THE AUTHORS CLUB OF LOUISVILLE
AN INSIDE STORY — I REMEMBER . . .

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Many people still recall the small group of young women, who, in the nineties, took to meeting every Saturday morning around Mrs. Evelyn Snead Barnett's hospitable dining table in her Weissinger-Gaulbert apartment in Louisville, never having published anything to speak of, but to their own amusement calling themselves "The Authors Club of Louisville"; meeting to work together in the hope of becoming what they so brashly announced themselves to be.

And before the last echoes of the delightful period that followed die completely away and the facts of it become mere literary statistics, maybe it would be nice for one of the last of those echoes to make a brief final recording, not so much of the "lives and works" of those authors—that has been done before—as of some of the more intimate aspects of their personalities and association that no one who had not been in the game could know.

The association was not, of course, unique. The history of all the arts is full of such groups, working and playing together. There are a number now in Louisville. But none, surely, with less of the jealousy and uncharitableness supposed to be inseparable from the artistic temperament. The record of that little group for loyalty and mutual helpfulness, not only among themselves but to how many other aspiring writers, is a shining one. They are worth a backward glance.

They were—

Evelyn Snead Barnett, founder of the Authors Club. For years editor of the Book Page of the Louisville *Courier-Journal.*

George (Georgia) Madden Martin. *Emmy Lou;* and a number of other volumes.

Eva Madden (George Madden Martin's sister). Pioneer newspaper woman.

Alice Hegan Rice (Mrs. Cale Young Rice). *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch;* and a pageful of other titles.

Annie Fellows Johnston. *The Little Colonel* series; and a regiment with banners following them.

Margaret Steele Anderson. *The Flame in the Wind.* Poet, critic, lecturer, Book Editor for the *Louisville Evening Post.*

Mary Leonard. *Everyday Susan;* and a troop of other young people there, too.

Margaret Womack Vandercook. The *Campfire Girls* series; fiction and verse.

Later came—

Abby Meguire Roach. "Some Successful Marriages," and other stories and feature work for the Louisville *Courier-Journal.*

Vanita Siebert White. *The Gossamer Thread.*

Fannie Caldwell Macauley (Frances Little). *The Lady of the Decoration;* and others. And

Ellen Churchill Semple, internationally known anthropogeographer, with two tomes to her credit, a lectureship at Oxford, the Collum Medal; a place with President Wilson's advisers about boundaries for the Treaty of Versailles; and a school in Louisville named after her!

Before this little group dissolved they had published more than seventy books, many of them best sellers or otherwise important. More than one had a permanent place in the history of American literature; and all self-consciousness about their name was forgotten.

We had fun, too—times when the simple mirth and high spirits, that Freud's theory does not seem sufficiently to allow for, had full sway and we met at any of our houses for any desired hour or occasion—often with some central program, often involving us as "characters," but always with everybody contributing something. Those meetings were by no means the least pleasant part of our association. We called them "Inky Dinks"—named by Alice Rice of course. You could always tell her touch. And Mary Leonard gave us our theme song "Come away to Slipaway," the name of my old home in Tyler Lane, then quite in the country.

And as Fan Macauley, adapting a familiar classic, observed characteristically at one of our nonsense parties—

> The Woman's Club has style and mon.
> The Monday Club has fame.
> The Authors Club of these has none
> But it gets there just the same.

And even those reservations were shortly outgrown.

When this writer was invited in, early in nineteen hundred, when her stories were beginning to appear in the East, *Mrs. Wiggs, Emmy Lou,* and *The Little Colonel* were in full flight, and other work had been accomplished or was in the making.

The early group had done a batch of six separately written short stories about what "A Well-Bred Young Lady" could possibly have been doing "In a Barber Shop at Midnight"—a shocking idea then!—and had had them all published in *The Black Cat,* a popular magazine of the day, in a number devoted exclusively to them.

Later, a different group, with a scattering of some of the original members, wrote *A Comedy of Circumstance,* an extremely light novel for which each member took a different character and wrote the part especially concerned with her own. It was a lot of fun, including having a composite photograph of those who took part made for the publisher's picture of "Emma Gavf" who was given as the author, a name made up of the first letters of the first names of those participating.

Though *A Comedy of Circumstance* was published in both New York and London and had its points, "considerin'," it was no raging success. Mrs. Rice, in her *Inky Way,* lists it as "A Tragedy of Circumstance"! But it wasn't really that bad! Like the photograph, it was a little of everybody and yet not anybody, an amusing stunt, not quite good enough to carry its determined anonymity which hampered publicity. The total proceeds—eighteen or nineteen dollars and some cents apiece, as this writer remembers—laid in dollar bills fanwise from the center of Mrs. Rice's luncheon table to each place, clothed that table for "Emma's" coming out—and going in—party. And so she became one with the ages.

The group shared all the richness of each other's lives—work, travel, triumph, disappointment, happiness, hardship, and sorrow—sure always of interest and understanding.

Much good work came to Mrs. Barnett's and other clinical tables in the years that followed. We ranged the whole field, both of matter and manner, in our analyses of our work and the work of other writers, and it not only gave us many points pro and con, but helped us realize what we ourselves were trying to do and fortified our courage for doing it—an important item. It gave us a creative audience.

In time we came to know so well what each of the others would say that there was less need of talking things over. The realization would flash out on us by wireless wherever we were working. But we never came not to value each other's judgment, or not to need the good old "Dog" to try out our efforts. We got so we could hear each other's voices when we ourselves read anything they did. I do so now. It has been one of the joys of this review.

Criticism in our club was free, frank, and honest; the only limitation, by common consent, being that it be CON-structive, and not just a matter of personal likes or dislikes.

But not all our getting together was for work.

Before the radio, TV, and the movies, reading was the great indoor sport. When no manuscript pressed, we read together: Shaw, Ibsen, Kipling, the Russians, The French, whoever.

The Rices were lavish buyers of books and generous lenders of them. And all the good reading of that day, or past ones, we read together or handed around to each other, much of it of Alice's providing.

I remember the winter that Ellen Semple came home after her years of study and research abroad. We used to get together in the afternoons at each other's houses—we were not always with Mrs. Barnett—and "Miss Ellen" read to us from her own copies of the German playwrights then much discussed—Sudermann, Hauptmann—reading with her eyes in German and to us with her lips in English—a preview of the U.N.

Ellen Semple never brought copy to the club. She came in the club when her subject, her style, and her standing were already established, and when the first spate of our mutual criticism had somewhat abated. With her, of course, the writing was secondary to its substance. Nevertheless, with what is commonly called "a man's mind" (in a very womanly woman), her style was simple, direct, lucid, so "heel and toe" as she herself complained, that she could hardly get another word in edgewise later even to insert a plug-in for a footnote. She "hated vague thinking." Before she slept at night, she laid her work for the next day on her deeper mind and left it there. And in the morning not mail nor telephone nor any other interruption was allowed to divert her till she had done her stint for that day. She got her training under a beloved teacher in Leipsic, Friederick Ratzel, to whom she dedicated her main work.

> "Hither as a fountain, other stars
> Repairing, in their golden urns draw light,"

she quoted Milton. And she was saturated with all that was best in the German mind and spirit before the First World War.

Her last years were shadowed by a heart condition brought on by too strenuous hiking in Japan and other Far Eastern countries; hiking twenty miles a day in sandals—because they dried quickly when wet—in pursuit of her favorite "relationship between man and his geographic environment"—a fascinating subject.

In more ways than there is space to go into here, she was one of the biggest persons I have ever known. "Plant a flower in your garden for me," were the last words of a "last message" of that time.

I remember one of the first manuscripts to come to our clinical table was that of Mrs. Rice's *Mr. Opp.*

Mr. Opp was more serious than anything she had done before, and

sometimes painful. And her publishers, while issuing it as a matter of course, begged her never to repeat it in kind. That, of course, was bound to influence her later output.

The day she read the first chapter of *Mr. Opp* to the club her audience was so quiet, with so little of the running laughter and response to which she was accustomed, that she was daunted. The silence was due to more than usually alert attention, and to the realization that now here was something else yet again. But she told us afterward that she felt the whole project must be a dud. For all we could say later, it was weeks before she could take it up again.

However, many people still think *Mr. Opp* the finest thing she ever did.

That mix-up about the manuscript of *Mr. Opp* was the only incident of its kind in my day.

Alice Rice was inherently a serious novelist. She has been called The American Dickens, and the two had much in common. She had the deep penetration and judgment of the observer of life and people, and like all true humorists she demonstrated Freud's contention that the purpose of humor was not merely to amuse. Her's could have a keen ironic edge.

But she had, too, the enormous compassion and tenderness, the tolerance, the understanding of the humanitarian, especially for those less fortunate. In real life she had them for everybody, but in her writing and social work her special ardor was for the under-dog. And it was those qualities, together with her ever-bubbling humor of the lighter sort, and the bright mood that she always maintained both in her writing and her living, that gave her her great popularity and characterized her work in the public mind.

In her *Inky Way,* Mrs. Rice laments the difficulty that a writer, with a reputation for doing one kind of work, has in doing anything different, especially of a more solid sort. Some people who cared most about her and her work felt that she never did anything quite as big as herself.

But, after all, she wrote *Calvary Alley* (and *Mr. Pete & Co.,* and others with the same qualities in them), showing the mature flowering of her deepest preoccupations, so that those impulses were never really inhibited. *Calvary Alley,* with its pictures of the housing conditions of the poor in the South, helped to get legislation to better such conditions. And it is in such books that her full stature, both as a woman and as a writer, stands clear.

The suggestions our group worked out together would not make a bad text-book for writers of any period.

Alice Rice would advise "Have your whole plot planned in advance." "I say every section of my work over and over to myself till it is ready to burst onto paper" (with a minimum of revision). "Work out your design." (Design was one of her strong points. She could have been a cartoonist as well as a fictionist.) "Then say everything in the fewest words. CUT, CUT." (Sometimes she overdid that.) "Let your characters speak and act for themselves. Don't just talk about them. And watch out for your mood and your point of view, and remember the importance of what is left out; that can be as great as what is put in."

She never stopped working over her own craftsmanship. Sometimes it was better than its substance. And she knew it. But she knew, too, that that was part of what carried her. She said so. She kept her hand in trim.

George Madden Martin's way of going at things was different. "This is where I would begin," she would say, jumping into the middle of your story and then going back to explain—the flash-back before the invention of that term. She had a circular approach. She would work round and round her subject, gathering up the threads and drawing them in to the center before pouncing on it and the denouement—a method not unlike that of Henry James, or that other Henry whose name was preceded by an O.

So—each according to himself.

Like Ellen Semple, but in a different and very interesting way, Mrs. Martin was an example of that mixture—and conflict—of both sexes that exists more or less in us all.

An intensely feminine woman, all the flash and go of esprit—("How can one photograph a temperament?" a photographer once despaired of her—while doing it.)—Mrs. Martin yet used "George" for her name instead of the baptismal "Georgia." There was a gentlemanly, a clerkly quality about both her personality and her handwriting; she almost always chose masculine roles for our play parties; and, in spite of an ardent interest in public affairs—inter-racial relations for instance—she was yet incurably reluctant not only about woman suffrage but the whole idea of expanded status for women.

Miss Ida Tarbell, who was so close a friend of both the Rices and the Martins that we all knew and loved her, though she was not of our group, showed in her own way that same contradiction. Ellen Semple had none of that form of contradiction. Her man's mind worked in a different way.

Apart from the *Emmy Lou* stories, Mrs. Martin's *Children in the Mist,* a strictly different collection of Negro stories, and some of her

short stories, "The Blue Handkerchief" for instance, are some of the gems of that period. A noted educator, speaking in Louisville in those days, said that wherever he went he found "Emmy Lou" reforming the schools ahead of him.

Mrs. Martin's occasional verses, even when they had only a personal connection, were always of the choicest, like herself and all her best work, distinguished, significant—a favorite word with her. She was a skilled workman.

But Annie Fellows Johnston's verses seemed perhaps the most graceful and charming. We all felt so. And Mary Leonard's, like all her work, had a genial aptness and humor that went right to the point.

Those three were our poets laureate, though all of us did more or less verse, sometime serious, even Alice. I have one of hers that I wish I could include—I feel sure it has never been published—but space presses.

I have spoken of the special charm that characterized the casual writing that Annie Fellows Johnston brought to the club. As the same shape and color run often through the stem, tendril, blossom, or fruit of a growing thing, so the same qualities characterized everything she was and did. After her husband's death she and her daughter Mary returned from Texas and made their home at "The Beeches" in Pewee Valley, which Mary Johnston still maintains as a shrine where hundreds of people come every year to pay tribute to a beloved memory.

There it was that I knew her best. Delicate, pretty, with pink cheeks and sweet merry eyes and a ready wit, and with a faint background austerity, Annie Fellows Johnston had a kind of spiritual aristocracy. She can never have been really strong for all her vitality and the load of love and work that she carried. In writing she stood at a lectern in the room she called her "Headquarters." Long sitting was too trying for her.

She always wanted to write a novel, but she complained that everything she knew had to go into the "sausage grinder" for the endless link of her book for girls, *The Little Colonel* series. So, she was one of the so-many people who, no matter how much they have done, feel that their biggest possibilities have never had a chance. Yet nothing she could ever have done could have exceeded in value the influence of what she did do.

Her deceptively simple stories of nice homes and nice people were yet done with a skill that those not trained so to observe might not realize, and they all had the same qualities that were in herself.

Thousands of women today, and no doubt their children and grandchildren, gratefully ascribe their own awakening to the real values of life to their influence.

More even than Louisa May Alcott, Annie Fellows Johnston reached her generation and established her permanent place in American letters.

The University of Kentucky lately completed a new housing group for married students and dedicated the units to Kentucky's ranking authors. Annie Fellows Johnston and Cale Young Rice and Alice were among those so honored.

If I have said more about some members of the club than others it is because those others were less with us or less active in our doings.

Before I joined the club Eva Madden had gone to Florence, Italy, to live, and when she came back to this country it was to New York. She was an honorary and honored but not a resident member.

And Margaret Vandercook had married and gone East. After her husband's death, she channeled her talents and her valour to the launching of her now well-known son, John W. Vandercook. We had her only for very occasional visits.

Venita Siebert White was introduced by Mrs. Rice and Mrs. Martin both to the club and to Mr. McClure who published her delicate and appealing stories. But she, too, shortly married and went West. She was not with us for long.

Mrs. Barnett wrote a novel, short stories, and book reviews. Her book reviews were quoted by many publishers.

Mary Leonard, who gave us our theme song, had her own audience.

Fannie Macauley did not take her writing very seriously. Alice Rice, her niece and not so very much younger, strung parts of Fan's letters from Japan on an imaginary love story and got the book published without Fan's knowing anything about it. Fan always said *The Lady of The Decoration* was more Alice than Fan Macauley. And the deft handling of the material *was* Alice, but the spunk and sparkle of those letters were Fan. They showed two chips off the same block. Fan never worked very hard at her later independent jobs. Impersonal professional writing came less easily to her.

There is one more member of whom a word must be said.

Of all that company Margaret Steel Anderson had the most of that quality that marks the difference between talent and genius—a difference, incidentally, that is more in quantity and degree than in kind. Her slender sheaf of verse had not the volume, perhaps, to carry it long or far, though it may be rediscovered and may become a collector's item on its own.

FLAME IN THE WIND

Dost thou burn low and tremble—all but die?
And dost thou fear in darkness to be whirled?
Nay, flame, thou art mine immortality.
And wind is but the passing of the world.

Never strong, gently bred, sensitive to all finer things, Margaret had the vision and ecstasy of the mystic, even in pain. She was so finely tuned that even happiness was suffering to her. She was herself a "flame in the wind," the title of her work. And with her own way to make and unequal to the practical requirements of this world, though her friends were always furthering and shepherding her, she was one of those figures only too common in the annals of all the arts. She had a hard life and a tragic death.

That "flame in the wind" may be a very penetrating symbol not only for the spirit that originated the phrase and for all this company so largely gone, but for all who have the spark, however faint, of divine fire in them—for all of us. It is a nice thought.

I wish I had the space to record all my recollections of the various occasions, such as our Alice in Wonderland Party, when each came in costume as one of the characters from the book; or more serious occasions, such as Mrs. Rice's housewarming in her just-finished home in St. James Court; and a birthday party for Annie Fellows Johnston, when we all went out to her home in Pewee Valley and "surprised" her.

In frivolous mood we went in rather heavily for limericks. This was Mrs. Martin:

There once was a lady named White
At figures exceedingly bright
She went out one day
In a relative way
And came back on the previous night.

And there is a batch of drawings, mostly by Alice—one of whose sidelines such touches were. Thumb-nail sketches, hardly bigger than a postage stamp, scattered through her letters; one topping a letter written under treatment for a troublesome spine—a drawing of a figure prone on a narrow bed, with, under it, in script—

As I lie flat upon my back
In quest of strength and healing
I ponder on immortal themes
And write limericks on the ceiling.

And this one which she quoted on a similar occasion—

I wish I was a moron,
He doesn't give a damn.
I wish I was a moron . . .
My God! perhaps I am.

However deep the waters in which she was swimming, like a silver fish she always flashed up shaking the sparkling drops along the trail.

Alice wrote by hand. Sometimes that hand cramped. Once she tried to condition herself to a typewriter. I have her one letter from that period, addressed to "My dearm," and giving me a little news, and then—

"This letter, I will have you know, is my first yypry lryyrt styyryrh . . .

"That is what I get for bragging! Anyway it is my first epistle written by the tough system which I have been teaching mysilf fir the past two weeks. . . . My little new typewriter insists on speaking with an Irish accent. . . . I am utterly exharsted with this effort."

She went back to her familiar method.

We went, in person or vicariously, on trips around the world, to historic dinners, met famous personages, were presented at courts, received honors, took part in authors' readings, all recorded in letters from all over the world from our travellers, which were handed around at home or read together at meetings called for that purpose by those left behind. We helped Alice and Cale (her husband) put on one of his plays. And when sorrow came amongst our group we were there to give not goods, nor chattels, nor food, nor money, as the primitive ancients did to service their own for the long journey before them, but the assurance of work well done and of the Somehow Rightness of Everything.

"Foregoing self, the universe grows I," Emerson tells us. Entering into the lives of others reaches the same conclusion. "Thou has set wide open a heart's gate where I come in and am at rest." Great fellowship, wonderful friendships! And all precious salvage in the storehouse of memory.

In the words of the foreword to *Calvary Alley*—

This Story
is affectionately dedicated
to
THE SMALL BAND
OF KENTUCKY WRITERS
with whom it has been my happy fortune
to make the literary pilgrimage.