, Gaia, Lepidina,
Fabulla, Nux Vomica,
The coarse grained, the hypersexual, the loud, the
proud, the unhappy ones?
All, all, are resting in their urns.*

*One bore a many-fathered child and exposed it,
One was choked by a lover,
One slain by a pimp,
One perished of lust and prurience,*

*One, after a life in far-away Byzantium and Corinth
Was brought to her narrow space by her fellow harlots —
All, all, are resting, resting in their urns.*

*Where is the old flute player Tuberculus,
Who fooled with life all his ninety years,
Drinking, rioting, regardless of kin,
Purity, Continnence or the Elysian Fields?
Lo, he babbles of erstwhile Lucullan feasts,
Of the chariot races of long ago at Capua,
And of what Tully the Orator said
One time at Tusculum.*

What interesting personalities would still further unfold to our perceptions could we but linger longer over this enticing chronicle! We should discover how Piscator Interiorialis, the powerful proconsul and tribune, freed Rome from the abuses of the greedy Street Litter Co., and established a municipal system of wheeled chair transportation that made Nero envious; how Radix Musicans Illustris was wont to convulse the Club with his flute playing and singing girls; how Ponderosus Acrobaticus, the understudy of the great Vitruvius, was the first to visualize intelligently force and pressure, as these perform their function in the pillar and the arch; and how Ahenobarbus Seislerianus Secundus, whose words were like a pellucid stream flowing through meadows of scarlet poppies, discovered in exuberant and breathless periods the mysterious case of one Casparius, an un-



IN MELLE CALAMVM INTINGVO, NON
IN ACETO.

knowable unknown, raised it tantalizingly from its Lethean mire, hallowed it with limpid rhetoric, and lowered it again unsolved to its gruesome bed with mesmerizing brilliance of trope and metaphor.

- We may only further transcribe briefly what our chronicle dwells upon at some length, matters of importance then as they would be now.

It is related that certain members possessed an astounding capacity for verbal monstrosities; that, although most of these were men of prehensile mentality, yet their prose productions were replete with phonetic combinations, which, while interestingly rare and unique, overtaxed the perceptions of the auditors to the point of asphyxia; and that the weight of their vocabularies, like a ball and chain, impeded their argument, and generally left them stranded in a morass of their own making. These members were often dubbed "*Sesquipedali*" by their fellows less fortunate in circumlocutionary fertility.

Other men of the Club not infrequently showed their literary interest, when the disclaimer for the session had reached his choicest period, by causing their *lecticae* (portable couches) to be set down in some prominent place in the hall by their slaves, who then saw to it that their masters' siesta was not disturbed until the orator had finished.

Another evidence of the real humanness of this antique club is the fact, stated by our relator, that the largest meetings in point of attendance were always on the occasions when free dinners were served, at which times Pomposus Asininus invariably "*clamorem tollebat*" — "raised a howl" — over the quality of the wine and honey (*mulsum*) furnished, but was promptly subdued by Gugianus.

Many another choice tidbit of Club gossip would be ours for the perusing, but time is calling a halt, and the night is far spent.

May I paraphrase the little statement made not far from the beginning of this historical transcription, to read thus: "*Nunc fortasse sciunt alii praeter me ubi soccus pressat*"; and may I add that, to my certain knowledge, the shoe is of *kid* and not of cowhide.



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