

## THE LIBRARY CLOCK AND JOHN URI LLOYD

October 28, 2002

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The handsome old tall-case clock in the library has been ticking contentedly for longer than any of us can remember. For my historian's paper tonight I've written a bit about the clock and the remarkable man in whose memory we have it – a world renowned pharmaceutical chemist, a successful author and a beloved member of the Literary Club from 1900 until his death in 1936.

Our clock belonged originally to John Uri Lloyd and was a treasured possession in his home in Clifton for many years. It's a fine timepiece of about 1900 with a precisely made German eight-day movement<sup>1</sup> in a beautifully crafted case. It can tell the time in hours, minutes and seconds, the phases of the moon and the quarter-hour in either Westminster or Whittington chimes. It was given to the Club, in Lloyd's memory, by his children.

Thanks to Dale Flick's eagle eye, we found a charming short budget piece about the library clock in the Club archives. It was read by Chalmers Hadley on May 30<sup>th</sup> 1949 and parts of it beg repeating. He wrote:

“Complacent and imperturbable, the clock in the Club's library stands with never a welcoming smile for a newcomer or a shadow of regret on its smug face as it watches an old member leave never to return again. During six days of the week the clock stares vacantly into the empty room as with rhythmic ‘tic-tock’ it clips off seconds from eternity and thrusts them relentlessly into its pocket.

“Only on Club nights does it point usefully to eighty-thirty and at nine, announces sonorously that a reader has about twenty minutes left in which to finish his paper. And so it has been ever since it left its former place in John Uri Lloyd's hospital Clifton home.

“In Mr. Lloyd's house the clock stood in the hall near the dining room where another timepiece, a century-old one, stood on the mantle directly back of Mr. Lloyd's chair where on Saturday nights he sat between his old friends, Frank Shaffer and Andrew Conroy. For years these friends had dined with Mr. Lloyd and then talked of men and events until after midnight. All were full of years and experience and as they spoke of things past and things to come, the two nearby clocks carried on their own conversations with ‘tick’ and ‘tock.’

“Of one Saturday night, Mr. Lloyd wrote later, ‘At the click of the clock ushering in the hour of twelve, there crept over us a tranquility of spirit difficult to describe. The last speaker had abruptly broken his sentence leaving it unfinished. By common impulse the faces of the guests turned toward the clock. As from the depths of a distant cavern came the blows of the lead hammer upon the clock's gong. The trembling vibrations

following each stroke produced sensations akin to the musical, yet reminding of the weird.

“When the hall clock came from the Lloyd home to the Literary Club, it became the special pride of Roy Carpenter who for years was the devoted caretaker of this club and a friend of every member. None knew that our meeting on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1946 would be Roy’s last. He had been ailing after a serious operation but was keen to have the Club year close with a preliminary dinner party. When the dining tables were cleared for the meeting, Roy lacked the assistance formerly given him in moving them. The long table-tops were heavy so they were stacked against the wall near the piano to be moved later. Two of them began to topple and the president hurried to Roy’s assistance in handling them. Roy was pale and shaken from the effort which may have contributed to the return of his old trouble and in a short time he went to The Holmes Hospital for treatment. He grew worse and in the late summer he wished to return to his room upstairs in the Club, where Mrs. Browning’s brother came to care for him. Mrs. Browning wound the library clock during Roy’s illness and it continued its routine life until three days before Roy died when it began to act queerly. Its timekeeping was impeccable but it began to strike erratically and unreasonably. Instead of sonorously announcing the hours in their turn, the clock began at any time to strike one o’clock, then two, three, four or five without rhyme or reason.

“Its mechanism seemed perfect as usual but its strange and mistaken gong strokes continued. Then at bedtime before Roy died the clock began to strike continuously. Without any pause whatever, the gong struck midnight then thirteen, fourteen, fifteen and on and on hour after hour until all count was lost. Mrs. Browning went to the library, switched on the light and there stood the clock with its enigmatic face showing correct time but throbbing with sound. Pulling the lever that controlled the strokes had no effect and after sitting helplessly in the library for a while, Mrs. Browning returned upstairs.

“The continued strokes penetrated into Roy’s room. His restlessness became distressing. He was too weak to do more than toss helplessly in his bed as the clock continued to assault outraged ears. Mrs. Browning said later that not only did the gong strokes, hour after hour, become nerve-racking in themselves, but as they went reverberating through the empty Club rooms they took on a quivering, eerie quality never heard before or since.

“Then, as mysteriously as they had begun, the incessant strokes ceased. The clock became normal and never since Roy’s death has there been any deviation from the clock’s staid behavior.<sup>2</sup>

That’s enough about our mysterious clock for the moment. Let’s look now at the remarkable man who owned it originally. John Uri Lloyd, the first son of Nelson Lloyd and Sophia Webster was born in West Bloomfield, New York on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1849. His rather unusual middle name came from his grandfather, Uri Webster. Both of his parents were college graduates. His father was a civil engineer, his mother a teacher. In 1853, during the early railroad-building boom, Nelson accepted a job to survey a proposed line

between Covington and Louisville, Kentucky. The Lloyd family pulled up stakes in New York and headed west to Burlington, in Boone County.

Unfortunately, the railroad project failed for lack of funds soon after it began. But, Nelson was able to earn a fairly comfortable living teaching at the local school in Florence, Kentucky and doing occasional surveying jobs during the summer. Here is where John Uri grew up. These were probably his happiest years. Florence was his beloved 'Stringtown on the Pike.' He was a bright, observant, inquisitive lad. His love of the woods, the plants and trees, the wildlife, his fascination with the people of all kinds he met and the colorful yarns some of them told had great influence on his eventual career. Years later he wrote:

"My apprenticeship in pharmacy may be said to have started in my home years. Even when I was too young to be enrolled in the chemistry class in school my interest in that subject was such that when the class was reciting. I had thought for nothing else. I tried home experiments in which such substances as oxygen and hydrogen were conspicuously entertaining. I of course had no apparatus such as glass tubes or retorts, but the very lack of such appliances led me to exercise ingenuity in finding something to take their place. I well remember how I connected stems of a pumpkin vine to make a delivery tube for gases generated in an old-fashioned conical ink bottle, to a pneumatic trough improvised from my mother's quart camphor bottle to collect the gasses generated in my backyard laboratory."<sup>3</sup>

Finishing the final grade in the local school taught by his father in Florence ended his formal education. It's difficult to understand why his parents, both college graduates, both teachers, did not see fit to send their son to college. He could have studied chemistry at the Ohio Mechanics Institute in Cincinnati or at Transylvania in Lexington, but the only pharmacy schools at the time were quite new and on the east coast. He later achieved great heights in science by his own study, observation and persistence. He even taught college courses for a number of years. He published a long list of highly-regarded scientific books and scholarly papers and was awarded many honors in his profession. He also enjoyed success in an additional literary career of considerable merit. Despite this formidable record of scholarly achievement, the lack of a college education always rankled him and he often felt unnecessarily ill at ease with more formally educated associates.<sup>4</sup>

For whatever reason, when John was fourteen, his parents decided it was time for their son to find a position as a druggist's apprentice. In those days druggists concocted many of their own medicines and rolled their own pills. The search for the beginnings of a suitable career for a young lad with lots of ambition but little education could be an interesting but tedious process in the mid-nineteenth century. The quest for a position became a regular Saturday ritual. John and his father walked to Covington and Newport and crossed the river to Cincinnati, on the ferry, canvassing the drugstores in search of one that might 'need a boy.' John enjoyed those jaunts. He wrote fondly about them later. In addition to hunting for a job, they took time to see the sights. They stopped to inspect the old suspension bridge of the Licking between Covington and Newport where

his father had provided the surveys. They visited the Cincinnati Water Works with its reservoir high up in what is now Eden Park and its gigantic machinery in the pumping station. They explored the Public Landing that was a beehive of activity when the steamboat was still king of long-distance transportation. John wrote later about his search for a position:

“We had vainly searched the City of Covington, had crossed the river to Cincinnati and had begun again the old story---‘Do you need a boy?’ From one drugstore to another we passed, sometimes pleasantly received, sometimes snappishly. Once or twice the apothecary patted me on the head in a sympathetic manner but more often I received but a passing glance as came the familiar word ‘No’.”

“Systematically we covered the city, beginning at the river. Every store between Mill Creek on the left and Deer Creek on the right was visited as we wedged back toward the hills. In one instance an apothecary in a small store on the west edge of the city encouraged us with hope that next Saturday he might have a vacancy as the present boy was ‘thinking of quitting’. But by the next Saturday the boy had decided to remain. This was a mighty disappointment because the apothecary had discussed at some length the problem of the pharmacy and its opportunities, but not giving a very encouraging aspect to the business as a life vocation. ‘Long hours, few vacations, the work slavish, all business. Better find something else for the boy.’ ‘Good advice’, said my father, as we headed for the next store, but it doesn’t always apply. To stop now would be to give up because of discouragement. Not until we find there is no chance will we turn to some other business.’

“At last, at the corner of Eighth Street and Western Row (now Central Ave.) at a very extensive establishment, Mr. Gordon, the proprietor (my father always asked for the proprietor) said he expected soon to need a boy as one of his boys planned to leave. He exhibited much interest in our affairs, asked a multitude of questions, quizzed me personally concerning myself, but then suggested that we should continue our search as it might be some time before his position opened.

“The next drugstore we visited was two blocks away, at the corner of Court and Plum Streets. Here the proprietor, Mr. H.M. Merrell, answered, ‘Yes’. He needed a boy. Elated at the final success, a tentative agreement was made with the understanding that I was to begin the next week. Back to Mr. Gordon to tell him of our success. To our surprise, Mr. Gordon said that will never do if you expect to become a druggist in Cincinnati. That house is not in good standing with us. It is an Eclectic establishment without professional affiliation. To take that situation will be to destroy your future. Mr. Gordon said enough to lead my father to decline the position we had so long sought. We went back to Mr. Merrell and my father presented the case exactly as he knew it. He said, ‘The boy needs to become a prescription clerk in a drugstore. I am informed that your establishment is connected with a section in medicine and pharmacy that would not give the boy general prescription opportunities.’ Mr. Merrell agreed, saying that he had no prescription business to speak of, that he needed a boy to run errands and do chores but not to learn the prescription business. And he advised us to wait until we could get

the position offered by Mr. Gordon where no better educational opportunities in pharmacy could be had in all of Cincinnati.

“Mr. Gordon seemed pleased with our decision and unexpectedly said that he would give me a position at once as he could use both boys to advantage. It was therefore decided that the next Saturday I would begin my work. That was in the late fall of 1863 . . .<sup>5</sup>

Mr. Gordon was highly respected in his field having apprenticed under his brother in Baltimore and had formal chemistry courses at the University of Maryland before coming to Cincinnati. He was active in the American Pharmaceutical Association and was elected its twelfth president in 1864. Young John was in good hands. He was an attentive, industrious, apt pupil. After finishing a successful two-year apprenticeship with Mr. Gordon, he served two more years under George Eger, another well regarded Cincinnati pharmacist who had been trained in Germany and Switzerland. John made rapid progress in his chosen field.

Apparently disregarding Mr. Gordon's apprehension about Eclectics and barely twenty-two years old, by 1871, he was chief of the laboratory of the H. M. Merrell Co. In 1877 he was a member of the firm. When Mr. Merrell died in 1881, the firm was reorganized under the name Thorpe and Lloyd Brothers and included John's two younger siblings, Ashley and Curtis. Finally in 1885, when Dr. Thorpe retired, it became Lloyd Brothers. They were off and running. Ashley was the business manager of the firm. Curtis had a minor role in the business, although he was a devoted mycologist and an expert book buyer who traveled the world in search of rare books for the firm's library.

John was always president and the chief driving force in the firm. His principal concern was research, development and quality control. He wrote voluminously in his field, was a frequent contributor to scientific journals and earned a national reputation as an authority on botanical chemistry and the art of pharmacy. He developed a cold distillation process that permitted the extraction of a plant's chemical constituents without the application of heat and designed and patented the equipment to accomplish it.<sup>6</sup> Through association with Dr. John King he became interested in Eclectic preparations and in 1878 accepted the chair of chemistry and pharmacy at the Eclectic Medical Institute, one of Cincinnati's four medical colleges at the time and was its president from 1894 to 1904. In addition to an M.D. from the Eclectic, he was awarded a number of other honorary degrees: Master of Pharmacy by the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy in 1890, Doctor of Science by the University of Cincinnati in 1916, and a Doctor of Philosophy by Ohio University. ‘He was the foremost chemist in plant research in the world according to the best authorities.’<sup>7</sup> He established and endowed the Lloyd Library and Museum which still flourishes today and is world renowned for its superb special collections.

In addition to being a bright star in his scientific field, John Uri Lloyd also found time to pursue a remarkably successful literary career. It began almost accidentally with his publication of Etidorhpa or The End of the Earth in 1895. He had a small edition

printed for his friends. He wrote it for his own pleasure and relaxation from the tedium of the laboratory. When asked how he found time to write a book outside the pharmacy field and carry on his regular work at the same time, Lloyd replied simply, ‘Oh that’s easy, a page is about three hundred words, you just write a page a day and at the end of the year you have a book.’<sup>8</sup>

Apprehensive at first about how *Etidorhpa* would be received, Lloyd was pleased when Robert Clarke Co. contracted to publish it in several large editions for sale to the general public. Otto Juettner author of *Daniel Drake and his Followers*, in his article on Lloyd, wrote in 1909: ‘Lloyd’s name became a household word a few years ago when *Etidorhpa or the End of the Earth*, that strange product of weird romance appeared. Interwoven with mysticism and occultism are speculative fancies about natural philosophy and the ever-present and never explained phenomena of life and death, all presented in strangely fascinating form. An example of pure English diction and elegant simplicity of style, *Etidorhpa* will not soon be forgotten.’<sup>9</sup> Juettner’s prediction proved true. *Etidorpha* is not only still remembered, amazingly it is still in print after 107 years and readily available.

*Etidorhpa* was Lloyd’s first and last exercise in writing speculative fantasy. But his literary pen was far from dry. His next excursion into fiction was a story titled *The Right Side of the Car*, published in 1897 to defray the expenses of erecting a monument to his friend and mentor, John King. Then came his *Stringtown* series, a group of six novels written from 1900 to 1934. Totaling 1,775 pages, they seek to depict social life and manners in northern Kentucky around the Civil War period.”<sup>10</sup> He recalled the people he met, the dialects, superstitions and folklore he remembered from his youth and brought them to life in his books. *Stringtown on the Pike*, the first of the series, was published in 1900, the year he was elected to the Literary Club. It enjoyed instant success. “This local color tale was immensely popular and netted Lloyd a tidy sum which he used to endow the Lloyd library. At its first release the local newspapers announced that 10,000 copies of *Stringtown* were sold before it was even printed. By February of 1901, there were 50,000 in print with additional printings in England. While it might have been unsubstantiated hype, one newspaper claimed, ‘the royalty offered by the publisher (Dodd-Mead) to Mr. Lloyd is higher than ever paid Mark Twain or any other American author.’”<sup>11</sup> For those unwilling or unable to pay for a copy, who rushed to the Cincinnati Public Library for *Stringtown*, all most could do was sign the waiting list for the 141 copies already checked out.<sup>12</sup> William Henry Venable, renowned literary historian and fellow Literary Club member, who had read the story in manuscript and became something of a mentor to the scientist turned novelist, wrote excitedly to Lloyd. ‘Everybody seems to be reading *Stringtown*, high and low, rich and poor—men, women and children. How does it feel to be a successful author?’”<sup>13</sup>

“Lloyd maintained his priorities and insisted upon regarding his efforts to portray his boyhood Kentucky as little more than a leisure activity. ‘I went at it as a matter of recreation,’ he said. ‘When I get tired of the laboratory work, I sit down and write a chapter or two. I find it rests my mind as well as my body: it takes me out of the rut. It is about all the exercise I need. Instead of golf, I find it more profitable to my bodily

health to write and that is the pleasure of it. But I am not literary. I claim to be a pharmacist and I am sticking to my profession.”<sup>14</sup>

Five other novels appeared eventually to complete Lloyd's Stringtown series. Warwick of the Knobs in 1901, Red Head, 1903, Scroggins was read as one of Lloyd's forty-nine Literary Club papers on October 8<sup>th</sup> 1905 and was dedicated to the Club when published by Dodd-Mead. The final two of the series, Felix Moses, the Beloved Jew of Stringtown and Our Willie were published locally and privately, primarily for Lloyd's friends and associates. While the books that followed Stringtown didn't quite reach its astonishing popularity, they were well received. For a man who claimed not to be literary, who wrote just for the relaxation and fun of it in his spare time, Lloyd's literary achievement is truly remarkable.

But back to his clock. Chalmers Hadley in the final paragraph of his budget paper, wrote: "I have stood before the clock and thought of John Uri Lloyd's remarks and of Roy and Mrs. Browning's description of the clock's strange, nocturnal aberration before Roy died. But it has never given me an inkling of an idea regarding these things, but only a bold stare from its round, smug face as its tick-tocks come like beats from a brazen heart. You may have better success with the clock than ever I have had—try it some time."

Hadley gave up trying to explain the clock's mysterious behavior. He knew that in any normal weight-driven clock the whole mechanism stops when the weights reach the bottom of the case. Could it have been a wild dream or hallucination that Mrs. Browning was having about the clock. Some of you remember Mrs. Browning. She was our friendly, pleasant stewardess, here until the late sixties. But it was rumored that Mrs. B might have occasionally sampled some of the bottles as she tidied the bar after meetings. My old friend, neighbor and fellow member, Carl Vitz, told me of his rather revealing experience with Mrs. B. Carl was the Club librarian at the time and had come down one day to do some library chores. On entering, he was surprised to find Mrs. B out cold on the library couch. Carl, every inch a gentleman, tiptoed back outside and banged on the door until he awakened her to stagger up to let him back in. Could she have been dreaming about the clock that fateful night when Roy died?

More than likely, Mr. Hadley was telling the story of the mysterious performance of the clock, much as John Uri Lloyd would have told it. The scene in Hadley's paper of the three old friends dining at Lloyd's house, with our clock in the hall and the other old clock on the mantle tick tocking to each other, is taken almost verbatim from Lloyd's Felix Moses. Lloyd would have loved that budget paper.

I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting John Uri Lloyd almost seventy years ago. It was in November 1933. My father had given me his copies of Stringtown on the Pike and Warwick of the Knobs. I was a junior at St. X High School. It was downtown then at Seventh and Sycamore, just a few blocks from the Lloyd library. I walked there with the books one day to see if he might autograph them for me. I was a bit apprehensive. I was a sixteen-year old high school boy. He was eighty-four and a world-

renowned chemist and author. When I was ushered into his office all my fears vanished immediately. He greeted me with a warm smile and a twinkle in his bright eyes. He made me feel perfectly at ease, asked about my schoolwork and what I hoped to do when I finished. He told me that Stringtown was his favorite and that I was lucky to have a first edition copy of it. I was so elated by that cordial visit that after I had found a copy of Redhead in August 1934, I went back to see him again and was welcomed like an old friend. I can understand why his old Literary Club compatriots, William Venable and Martin Fischer, Chalmers Hadley, James Albert Green, David Philipson, and Harry Mackoy wrote so lovingly in their Club memorial of him. When you glance at his handsome, old clock in the library, give a nod to a renowned scientist, a highly esteemed author and one of our beloved former members, John Uri Lloyd.

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