

(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*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

Smithson E. Wright as Our Secretary

On the 24th of September 1870 Mr. Wright was elected secretary of the Literary Club, and from his minutes of that meeting until his record of the meeting on the 27th of February 1879 we have in his beautiful writing, the most lucid part of the Club memorabilia. During the time covered by these minutes, everything that was done is recorded, and recorded so that it can be read with ease.

In the early days of our history the minutes were very solemn and had all of the dignities. The club then was a sort of post graduate debating society and there was a regular order of business for each meeting and the minutes had marginal head lines or catch words and were very long and were always signed by the President as well as by the Secretary, and at the next meeting were duly read and approved.

This was in the good old antebellum days. Sometimes however, the formalities were dispensed with for we find occasional lapses like the following which is in the handwriting of Judge Force:

“Saturday, September 20th 1856

Club met. Present, Dodd, Dutton, Force, Strong, James, Leake, Partridge.

No members under rule were excused.

No member was announced as under rule.

No essayists were appointed.

No question was chosen for debate.

No miscellaneous business was transacted.

No new members were elected.

No names were proposed for election.

No essays were read.

No essayists were fined or excused.

No debate was had.

Note disputants were fined or excused.

No decision of the question, but the club ignored the rules and resolved itself into an informal committee of the whole. Partridge dozed – Dodd was cozy – Dutton was comfortable – Leake was loquacious – James discoursed – Force sat still taking notes – and George Strong made his farewell address; he meets with us no more. Alas! we can ill spare him. Force Secretary, and the rest Presidents.” Again by the same hand:

Saturday, September 13th 1856

the club met. Members present, Dutton, Force, James, Leake, Page, Partridge, Spofford, Strong, Wright, cetera desunt.” And again:

July 3d 1856

“33 members – sundry guests. Fourth of July orations – paper, wining, &C, &C, and a

good time generally but no secretary.”

The following is a strange hand, probably that of the essayist who wrote:

July 10th 1858

Wockersham present with essay – nobody else here. exit in disgust.” Below this in Force's writing: “Morgan, Partridge, Anderson, Stephenson, Tate, Mussy, James, Merrill, Foote, Force, et al. were present but so unhappy as to hear nothing of the essay – probably came too late.”

And this:

September 27th 1856.

The club met, transacted and adjourned as follows: several members dropped in singly and departed severally, each one leaving before any one else came, nobody saw anybody or did anything Troja fuit.

Mr. F Force, secretary.”

Again by the same hand:

“Nov 5th 1859

Hardly a meeting – nothing done – members gone to hear Buchanan read lecture and the Secretary out of town.”

“Saturday, November 12th 1859

Still less a meeting and therefore and also because the Secretary still out of town, no record.”

After the postbellum organization Messrs. Dexter, Newton, Lloyd, and Throop each in turn filled the office of Secretary and I need not tell you that during their reign there was no full richness in the minutes, although shortly before the election of Mr. Wright the following relapse occurs

June 18th 1870

“Present J. Dexter, Newton, Wright, Wood.
Adjournment to Loewen Garden.
H. Wood Secretary, pro tem.”

This was undoubtedly too much for the Club dignity, but the vacation was at hand and no steps could be taken to put the records into trustworthy hands until fall, but at the very first meeting after the vacation Mr. Wright was elected as a reform Secretary.

Joking aside, Mr. Wright made the minutes what they should be. Under his pen they became beautiful to look upon and he earned the blessings of future club historians by filling them with information, and besides he touched them up with enough color to give them life. During his days we had two sources of literary entertainment, for after hearing the paper we used to take turns in reading and enjoying the minutes of the previous meeting which were always ready on the table, and occasionally the lucky possessor of the book would be surrounded by a little knot of members to whom he would read.

During Mr. Wright's secretaryship we did not preserve a copy of the papers in detail so that there was more necessity for a summary of the essays, by the secretary than there is now, but yet the summary would be a good thing still. The book containing a copy of the papers is never here, nor where we can get at it, without a special effort. If we could have a summary of the papers given in the minutes we could perhaps tell from it, in case we missed a meeting, whether to make the effort to get at the copy.

It is difficult to select examples from Mr. Wright's minutes. There are no parts that are better than the rest but all his work is evenly and uniformly good, and covering as it does about ten years or nearly four hundred meetings, no adequate or just impression of the whole can be given by mere extracts taken here and there. The passages I quote are parts only and not the whole record of the meetings referred to.

Feb-4-71

“Judge Cox was the essayist of the evening and read his discourse in relation to life of General Harrison at North Bend. The Judge did not however, confine himself to the place mentioned, but gave a general sketch of the life of General Harrison from his youth in Virginia to his death at Washington while president of the United States, and the last solemn ceremonies attending the deposit of his earthly remains in the homely tomb on his farm in North Bend. The good old man did not lack a loving eulogist on this occasion.”

March 11th 1871

“Mr. Bliss read a very interesting essay on Lucian a Greek writer born in the second century, giving a sketch of his life and writings and an estimate of his character as an author, most of which was undoubtedly new to most of those present.”

Oct. 7th 1871:

“Dr. Bartholomew read his paper as before announced entitled “The quarrels of the Doctors.” Dr. Bartholomew went back to the first Doctor history tells about, and following his sketch down to recent times, gave an instructive sketch or survey of the disputes and hard sayings against each other of gentlemen of the medical profession, not forgetting to hint that if the history of the other learned professions were looked into, it might appear that the lawyers and even the clergy had not been without their quarrels as bitter as those he had described.”

“Dec-9-71

“Mr. Eggers read his essay on the constitution of the German Empire. A large amount of information was communicated in this essay which it would be much labor to find elsewhere.”

Feb 24-72:

“Mr. Jenny, Editor, read the contents of his paper which was various in its character and considerable in its quantity, occupying an hour and a half in reading.”

Saturday, Jan'y 18-1873

“the club met this evening Vice-President in the chair, constructively it may be

said, for there was not a quorum present, as will appear by the following list of those who did appear. Bliss, Dr. Connor, Force, Merrell, Newton, Seely, Robertson, Wilby, Hancock and Wright. Ten. Whether the slim attendance was owing to the announcement that this meeting would be merely a social, the essayist on the printed program having given notice that he would not be in on time, or to the fact that the thermometer showed a pretty low figure, cannot be determined, but it is very certain that those who were present understood and appreciated the meaning of a “social.” Gathering around the principal table and constituting a sort of Council of ten, they discussed things generally and the conversation was lively and entertaining, and the intercourse cordial. When the usual hour of adjourning arrived it was found as difficult to tear one's self away as when the meetings were larger, but they did adjourn about the usual hour.”

Nov-29-73-Informal

Mr. Editor. Four articles in the budget, one of which unhappily seems to have been by the writer. The secretary concludes his report as follows:-

“the literary entertainment was short, which is perhaps upon the whole the best that can be said of it. It may however be said that our meetings are regularly large and interesting in consequence.”

Nov. 15-73.

Dr.——read an essay on “Individuality.” It is difficult to describe this discourse in a few words and it will not be attempted. The doctor went into all the subtleties of physical and mental law, and phenomena that learning and thought are master of and came out apparently conqueror.”

January 24-74

“Judge force read an essay entitled “The chances for the Indians.” The subject was the future of our Indian Tribes. The Judge considered that the question was one of extirpation or civilization. He treated of the character of the Indians, quoting many authorities and facts in their favor, but showing little grounds of hope for their civilization under our national policy of keeping them in the condition of separate inferior peoples, holding their lands in common.”

May 13-76-

Dr. Bartholomew read a discourse on “The Influence of Mental States in the causation and Cure of Diseases”. The doctor recognized the large influence of the mind on the body, and referred to the action and functions of parts by which this took place, and he admitted that in many cases, which he quoted and which appeared to be well authenticated, diseases had been produced and cures effected solely through the influence of “mental states.” Even the stigmata, regarded by religious enthusiasts as miraculous, had been attributed by scientists, after the most careful investigation, to mental causes.”

May 27-76

“Prof. Benedict delivered (extempore) an address on the Cincinnati University. After some preliminary remarks, he gave a statement of what he considered the true

definition of Education, with some views on its methods, objects and means – distinguishing the scientific from the classical, contrasting the aim of preparing the man for encountering his surroundings, with the subordinate purpose of merely filling him with Knowledge and emphasizing Nature as the great teacher. He spoke of the comprehensiveness of the University as contrasted with more limited institutions, and particularly of the Cincinnati University, and its value as a gift of means and opportunities, and of the professors as the instruments, in their respective departments, of a culture and a practical education of the greatest importance.”

"Mar 17 - 77

“Mr.———read an essay on “The Realistic and Idealistic Theories of Art.” The writer had, no doubt, clearer ideas of its subject than he was able to fix in the minds of his hearers. The essay was listened to with close attention, but probably it was not “realistic” enough to receive the “idealistic” appreciation of the majority of the club.”

June 23–77

“Doctor Forchheimer read a well prepared paper on “Fiddles.” A history of the origin and improvements of stringed musical instruments, so far as known, was given, and some account of the most celebrated makers of the modern Violin, and of the material and mechanical construction of them. At the close of the Doctor showed the members four violins of the highest merit and value owned by citizens of Cincinnati, one of which, the property of Mr. Lewis Heidlebach was worth \$1500 and believed it to be over two hundred years old. The club was treated by the Doctor to some specimens of the wonderful voice of this valuable instrument.”

“Dec- 11–77

“Mr. Mueller read his essay as announced. He gave a history of the origin of the “kindergarten” schools, which he credited to Prof. Froebel of Saxony (Germany) who spent a life-time in studying and maturing the best methods of educating children. Mr. Mueller described with minuteness the methods and means used in the Kindergarten, both in Germany and this country, and exhibited specimens of the children's work and the working apparatus used. He stated that in St. Louis the Kindergarten had been established as a part of their public school system and was very successful. In Cincinnati there are some five or six of these schools, carried on by private teachers, whose limited means do not enable them to incur the expense necessary to the completest success.”

Jan'y 19–78

“Dr. Ayers read an essay entitled “Early Medical Views and some of their absurdities.”

“Although we have often read of many of the absurd theories and remedies of men called Physicians in the times before true science began to sweep away the superstitions of antiquity, yet such expositions as that given in Dr. Ayers' essay are both entertaining and useful. Many relics of old error still linger with tenacity in the popular mind and it is still the task of science to assault and expose them.”

Oct–5–78

“Mr. Bliss read a paper entitled “Predoglotology.” Before reading, Mr. B—stated

to the club that this paper was sent to him on an occasion when he was Editor at an informal, but was not then read partly on account of its length. The author was Mr. Luquiens, formerly a member of the Club. It was a humorous account of his observations on the first attempts at language of a very young scholar in his charge (a son about a year old) whose untaught utterances had, he thought, a bearing on certain theories of the origin of Language.”

As an example of Mr. Wright's comprehensive and succinct manner of reporting a business episode I quote from his minutes of the meeting of Dec 23–76:

“Mr. Merrill, in the absence of Prest. Dexter, stated to the club, that Mr. Wilson, the owner of the building of which the club rooms are a part, and the lessor of the club, desired to know if the club would have any objections to his leasing the adjoining room to a Military Company to be used on Saturday evenings for purposes of drill, &C. Members of the club heard the statement with surprise, not to say indignation.

Mr. Wilby moved that the subject be referred to the trustees with instructions to confer with Mr. Wilson &C, which after some discussion, was carried, and the matter seemed to be disposed of. But it now began to be evident that the indignation had reached a pitch which would not be calmed by the pacific resolve which the club had adopted. The question of Mr. Wilby's motion being again before the club, Mr. Parkinson proposed an amendment, giving more definite instructions, looking to conciliatory negotiations, and other amendments were proposed, by no means of that character.

In the meanwhile a somewhat irregular but animated discussion went on, in which nearly every body participated the Secretary being advised by a member who seemed to have given special attention to it that only Messrs. E. Dexter, Stein, Maxwell and Forchheimer had failed to give their sentiments. Amongst the lawyers there was some (not much) difference of opinion as to the legal points; and amongst the Medical Profession, one who confessed that Doctors, like Necessity, “Know no law.” seemed in favor of prescribing a change of climate, and quoted a case which he suggested as applicable here, where a party requested his adversary “to go to” (a very much warmer country).

The result was that Mr. Parkinson's cautious instructions were voted down, and the Trustees were requested to let Mr. Wilson know that the Club does object to any such use of the room in question; and that be authorized to call a special meeting of the Club if they think it necessary.”

In September 71 Mr. Wright printed a list of the members on a folded card, on the other side of which was the program for the year, and in September 1873 this card developed under Mr. Wright's care [] into the folder which we now receive annually and upon which we so much depend. This device of his has been adopted by the Bar Association and was taken with other features of the Club by its children of Chicago and Indianapolis.

His successors in the office of Club Secretary have been indebted to Mr. Wright for the satchel which he had made for the convenience carrying of the volume of the minutes. It would seem, however, that some of his successors have not always had the need for any such convenience. These examples of Mr. Wright's work as our Secretary do not fairly represent it. The whole must be read together for it was uniformly and always good. I have thought for a long time that the club should print four or five of the earlier

volumes of minutes. Almost 2 of these were written by Mr. Wright. If the club is not able to bear this expense from its treasury, no doubt those interested in the club would subscribe for a sufficient number of copies to cover the outlay necessary.

C. B. Wilby

March 28, 1891