

THE BIOLOGY GROUP OF CHICAGO.

By

CLARENCE LARRIW.

Verbatim Report

By

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NOTE: An amalgamation of the liberal organizations in Chicago occurred in 1915. Representatives met at Hull House, among whom were Arthur M. Lewis, H. Percy Ward, Dr. Horace J. Bridges, F. C. Feichwald, Jesse Quitman, Dr. Albert S. Gray, Dr. Joseph H. Greer, Wm. F. McGee, W. L. MacLaskey, and other interested persons. At this meeting the Chicago Rationalist Association was formed under which auspices the Sunday Evening Fellowship came into existence.

Clarence Darrow was the chief speaker from this platform. He attracted large audiences. Dr. George Furmen Foster also spoke from this rostrum. After the Fellowship had run its course, Mr. Darrow thought it would be an excellent thing to have professors come to business men who were unable to attend college so he opened his home once a week to a group of men to listen to lectures on scientific subjects by college professors. Subsequently, the Group rented a room at a Loop hotel every Thursday night for many years to have lectures. No women were admitted to the lectures but annually a dinner was given for them which was a gala event. This talk was given at one of these affairs when the professors were the guests of honor.

F.M.M.

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CLARENCE DAFFO.

I was one of the first to start this Biology Group. It came about in a rather singular way. I have been talking all my life on all kinds of questions. I was getting along and I thought if I ever wanted to know anything about any of them I ought to study them. So, some of us got a few people together to really study, to say nothing ourselves, but to listen to others. We had a rather narrow escape in the beginning over the question of whether women should be admitted to the class. But we escaped, all right. I do not need to say how we decided to settle that question, when it has been running now for eleven years, and we hope to run it for sometime longer.

I really have enjoyed it, and I think the other members have. I fancy I have learned something, even, I think, that has unsettled some of the opinions I once held. Of course, it is a pretty good idea to unsettle one's opinions because one can make speeches and write books as to what one believes and then, after one learns something, one can write books and make speeches to show that the others were wrong. Both ways work. If they did not, one would have to stop after a while, for one couldn't make any more speeches. I have often had people remark to me, after some of my debates with some of these professors, in

wonderment, as to how much I know. It is not a question to marvel about at all. I have had great advantages. I do not mean inherited; I mean acquired. Since we started this Biology Class, we have found out about all there is. I was just discussing with one of the members what we could take up next year. We cannot think of anything that we have not had.

We started with biology. We had a first class teacher, Dr. Herrick, who is a real biologist. We had him for a year and part of another. We found out all he knew. We got the whole thing and he could not tell us any more about it. So we have gotten through with biology and we know that subject thoroughly.

Then we started on anthropology. We had two of the very best teachers, Professors Thomas and Starr. We found out all there was about anthropology. We got all through with it. So we had those two subjects fully mastered; we were biologists and anthropologists.

Next we tackled psychology under Professor Carr. He is an excellent teacher. We found out all there was in psychology, so we got through with that, too.

We had Professor Cole from the Field Museum, who told us all about primitive races, the dwarfs, pigmies, giants, and all those things. We got all of that. So we knew that, too.

Then, we had Professor Case. I thought there was one subject, perhaps, of which we might learn a little. I suppose I had a little of the spirit of a missionary in this thing. My early religious training had been neglected some, too. We got hold of Professor Case and he gave us some lectures on religion. I remember very well what astonishment greeted my recommendation that we should have some lectures by Professor Case on religion. I do not know whether the astonishment was so much at that we would have a professor from a theological seminary, or because I should suggest it. Anyhow, we took it, and all marvel at the things we did not know before. Well, we found out all there was to know about religion.

We had our old friend, whom we all miss and mourn, Professor Foster, on philosophy. There were few men who could discuss a philosophical question as Professor Foster could do it. We had him and we learned all about philosophy.

Then we got an idea that Professor Case knew some other things. And, in order to fill in the time, we asked him to give us some lectures also on philosophy. We found he was even sounder on philosophy than he was on religion. We learned that there were still other things that he knew. We got him to give us a course on the history of civilization. We learned that the Babylonians came from Babylon; that the Greeks came from Greece; that the Romans came from Rome and that the Jews---I don't remember where they came from, but I think from New York,

wasn't it? Anyhow, we learned all about it. And really, I must say, I think if we had taken Professor Case in the beginning we would have had no need of these other Professors. We have not yet found a subject that he was not master of. Of course, he has his limitations. We could not get any history beyond 327 A. D., and then there was a blank wall; that is where he ended.

There is something which Professor Case has that is not common to college professors. He has a faculty of telling what he knows. Lawyers have the faculty of telling it whether we know it or not! As a rule, those who know a thing well do not have the faculty of telling it well. Professor Case has this faculty to a marvelous degree.

Now, when you think of all the great subjects we have covered--- most of the field of human knowledge---it is not strange that I can debate with these college professors who only know one thing. I really have an advantage over them. All I have to do is to sic them onto something that is not in their line, like the doctor who didn't know anything about fever, but who could throw the patient into fits and cure the fits. That is the secret of it. I have been taught all of it by experts in various fields so I have all that all the rest of them have.

~~We~~ had sense enough when we organized this class to get specialists in all these various fields of thought, and we had sense enough to let them do the talking, and we had sense enough to listen, and that is quite an art. Probably none of us imagine how hard it has been sometimes; but we did it, and we have gained by it. We have gained

in fellowship. And while I like to think of the learning of these men who are masters in their lines, I like to think, too, of the intimacy it has brought about between us.

We all admire and respect and possibly envy their ripe scholarship; their learning, and minds which examine subjects, utterly regardless of the results. The unconscious example of finding out the truth is the rarest thing that can be a characteristic of any mind.

It is the habit and thought of our lives to jump at some conclusion and want it that way. When we read the papers during a political campaign, they are those papers that are on our side because we want it to come out that way. And when we marshall our arguments and our reasons we try to prove that which we wish to prove. This is an almost hopeless impediment in the search for knowledge. But we have all watched the workings of these professors' minds, observed their absolute fairness, ~~and~~ thorough investigation, and utter disregard of results.

The only effort is the pursuit of truth. The pursuit of truth may be a barren thing. I ask myself over and over again why I want to get at the truth? Of course, being a pessimist, I know it will be disagreeable when I find it. I approach every subject with the certain knowledge that it will be disagreeable when I find it. The only reason, I suppose, any man really wants to get at the truth is because he has the urge in him to do it.

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