

Minutes of the Cincinnati Literary Club
September, 2021

To paraphrase a writer more eloquent than I: "Now is the sesquiannum of our discontent made glorious autumn by the COVID-19 vaccine." With great joy, but just a little trepidation, we tiptoed back to our beloved clubhouse.

And what better way to celebrate the "clubbiness" of it all than Jim Wessner's excellent paper, "The Club from Hell." He tells the story of Sir Frances Dashwood, a gentleman to the Manor born, well educated, well travelled, well connected. From the papers of Horace Walpole, Jim followed Sir Frances and a coterie of his peers, including John Montague, Fourth Earl of Sandwich, a gentleman well-bred, with a wry sense of humor, as they established various Gentleman's Clubs first in London, and then at Dashwood's Ancestral home in West Wycombe. The arcane rituals observed in each of these institutions included a fair amount of anti-clericalism and no small amount of debauchery. Do hearing of these club activities make us just a tad jealous? Many of these men went on to responsible positions in the British Government, including a Prime Minister, a Chancellor of the Exchequer, and a First Lord of the Admiralty. These leaders made a real impact on British history. It was a treat to look into their private lives and the lives of "Gentlemen's Clubs" in the mid eighteenth century.

Benjamin Franklin famously said, "Nothing is certain except death and taxes." Lewis Gatch addressed both of these issues in his paper on the difficult and complex issue of final arrangements. He reviewed the options we have for disposition of our earthly remains: interment, cremation, donation to science, and now the new process of composting. He told a story that demonstrated the difficulties of blended families coming to consensus on where their loved ones should spend eternity, and with whom. He concluded with four guidelines for insuring post mortem tranquility, a cautionary tale for a grave subject.

Bill Burleigh's paper, "Elegy in an Urban Churchyard," is the kind of paper that keeps me coming back. He and his wife visited a memorial to the historian Henry Adams and his wife, who perished in the late nineteenth century, and created by the noted American sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens. Due to his intellectual curiosity, he gave us a biography of Adams, his wife, and of St. Gaudens as well. He took three deceased people, little known to most of us, and brought them eloquently to life.

The coda to this fine budget of papers was Paul Franz's "The Hounds of Byzantium," a saga of an adventurer who struck up a friendship with some Turks while working in a factory in East Frisia, Germany. Having been invited to his Turkish friend's wedding in Istanbul, he travelled by train, and mostly by thumb, across Eastern Europe to the shores of the Bosphorus. Indulging his odd taste for visiting local cemeteries, he found himself in an isolated, put of the way graveyard where he met his denouement.

All in all, a wonderful lead-off paper followed by a lively budget of papers revolving around a most unlively theme. Can't wait to see what October brings!