

Hereditaments

By James N Myers

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Thirty or forty years ago, I met the librarian of a poorly-funded college library a couple of states south of here, and during the course of our conversation, he said to me, "Every library, without exception, has some distinguishing characteristic that is its claim to fame. I have the only college library in America with a back porch."

The Literary Club Library, too, has a sort of ironic distinction. We have the only library in America that permits smoking, and even supplies the cigars. But, we have some other wonderful distinctions, as well. We have a collection of minutes and papers that represent the contributions of members of the Literary Club over a period of more than 160 years, unique and irreplaceable. Although the minutes go back to the very early times, until the fall of 1885 it apparently did not occur to anyone that the club should preserve the papers written by members. From then on however, most papers were copied in longhand script into the substantial leather bound volumes you see stored behind glass in our library. It is not entirely clear whose handwriting it is that appears in these volumes. Is it the author's? The Club's Secretary's? Or a hired transcriptionist's?

In May of 1891, a Literary Club member delivered a humorous paper about a young man who was driven mad by this job of transcription. Now "a harmless lunatic," he explains his condition to the doctor before being carted back to the asylum by the police:

At the age of 19, writing an excellent hand, I hired myself as a copying clerk to ... an old bachelor with whom I lived. [He] had permanent employment from the world renowned organization, known as the [Literary Club of Cincinnati], to copy all the essays and papers read there, transcribing the same in large strictly bound volumes which he kept in an iron safe in the house.

As he advanced in years, I relieved him of his duty and on his death succeeded to his post. At first I copied mechanically, without just or due appreciation of the true literary character of my work, stumbling or groping in the dark, sometimes mistaking the most comic productions for the truest pathos, and at others weeping long just when I should have laughed loudest, and finally a great light flashed upon me, I could determine which was which, by lot. ... I read only the witty and humorous contributions but read them again and again. ... Night and day I reveled like a fiend in my love for the humorous, so much so that when one day I was summoned to attend a relative's funeral, I could hardly compose my features or treat it as a solemn occasion. I went from bad to worse. The power of mind so worked over matter that my figure changed, becoming irresistibly comic, almost as you see it now. I took to reading the Club's statistical papers. Those turned my brain, and I became delirious; was thrown upon a bed of sickness where I remained many months. (*The Doctor and the Stranger*, by Simeon M. Johnson May 30, 1891)

This practice of longhand transcription of Literary Club papers continued into the early 1890's when the typewriter replaced pen and ink as the preferred tool of transcription.

As many of you will know, my primary life's work was in university libraries, where treasures like these volumes abound. But I was soon lured into administration, before I had much time to do any honest library work. So, when I discovered these nineteenth century works of our brother Literarians, in danger of loss from fire or flood or from simply fading away as old soldiers do, I decided to do something about it. A little more than a year ago, I began to transcribe them, but this time into more permanent and portable electronic format, and to make the transcriptions available on the Club website. To date, I have transcribed about 220 of the papers, and I foresee several years of pleasure yet to come.

Perhaps I should take warning from the young transcriptionist, for reading these early papers is not easy. The writing is in difficult cursive script, using various inks or even pencil. Punctuation is often casual, with seemingly interchangeable periods, commas, semicolons, dashes, and hyphens. Quotation marks often begin a quote, but then fail to end it, or the other way around. Latin and Greek are used without apology or translation. Although some papers are fairly easy to read, others are next to impossible. Some pages are so badly faded that one can hardly detect much of the text, particularly along the edges of the pages, where the writing has often been obliterated by the thumbs of more than a century's worth of Literarians.¹

The tool I use to transcribe the papers is voice recognition software. That is, I read the papers into a microphone attached to my computer and out comes text. This is a reasonably accurate method, but not entirely so, since the gremlins that inhabit personal computers require the exercise of some degree of caution. You have probably met these gremlins if you have used a spelling checker on your own computer. Some of the errors I have caught are: "quite a mullah" for "Guatemala," "ten gerbil" for "tangible," and "or dishes" for "Odysseus." If you choose to take a look at my transcriptions, you will surely find others, as I do every time I re-read one of the papers.

The variety, delights, and foibles of these early handwritten papers (from which I intend to read tonight) are the subject of my paper. They represent our inheritance from members past, which, if we preserve them, we will pass along, together with our own written contributions, to Literarians of even another century or two to come. There is not time to sample many of them tonight, but the variety is great. There is humor, fiction, original poetry, a little plagiarized poetry, translations, and commentary on the sorry state of Cincinnati's government and the newspapers that prop it up. There are papers praising

¹ The papers were microfilmed by the Cincinnati Historical Society some years ago. A positive copy of that film is housed at the Society and a negative copy is at the Literary Club. Sadly, the handwritten papers are often nearly illegible on the microfilm, and, ironically, neither of these organizations owns equipment for the reading of these microfilm copies.

the progress of the United States in power and trade. There are treks across country in Europe and America. There are papers on “mirror writing,” higher education, “The Shakespeare myth,” the Mississippi River, murder, prehistoric architecture, public roads, marine architecture, the gold and silver standards, and much more.

There are, of course, celebrations of the Literary Club itself. There is a humorous paper concerning a battle between the Club’s too ambitious wine steward and the stingy treasurer. One, from our all-time most prolific presenter Charles B. Wilby, congratulates the Club on its tolerance of odd opinions and suggests precisely the sort of opinions that are tolerated best. It is entitled “Autopanegyric” and contains a political argument that seems quite modern. I’ll let Mr. Wilby tell it.

The toleration which the members of this Club have always shown to each other, of their opinions on all sorts of questions, has much to do with our healthy condition. We sometimes boast that everyone is sure to find here a place where he can express any opinion and be received courteously.

If any of our members ... should still insist that the earth is flat and should read a paper here maintaining this belief, he would be accorded a most respectful hearing. So too would any gentleman find here a civil audience, who ... might be led to affirm that the people of the Yankee nation are such poor traders, that in self-defense, they must check their trading propensities by law.

.... We number among our members, some who still believe that a protective tariff is not a tax, and more, who are convinced that free trade under the alias of reciprocity, is a good thing if on a small scale with a few South American Republics, but that under any other name or in a larger quantity, it would not be at all desirable. In short, there are some of our members who believe ... that if an industry cannot stand on its own legs, all other industries ought to be taxed to keep it going, and yet they are among our most valued members. We would miss them if they staid away.... (*Autopanegyric* by Charles B. Wilby June 27, 1891)

From time to time there was a contrary view of the club. This one from which I quote was in response to an invitation to former members to attend the Anniversary Dinner in October 1886, the response letters being read to the members upon that occasion:

In reply to your kind invitation, I regret that I can not attend the Anniversary meeting of your club, to be held on the 30th; nor can I furnish you with a “short reminiscence.” When I was a member I esteemed the honor; but did not, to any great extent, avail myself of the privilege of taking part in the debates and other intellectual exercises of the club. Possibly I did not look upon myself as an Oracle, and was too diffident to bear the exposure of my ignorance and inability among those who knew so much, and had such capacity for imparting their knowledge. There were always enough surcharged gentlemen able and willing, if not eager to impart unlimited information and argument to such as would listen. I listened, and I thought I was being educated up to a high plane. Listeners and learners are as necessary to the life of a Literary Club as talkers and

teachers. Hence I filled a niche in the Temple of literature, humble, but important, and feel a certain pride in my contribution to the existence of your celebrated club.

As I recall the past, the club was composed chiefly of doctors, lawyers, artists, and editors; who were, as a rule bright fellows, possessed of a mission to instruct the world. What the doctors did not know about law could not have been familiar to Blackstone. The lawyers were well up in art, and the artists were regular literary fellows. As to the editors, well, all that can be said is, if they fell short of Omniscience, the fact was not apparent to themselves. In short, the members of the club were far from being “prophets not without honor save in their own country.” They honored themselves and asserted themselves, and it is established by ancient history that quite a number of people took them at their own estimate. (Letter signed by Robt W Carroll, in *Editorial* by Stephen Cooper Ayers, October 30, 1886)

Over the period of just two years, there are two papers concerning the Nicaragua Canal, in which the authors revel at the approaching French failure in Panama when compared to America’s certain success in Nicaragua. Here is a short sample of one of them that begins with a bit of a travelogue:

Some years since I disembarked from a ship on the Pacific Ocean fifteen miles south east of Brito in Nicaragua, and traversed the State in the vicinity of the projected interoceanic canal. The only part of the journey by land was twelve miles on mule back across the Continental divide to Lake Nicaragua. Thence across the lake to its outlet at the head of the River San Juan, and thence down the stream winding through dense tropical forests, stopping two or three times to make portages around rapids and landing at Greytown within sound of the breakers of the Caribbean Sea. This journey awoke an interest in the project of an isthmian Canal which has caused me to follow its development to the present time.

After explaining the project further, he continues:

When the atmosphere of wealth which surrounded the undertaking at Panama, leading to the wildest extravagances in its administration and culminating in a financial storm which swept away \$200,000,000 of the savings of the French people, while yet the construction was little more than begun, the hope of a sea level canal entirely abandoned, and the colossal problem of the diversion of the floods of the Chagres River still unresolved, the comatose Nicaragua project sprang into life again, energized by the failure of its rival. (*The Nicaragua Canal* by G.B. Nicholson, November 28, 1891)

On an entirely different topic, a paper that might make us squirm is one of boyhood reminiscences of “old slave days”.

Here are the words of G.B. Nicholson, in May of 1891:

Uncle Wash had a number of slaves, who in the free and easy life of the farm lived a happy and careless existence. His wife, Aunt Betsy, was an invalid (and) nearly blind, and as uncle Wash was not a man to bother himself about trifles, the slave women were almost absolute in his household matters, and the men did more toward managing the farm than they should.

Among the slaves was Aunt Jennie, supposed to be between eighty and ninety years old. Jennie occupied a cabin by herself in a corner of the farm; and was practically free, (as no service was expected of her, although Uncle Wash had never taken the trouble to make out "free papers"). She had been brought from Africa when a child and was quite an aristocrat, priding herself on her freedom and her sure descent. "I'm ... full blooded ...," she would say. "No pore white trash in me." (*The Old Slave Days in Northern Kentucky* by G. B. Nicholson, May 30, 1891)

On the lighter side, one member writes of the trouble he had meeting girls. He was frustrated by the Victorian Idea that one could not properly speak to an attractive young lady to whom one has not been formally introduced. (*An Agreeable Solution of a Social Problem* by C.B. Wilby, May 30, 1891)

On May 30 of 1881, Dr. L.C. Carr told the story of an exceptionally successful wake. It seems that the dead man was the father of eleven children, whom he fed on a salary of forty dollars a month, earned as a flagman at River Side. "He had two habits which troubled his good wife sorely. He could and did out-drink and outfight any man in the neighborhood."

On the day before the wake, he had come home in a drunken state and his wife had locked him out all the cold night. About 8 o'clock the next morning, a freight train had come through, apparently making short work of him and dividing his body into numerous parts, so mangled that he was virtually unrecognizable. . "The next time she saw him he was a corpse."

The wake was held in the modest home of the dead man and his family, the body parts put back together as well as possible in a pine coffin in a back bedroom, while story-telling, drinking, and dancing took place in the front room, with frequent trips to the pub to replenish the pitcher. (Perhaps you need to be Irish, as I am, to believe such goings on at a wake).

It was suggested that Big Barnsey was the only man that ever gave the corpse a rattling good fight, was just the person to step into the dead man's shoes. The beauties of a ready-made family half-grown, were painted to Barnsey in glowing colors. The widow closed this new avenue of amusement by remarking that when she wanted to marry a boy she would send for Barnsey.

and so it went into the evening. But then:

"To Hell wid ye!" came in a hoarse voice from the back room and the

transformation was marvelous, then a yell, a fearful crash, an instant's silence, a bursting open of the kitchen door and there stood the corpse, with the bloody rags over his face and a piece of his coffin in his hand.

I ... heard the bursting of doors, the crashing of windows, some screams from the canal bed, where many of them had fallen in a confused heap, and then I realized that I was left alone in the dark with a man who did not seem to know that he was dead and a dozen howling children whose mothers had forgotten them. (*A Successful Wake* by Dr. L. C. Carr May 30, 1891)

It turned out that the man in the coffin was but a substitute for the Irishman, who had suffered the cold night outdoors, got into a fight, nursed his hangover and his battle injuries, and slipped back into the house through a back window overturning and smashing his own coffin and knocking his surrogate to the floor. He was to do battle one more time, but this time with his wife.

In 1892, Charles Greve reviewed *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, by Thomas Hardy. It had been published the previous year. The book was already a raging success, particularly among women and girls. Greve has his own view of it:

This is the satire upon purity of which one of our foremost writers has been guilty, and pure maids and mothers are reading it with approval and admiration.

Purity in woman means above all things personal chastity and there is no moral code that forgives a woman that yields up her virtue, even under the excuse of excessive passion. Our heroine has no such excuse. She is simply bartering her body and soul for an equivalent in creature comforts. She never makes a sacrifice. She makes not even the pretense of resistance. There is not a moral idea inspired by any thing or person in the book. And yet our young girls read and discuss this story of profligacy and sensuality.... What can a pure woman who reads such a story of moral relaxation, such an insidious attack upon all that is pure and sweet in our most sacred relations be thinking of when she defends such stuff? (*Pure Mud – a Protest*, by Charles Theo. Greve, April 30 1892)

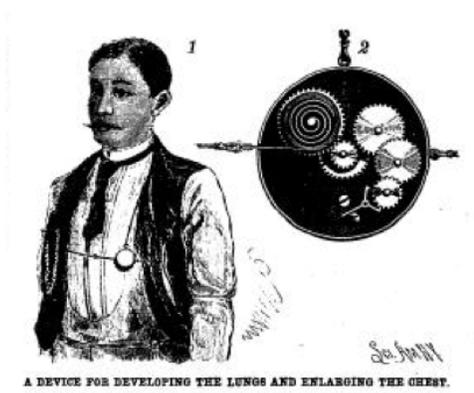
Science, technology, and medicine were topics that interested Literarians and generated pride in the rapid advances that Cincinnatians often led. One such advance was a medical device invented by Literary Club Member, Charles C. Davis, who had gone to Colorado to benefit his diseased lungs.²

“... it was necessary that he should be constantly reminded [to breathe deeply] otherwise he would unconsciously drop back into his natural habit of breathing

² Inventor's name from *Scientific American*, December 27, 1890, p.402, where there is also a photograph of the device.

short and quick. After some experimenting he invented for his own use a device which he has since patented recently under the name of Spiroplethe....

It is a little steel or silver box about the size and shape of a small [ladies] watch which being fastened upon the chest produces there an intermittent pressure, not strong enough to injure the patient or cause him pain but sufficiently effective to attract attention and if relief is not obtained by an expansion of the chest, in a short time the continuous pressure becomes noticeably annoying. The effect of deep breathing in time and in a natural way produces a development of the lungs and the fuller breathing thus induced becomes a habit.



The inventor writes me that he has increased the size of his own chest since he began to use it not less than two inches. (*The Spiroplethe, Or a Mechanical Device for the Relief of Persons Afflicted with Weak Lungs* by Charles Wilby, December 26 1891).

Joseph Cox presented a paper on the origin of life on earth at the North Pole.³ The idea is that when the earth was first formed, it was too hot for the existence of life.

In Cox's words:

[I]f the Earth from its earliest consolidation had been steadily cooling, it is hardly possible to conceive of a method by which any region, too hot for human residents, can become too cold, except by passing through all the intermediate stages of temperature, some of which must have been precisely adapted to human comfort, and all scientific authorities admit that at one time there was within the Arctic Circle a tropical climate. The best authorities in science in Europe and America conclude that all the floral types and forms revealed in the oldest fossils of the earth originated in the region of the North Pole and then spread, first over the northern & then over the southern hemisphere from north to south.

³ Cox bases this claim on the book by Dr. William F. Warren, President of Boston University entitled *Paradise Found: The Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole*.

But Cox doesn't stop there. He goes on to suggest that there may be, even in 1885, hidden at the very North Pole, behind almost impenetrable ice and snow which surrounds it, a paradise of moderate temperatures, maintained by the long periods of sunlight enjoyed there. (I will not attempt to explain this argument.) He cites his interview with an explorer whose intent it is to go north to prove it. Here's more from Cox:

The last day Capt. Hall was in this city previous to the voyage which proved to be his last, he spent at my house, and it was wonderful to hear him discourse on the absolute certainty of its discovery. All the hardships and sufferings and labors of all preceding expeditions were familiar to him in their minutest details. He spoke of and dilated upon them, pointed out the mistakes which prevented their success, but never once expressed a doubt of the existence of a land of pleasant temperature, exuberant life, bright skies and wonderful fertility. Nay, further he reiterated in the most positive manner that he had obtained almost a full view of it, more complete and satisfactory than had ever before been obtained, that he had the key to the whole mystery, and only held it back because he wanted the final result to be obtained under the flag of an American vessel, chartered by the government. That in the event of his failure in this last expedition, he had left such memoranda carefully prepared and in safe hands to be published after his death as would no longer leave any doubt in the minds of the world. (*Antiquity of Life at the North Pole* by Joseph Cox, October 10 1885)

Pride in Cincinnati's contributions to 19th century progress is evident in a number of papers.

The first local weather Bureau in this country was started in Cincinnati under Professor Abbe [a Literarian], in 1869. It was supported by contributions from the Associated Pork-Packers and from the Chamber of Commerce. Professor Abbe was summoned to Washington shortly afterwards, but not, however until he had demonstrated the practical value of local weather forecasts.

The men who forecast the weather for the U.S. Signal Service have so much to predict that it seems quite marvelous they succeed so often. With large areas to cover and with more or less general and confused predictions to announce in order to cover such a large geographical area, e.g. as the Ohio or upper Mississippi Valley with their varied weather at widely separated portions. It is no wonder that to those who are uninitiated or unacquainted with the real facts, these indications look decidedly shot-gunny, in fact like a little of every thing, in order to be sure not to miss it.

The author goes on to explain how weather forecasting is done, by collecting a few data, basically temperature and barometric pressure, from a number of ground stations over a period of time. The stations (in railroad stations, drugstores, and other places that are likely to have telephones or telegraph) call or send in the measurements to the weather bureau, which can then calculate the movements of the air.

Areas of low are followed or chased across the country, by areas of high which are trying to get into them and fill them up or the areas of low are deflected to one or the other side as they meet resistance in high areas in front of them. It is the determination of the exact courses these various areas take which determine in large measure the forecast, so that it is of the utmost importance that the movements of the storm-centers be watched, and their rate of forward movement known, as well as the relative positions of all other areas.

Forecasts are guesses at the direction and rate of these areas, based on experience and what has occurred many times before under similar conditions. A high cold wave is reported from the North West, a warm, low area is approaching from the south. The questions are, what will be the directions which each will take? Where will they meet, and where is the line where the cold air will ... warm up so much that it will not be felt? And how much warming will occur before it reaches us? The answers to such questions must be found in the accumulated experiences of the past, and they are now so many as to be laid down in rules, broad to be sure, but based on the experience and scientific research of the last 15 years.

But, I ask you, how will the people of Cincinnati learn of forecasts, without WCPO's Steve Raleigh to tell them? They could of course go out and look at the signal flags put up at the railroad station or at the local drugstore, but there is more help than that in store, according to Mr. Dun:

It is not many years in the future when the patents on the telephone will run out; a reduction in price with improved instruments and a great extension of telephonic service must then occur. The present company with its extensive system will be compelled to add extra inducements to subscribers in order to keep ahead of rival companies.

That local forecasts will be one such inducement, there can be no doubt. We see vast means of centralization of power, vast possibilities for the diffusion of knowledge, and vast range of distribution in the telephone of the near future. We can picture to ourselves the time when it will be found in all the humble farm houses and cottages. We can see the inducement offered that the subscriber can often save by timely weather warning, many times the price asked for the instrument for the whole year, and we can see this fact demonstrated over and over again. (*A Local Weather Bureau* by Walter A Dun, December 12, 1885)

Although travel is one of those subjects that are today virtually taboo for Club papers, there are a number of travel accounts in these early papers. San Francisco (and particularly Chinatown) was the subject of two papers, much of which, as you will hear, is less than flattering. To give you fair warning about what follows, A. F. Kuersensteiner, whose paper was entitled *Among the Heathen*, was easily convinced by the guide he had hired that most women to be seen on the streets of Chinatown were prostitutes. In fact, he doesn't approve of Chinese men or children either. Here is Kuersensteiner himself, in November 1891:

[W]e went to several Joss houses [or temples]. The moment we entered the first one I could not help saying to myself, "childish." And childish seems to be the word which, better than any other, characterizes every thing about the Chinese excepting their vices. Their vices are those of full-grown men, but all else, pardon the repetition, appears childish. They are small in stature. They cling with childish tenacity to their peculiar dress and their pig-tails. They are superstitious, even their children do not look like ordinary children but rather like the children of children, i.e. like dolls.

The few favorable impressions that this author reports are almost as jarring to a 21st Century ear as were his negative ones:

It is but just to state in a few words the favorable impressions that I received. From what I had seen, I inferred that the Chinese were an unclean race. And yet I never saw a China man whose face was not scrupulously clean and whose socks, at least those parts of visible above the slippers were not of snowy whiteness. I had also thought, judging from the few that had up to that time crossed my path, that they were an unintelligent-looking race. But in Chinatown I saw many men whose countenances would have done honor to Caucasians and some of them had truly magnificent heads! (*Among the Heathen*, by A. F. Kuersensteiner, November 28, 1891)

The other San Francisco paper, by Manning Force, was presented a few years earlier. Here are some of his impressions from twenty-one years before the devastating fires that followed the famous earthquake of 1906:

All the dwellings of San Francisco, including these great mansions and the little houses on the out skirts are built of redwood, are two stories with a basement, are covered with bay windows, and are painted with a heavy paint like cement. The high, steep hills, covered with these frame structures look like preparations for a gigantic bon fire. Yet I was surprised to learn that the rate of insurance was low. The fact is that red wood, the lumber of California, is absolutely free from resin and is not inflammable: that is, it will not blaze; it slowly chars and is easily extinguished. Such a thing as conflagration would be impossible.

Mr. Force then continues his San Francisco observations:

The grip-cars are a feature of the city. They go so rapidly and smoothly, it is a pleasure to ride in them. There are always two cars. The front one is an open observatory car. I always took the front seat in it. Plunging down the steep declivities of Union Street, bracing myself and holding on, it seemed like coasting. They are now a convenience. When built, they made available for habitation a larger part of the city. When the city was begun, a narrow strip of low land lay between the water and a range of abrupt, steep hills, rising to the height of 300 to 360 feet.... The grip cars give easy and pleasant access, and now the finest residences crown the summit.

And finally, the author too moves on to Chinatown.

The streets were thronged; we were the only persons who were not Chinese. Many colored lanterns hung from the houses, and sounds of squeaking instruments and of gongs, mingled with squeaking falsetto voices issued from upper stories. ... We went into some of the provision stores, where our guide brought out everything for our inspection. There were dried fish from China, ducks cleaned and pressed flat, dressed in oil and then dried, brought from China, strings of dried duck-legs, and other small anatomical collections, dried herbs and vegetables, dried and preserved fruits, all from China. Fresh eggs from China, large eggs prepared by being coated with glue, and then with black earth, so as to be quite impervious to air. So prepared, it is said they keep fresh for five years—to the taste of Chinamen, and no Christian has knowledge to the contrary. ...

Further along the streets we entered a long, dark passage and found at the other end a small, dark, damp court. My wife remained with my two friends while I crossed the court. Jackson opened the door, and we found ourselves in a room like the cabin of a boat, lined to the ceiling with bunks, leaving no unoccupied space but a few square feet about the door. On every bed was a recumbent Chinaman. Some were adjusting opium in their pipes. Some were smoking holding the opium in a bowl against the flame of a lamp. Some had smoked and were lying in stupor. It was a forbidding site. The guide said this was a very mild specimen, and passing further on, opened another door. Nothing could be seen but dense smoke; a faint, diffused glare showed there was a light somewhere within. I did not care to enter. (*Black Point —San Francisco — Santa Barbara* by M. F. Force, October 3, 1885)

Literarian Alphonso Taft (the father of William Howard Taft) was in 1882 appointed Minister to the Court of Franz Joseph, Emperor of Austria-Hungary. In February and March of 1886, he gave two extraordinarily long and interesting papers on his experiences at the court. Here are some of his observations from the first of these papers:

The founders of our government were undoubtedly wise in forbidding the receiving or conferring of hereditary titles in our Republic. Not that titled persons are any worse or any better, than persons without titles; but because such titles are at war with the principles of equality of privileges among men, and antagonize republican government. They are an important instrumentality in the hands of a monarch to keep in vogue the artificial distinctions of classes among his people, so necessary to the existence of any monarchy. They furnish a cheap bribe in the hands of the king, or the Emperor, to bind to his throne for ever the most influential men of his realm. Every sovereign of Europe has a basket full of titles and orders, with which to secure the unconditional support of the leading men of the country.

The maintenance of these distinctions may be essential to a despotism or a

monarchy. Many American heiresses have been captivated with the glitter of these high sounding titles. As princes, and counts, and barons may be as good as other people, an American lady who gets one may get a good husband. But the majority of such experiences have not been encouraging.

Mr. Taft continues:

The Emperor is nearly, and perhaps quite six feet in height, not stout but rather slightly built with a full beard except a spot on the chin, which is shaved close. His head is now quite bald, though he is but 55 years old. His hair, what there is of it, is quite gray, nearly white. His step is elastic, and all his movements are military. He walks like an Austrian officer. The military step of Austria is not quite the same with that of our military men. Without attempting to describe accurately the difference, there is one thing I have observed, viz.: that the Austrian soldier is trained to swing his arms freely, to correspond with and aid the movement of his legs, which I have not observed in the marching of American or English soldiers.

Describing a ball at the court, Minister Taft:

The Emperor and all the male members of the Imperial family as well as the officers of the army whether in active service or retired, were in full uniform, the nobility too were adorned with the orders which they had obtained from the Emperor Francis Joseph, or from any other emperor or king. The members of the diplomatic corps were also arrayed in rich uniforms with a great amount of gold lace and gold buttons always excepting the minister of the United States who wears by act of Congress plain black, an evening dress suit. This was really the most distinguished uniform there was in the company for there was no one like it; and as the members of the corps came in, and were announced by officers of the court, they had no difficulty in knowing when to announce the Minister of the United States. His black dress suit was decisive. I have never complied with any act of Congress with more satisfaction. Gold lace is not republican, and I am sure that I should never wish to wear it. It is heavy and uncomfortable, and to my eye it is not becoming. (*Reminiscences of a US Minister at the Court of Emperor Francis Joseph* by Alphonso Taft, February 13, 1886)

This will be the best place to end this tour of a bit of the Literary Club's past, with just a short personal note. As I suggested to begin, the librarian in my blood makes me reverent about records of the past, and alarmed that they may be lost, and even frustrated that they aren't readily available in a new century when more and more material is online. Some of you have been encouraging, even looking forward to reading the transcriptions as they appear one by one. Others have been more skeptical or practical, suggesting that it may indeed be the labor of a fool. My guess is that both views are defensible.