

(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 I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

Budget. Hooper Editor. March 27, 1886

Personal Columns in Our Budgets

Mr. Editor.

During its long and useful life, the Budget has contributed not a little to strengthen the bonds of literary and social fellowship among its hearers. This happy result has been largely brought about by a combination of tact, moderation, and good humor on the part of the Editor, who, from the quiet of his sanctum has exposed sundry abuses which, from time to time have threatened the harmony of our meetings. But this has generally been accomplished in so pleasant and good-natured a manner that while it gave offense to none, it amused and instructed all.

With surprise and deep regret, I have recently noticed a departure from this wise course, and I hasten, before the new practice has developed into a settled custom, to protest against it, since I am persuaded that its continuance would destroy your beneficent and harmonious influence, change into uncertainty and dread the pleasant anticipations with which we have looked forward to your monthly appearance, and evidently drive us, one by one, to drown, in the seclusion of our respective firesides, the cares and anxieties of the week, in still sourer wine than that which congenial company has rendered endurable here. The new practice, to which I refer, is the introduction, into the Budget, of a personal column.

Whether it is simply your digestive apparatus which is out of order, or whether, as I am inclined to suspect, that demon Reform has your whole system in his clutches, I leave you to determine. Be the cause what it may, certain it is that a great change is apparent in your tone. Where you once sought to point a moral, with allusions to that which was fair and noble, in the lives or acts of men, you now alas too often adorn your tale darkly with examples of evil. – Not content with this, you actually search the records of your auditors, microscope in hand, for some questionable word or action, and when you think you have found such, you roll it as a sweet morsel under your tongue. Nor is this all for, waiting until your victim is before you, all

unconscious of your purpose, and perhaps surrounded by admirers, if you proceed, with much ostentation of aim to direct your magnified and distorted gleanings full at his head.

Now, Mr. Editor what is to be gained by this course? Do you think you can drive the culprit, (admitting him to be such) into the path of virtue? Surely not. When was sinner ever reclaimed by such means? – Or is it your wish to entirely annihilate them? The suddenness and incivility of your discharge, like a clap of thunder from a clear sky, doubtless stuns, but never kills him. Your desire cannot be to amuse or enlighten the club, for you well know we are neither such savages as to derive amusement from the discomfiture of a fellow creature, however base he may be, nor so ignorant of the important current events (and you would notice no others), as to require such enlightenment.

No. Your performance must proceed from a mistaken idea, either of your own function, or of that of the club. Now it is manifestly the office of the Editor to endeavor to interest his audience; the club does not sit as a Court of Inquiry, to scan the personal actions or opinions of its members. We don't care a rap whether Dr. A. agrees with Dr. B's treatment of cholera, whether the decision of Judge C accords with the opinion of Lawyer D., or whether Prof. E's ideas of Pedagogics are entirely at variance with those of Prof. F. We have each of us spent the entire week in the consideration of some such questions, and when Saturday night comes round, are heartily tired of all bickerings, and are ready to enter into a truce with all mankind; to enjoy a quiet paper, a modest supper, a cigar, a glass of wine, and above all, the companionship of those who have become endeared to us, perhaps simply from association with these meetings since “Lang syne,” and entirely without reference to or knowledge of their acts and opinions without these walls.

Do not think Mr. Editor I would abridge your liberty to express your opinions. Far from it. Let us have your opinions by all means, about things or about actions, about other opinions or about men; but remember that in expressing unfavorable opinions of men in an ill-natured way, and in their very presence, liberty has degenerated into license, friendly admonition into gratuitous insult.

Russell Hinman