

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers 1*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is badly faded.

Budget

Henry Hooper Editor

The Condition of Our City Charles B. Wilby

Mr. Editor:

This evening our club celebrates its thirty sixth birthday. Of the thirty six honored pioneers who were members during the year of the club's organization, twenty are yet living, but only seven are still residents of this neighborhood. Of these, the names of Patrick Mallon, John W Herron, Rutherford B Hayes, and Manning F Force stand right at the head of our roll, where we all hope they may shine for many a day to come. The others still breathe the spirit of the club if not its tobacco smoke. Judge Dickson gives us through the daily papers occasional specimens of that trenchant literary style which he first cultivated within our walls. Mr. J Ralston Skinner is still evolving those mathematical abstrusities, in the demonstration of which he first spread his literary wings from our platform. And Justice Stanley Matthews, sitting with nine less fortunate jurists on occasional visits to Washington, decides controversies wherein "the matter in dispute, exclusive of costs, exceeds the sum or value of \$5000" by the aid of those powers of logical reasoning which received early encouragement and exercise in the debates of the old club.

While we have these evidences of the influence of the club before us, and to speak more seriously, while we have with us as members four gentlemen, who, from the beginning have done much to give the club its character and reputation, it can not truthfully be said, as was hinted at the first meeting of this year, that the club was in danger of a decline. On the contrary, the opening of this, the thirty seventh year of the club's life, shows that it is truly in its prime and gives promise for a greater activity and an extended usefulness, for which there was never a better opportunity than now.

While the club has always encouraged the greatest freedom of discussion of all subjects among its members we have an unwritten law, and it is one of the causes of the club's long continued unity, which forbids us as a body to express, or even hold, opinions upon any questions, like those of religion or politics, upon which differences of opinion are possible. Yet upon matters of large public interest, where there may be no difference of opinion among honest men but simply a question of right against wrong, I take it the literary club should still stand ready as it has always been, to give the aid of its no small influence, to the side of the right. This was done when, on April 17th 1861, five days after treason fired its first gun in Charleston Harbor, the club laying aside its pen, and taking up the sword, organized the Burnet rifles, to fight on the side of the right.

Today the club is called upon to take sides in another conflict, local this time, and it is to be hoped, bloodless but of as much importance to our city and to all of us, as was that which called for the club's aid twenty five years ago. It must soon be determined whether or not this city is to become unfit for the residence of honest men.

The seat of our city's disease can be found, I think, in the universally low and lifeless moral tone, resulting in a general indifference to evil, which has, of late years, settled down upon the whole country. This was sufficiently shown during the late Presidential campaign, by the indifference of the mass of intelligent people particularly in the west, upon the subject of the personal integrity of the two candidates; a manner which few people thought it worthwhile to inquire into.

In Cincinnati, the existence of this moral apathy has been manifested in various ways, such as the reported collection to important local offices of men whose records would not bear investigation, and the indifference of the Chamber of Commerce and other representative bodies, to the character of their members.

It seems as if our city had been sufficiently dishonored before the country by the result of the Campbell trial, and the scandal in the leasing of our Southern Railroad, but the events of this summer and fall, beginning with the Turner Hall Convention, and ending with the arrest of Mr. Dexter complete her disgrace.

This condition of affairs is the direct result of the want of an energetic public sentiment among our people on questions of simple right and wrong, and it grows out of that moral torpor which seems to be sapping the integrity of the whole nation. If a proper public opinion does not exist in a community, one generally finds that the public press is largely to blame; and wherever a healthy public opinion exists, there you will find, in nine cases of ten, a fearless, independent daily newspaper, edited by a courageous patriot.

This healthy public sentiment will not grow wild. It must be cultivated, and it is to aid in its growth that the Literary Club should devote itself now.

We seldom realize to what extent the mass of so-called intelligent people, whose opinions in each community make up its public sentiment, are dependent upon their morning paper for their views on almost every subject outside their daily lives.

If the editor is a man of high character, known to be above any improper influences, his readers fall into the habit of shaping their political actions and opinions on public matters according to his dictation with child-like faith.

Such was the enviable power of the Editor of the old Commercial, but so far as this power remains today, its use for the good of the city has been sacrificed on the altar of the Grand Old Party.

Forgetting every allegiance but that of party, our whilom friend has led his sheep to do

likewise, until the bosses who control our nominating conventions can generally rely upon a full party support for any creature labeled Republican who can afford to buy a nomination. Let me digress for a moment to show how much this blind party spirit leading astray an imbecile public, is to blame for Cincinnati's condition today.

If, when Wm. P Anderson, Dudley W Rhodes, Chris von Segren, and J. P. Carberry accepted the school board nominations of the Municipal Reform Association in the spring of '83 the Commercial Gazette had supported them instead of four Republican ward politicians, the taxpayers would not now have the Foster and Mather school lot jobs to pay for which two purchases the Commercial Gazette has already charged were corruptly put through the School Board, and which it so happens were engineered by one of the very men whose election to the board this paper had urged for the sake of the "Grand Old Party," in the face of the incorruptible ticket offered by the Reform Association.

In the cause of his beloved party the Editor of that paper did all he could to elect the man whom he now calls "Boodle Beresford," whose affiliation with the Enquirer branch of the Republican Party was well known long before his election. Again if the old Commercial and its independent Editor had survived until October 1883, the College Hall legislative ticket, notably superior to the Republican nominations, would have received its support, the Highland House delegation to the local oil Legislature would have been kept at home; Mr. Pendleton would have remained in the Senate; the present police Commissioners would have been harmless citizens on the 13th of this month; the Cincinnati Police would have been controlled by Amor Smith; and the Committee would now be unnecessary.

The people of Cincinnati, who have been following the party organs want some good advice. They want to be shown that to elect a ward politician to a municipal office simply because his name is on their party's ticket is a most absurd proceeding, notwithstanding all of the American History. They want to learn that the bosses of both parties depend on this folly of party spirit for their power; that if good citizens could once throw down party lines in local politics, they could rout the bosses, and restore good government to our city.

In the absence of any independent newspaper, there is no organization better able to aid in spreading these truths and in building up a better public sentiment on the subject of local government, than this club.

The committee of One Hundred may punish those who were guilty of the recent frauds, but this does not effect any permanent cure. For example: most election frauds need the aid of the canvassing officers before they can be useful, and one means of securing an honest election is to secure honest city and county clerks. If the decent people of Hamilton County will merely forget that they are Republicans or Democrats they can elect honest and capable men to all offices, and not until this is done can we hope for better things.

Two years ago we set apart certain evenings for papers on the Kirby Smith and Morgan raids, in which campaigns many of our members took part. Perhaps if we set apart certain evenings this winter for the discussion of this question of local government in which we

are all interested and print the papers, if they prove worthy, we may do something towards the formation of that better public sentiment by which our city is to be saved.