

# MINNESOTA HISTORY

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## Early Literary Periodicals in Minnesota

*John T. Flanagan*

LITERARY ACTIVITY is obviously subsequent to the settlement of a new country. The explorers, soldiers, fur traders, woodsmen, and farmers who shouldered their way across the wilds of America had no great respect for book learning and all too seldom recorded their own impressions. But if it is true that the first wave of settlement paid little attention to human needs beyond those of food, clothing, and shelter, it is equally true that the printing press was always closely behind the van of exploration. Human society eventually demands codes of laws, gazetteers, sermons, newspapers, all of which the adventurous printer hastened to supply.<sup>1</sup> On the Middle Western frontier a need for periodicals was soon felt and ambitious or rash editors strove to satisfy that need. Even literary periodicals appeared at a time when much of the surrounding territory was unsettled and even unmapped. In Illinois, James Hall issued the first number of his *Western Monthly Magazine* in 1830, when Indians and horse thieves still were important elements in the state's population; and in Minnesota a literary monthly appeared less than a year after the state became the thirty-second member of the Federal Union.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For a survey of the westward march of the printing press with special reference to Minnesota, see Douglas C. McMurtrie, "The Printing Press Moves Westward," *ante*, 15:1-25. Files of most of the periodicals described in the present article are in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society. Among the early Minnesota magazines that the society's library lacks is volume 1 of the *Literary Northwest*. The writer, however, examined a partial file in the library of the University of Minnesota.

<sup>2</sup>Another proof of early interest in literature was the appearance in 1864 of *The Poets and Poetry of Minnesota*, edited by Mrs. W. J. Arnold, published in Chicago, and

*The Frontier Monthly*, the first of several literary periodicals launched in Minnesota after it attained statehood, typified the faults and merits of its successors. Published by J. R. Mars and J. F. Mead at Hastings, it lasted for only three issues, April, May, and June, 1859. Its editors were both ambitious and prudent in their initial editorial. They promised their readers original as well as selected, that is, reprinted, stories, verse, historical sketches, and humor. "We wish to make our Monthly an enlivening and entertaining guest in the parlors of the wealthy—a friend and truthful adviser among the home group in the cabin of the pioneer, and a counsellor and guide to the friendless and forsaken. We shall endeavor at all times, to assist the young ladies and gentlemen on the road to prosperity, and shall always advise a moral and respectful course for them to pursue."<sup>8</sup> Prospective readers were also assured contributions by well-known authors and miscellaneous material of consistent interest.

Despite these optimistic promises, however, and despite the low subscription cost of a dollar a year, payable in advance, the *Frontier Monthly* did not prosper. And today a curious reader of Minnesota's first literary periodical finds little to compel his attention. A temperance story by C. P. Adams with the lurid title of "Rum's Victim" ran through the first two issues. Fictional sketches by a contributor who signed himself Phil Banter appeared twice, one dealing with an old Tory incident, the other with the Mexican War. Each issue contained installments of Captain Sam Whiting's "Leaves from a Log," an account of a tedious trip around Cape Horn to the California gold fields. Various writers, among them Mrs. R. H. E. Kenerson, L. Mel Hyde, Edwin Darling, and Emily Hewitt Bugbee, contributed verse. Such a table of contents does not suggest a high level of available material, and one is not surprised to learn from the May, 1859, issue that the first editor, E. W. Northup, soon resigned in favor of one of the publishers, Mead. But the periodical

containing the verse of twenty-four poets. Few of the names would be recognized today, but Ignatius Donnelly, Hanford L. Gordon, Mrs. H. E. B. McConkey, and Stephen Miller, Minnesota's fourth governor, were contributors.

<sup>8</sup> *Frontier Monthly*, 1:31 (April, 1859).

did have one singular feature: it listed rejected contributions with reasons for the editorial verdict.

Obviously Minnesota was not ready to support a literary periodical in 1859. Furthermore, the *Frontier Monthly* was conventional, heavy, dull—adjectives which could well be applied to many later magazines. Its importance is not aesthetic but historical. Yet it appeared in a town whose first settler had arrived less than thirty years before and in a state less than a year old. The *Frontier Monthly* was at least a respectable beginning for Minnesota literature.

In the following decade the Civil War undoubtedly put a stop to any further literary developments within the state, and the Sioux Outbreak of 1862 turned the interests of Minnesota citizens far from books. But the period of the 1870's brought renewed activity and produced several literary periodicals. Just before the decade began, *The Minnesota Monthly*, *A North-Western Magazine* made its appearance.

The *Minnesota Monthly* was published in St. Paul from January, 1869, to January, 1870. According to Daniel A. Robertson, editor and publisher, the magazine was devoted to agriculture, horticulture, domestic economy, social improvement, and general information. Obviously a general utilitarianism rather than any pronounced service to literature was the purpose of the periodical—a purpose clarified in April, 1869, when it became the official organ and advocate of the Patrons of Husbandry and took on a distinctly agricultural character. But even though most of its miscellaneous contents were practical, the *Minnesota Monthly* occasionally expressed its concern with cultural and literary matters.

Sandwiched between articles on beekeeping, dandruff removers, hygiene, and preventions of snow blindness, for example, were moralistic fiction, short poems, correspondence on a wide range of themes, and editorials distinguished for their shrewdness and vision. In February, 1869, the editor declared: "In no other part of the Western country are there so many persons, in proportion to population, who have cultivated tastes for the pursuit of Literature, Science and Art, as are to be found among the thirty thousand

# THE BUSY WEST.



DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS, INSTRUCTION AND AMUSEMENT OF THE WESTERN PEOPLE.

VOLUME I.

ST. PAUL, MINN. JUNE, 1872.

NUMBER III.

## The Falls of Saint Anthony.

BY J. F. W.

The Falls of Saint Anthony is one of the few places in Minnesota, around which cling historic associations and the romance with which the lapse of time invests all spots known to preceding generations. A few historical notes, concerning the same, hastily compiled from the writings of early explorers, may prove of interest to the more romantic of our readers.



THE FALLS OF SAINT ANTHONY, 1835.

### DISCOVERY OF THE FALLS.

Father Louis Hennepin, a Franciscan priest, was undoubtedly the first European who saw the Falls. In the spring of 1680, he had been sent by La Salle, from Fort Crevecoeur in Illinois, to explore the upper Mississippi. He and his two servants were taken prisoners by the Sioux and accompanied them to their village on Mille Lacs. In the fall they were allowed to return, and with one companion named Du Gay, Hennepin set off down the Mississippi in a canoe. It was now that he first saw the Falls. His mention of them is very brief, and in one

or two of his earlier editions, omitted altogether. In the last edition of his travels, the adventurous Father simply says: "The navigation is interrupted by a fall which I called St. Anthony of Padua's, in gratitude for the favors done me by the Almighty through the intercession of that great saint, whom we had chosen patron and protector of our enterprise. This Fall is forty or fifty feet high, divided in the middle by a rocky island of pyramidal form." As Hennepin was passing the Falls, in company with a party of Dakota buffalo hunters, he perceived

killed our kindred, grant that we may avenge them."

As they were carrying their canoe by the cataract, their attention was arrested by a huge snake, six feet long, he says, writhing up the bluff to devour the swallows in their nests made in holes in the sand-rock. They killed him with stones, he adds. In a later edition, this snake has grown to eight feet in length and the Falls themselves have become ten feet higher.

Hennepin was a sad liar, and the untruths he told threw much discredit on the rest of his work, and tarnished his own good name. He died in obscurity, at last.

Another of the earlier notices of the Falls, is found in a curious, old French volume called "The History of Louisiana, or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina," published at Paris in 1762, by Mons Le Page Du Pratz. He says:

"M de Charleville, a Canadian, and a relative of the Commandant General of the Colony, told me that, at the time of the settlement of the French, curiosity led him to go up this river to its source: that for this end he fitted out a canoe made of the bark of the birch tree, in order to be portable. \* \* \* He went up the river three hundred leagues to the North. That there he found the Fall, called St. Anthony's. This Fall is a flat rock which traverses the river, and gives it only between eight or ten feet fall. He caused his canoe and effects to be carried over that place."

Thus, little by little, this spot was becoming known to Europeans.

### CARVER'S ACCOUNT.

The first American who saw the Falls, was Capt. Jonathan Carver, a native of Stillwater, N. Y. Carver's history is so well known that it need not be repeated here. He reached the Falls of Saint Anthony on his exploration, on November 17th, 1766, and in his account says:

"Before I left my canoe, (at the mouth of the St. Peters) I overtook a young prince of the Winnebagoes, who was going on an embassy to some of the lands of the Naudowessies. He agreed to accompany me. We proceeded by land, at-

a Dakota up in an oak opposite the great Fall, weeping bitterly. "He had a well dressed beaver robe, whitened inside and trimmed with porcupine quills, which he was offering as a sacrifice to the Falls, which is in itself admirable and frightful. I heard him, while shedding copious tears, say, as he spoke to the cataract: 'Thou who art a spirit, grant that our nation may pass her quietly without accident, may kill buffalo in abundance, conquer our enemies and bring in slaves, some of whom we will put to death before thee; the Messencocq (to this day the Dakotas call the Fox Indians by this name) have

people resident within a circle of twelve miles diameter, containing the triune cities of Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Saint Anthony, which are destined to become contiguous parts of the greatest theatre of commercial, industrial, and intellectual development in the Upper Mississippi Valley. This grand achievement . . . is already apparent to every intelligent observer."<sup>4</sup> He then remarked that within the bounds of these "triune cities" was already laid the basis "of eminence in literature, art and science, which," he predicted, "will grow and expand into commanding excellence, and by example fashion not only the intellectual character of our State, but exert a beneficial influence upon the whole country." The libraries, newspapers, and printing firms of St. Paul and Minneapolis, the editor observed, provided an excellent beginning. The climate was especially advantageous. All in all, he felt that the metropolitan center of the new Northwest might well rival the great city of Edinburgh.<sup>5</sup>

Robertson's faith in the future of the region was shared by Bella French, the editor of another short-lived but interesting periodical, *The Busy West*, which was published in St. Paul from April, 1872, to April, 1873. It had literary aspirations and a feminine tone. In the first issue the editor praised her largely female staff and boasted about a magazine which appealed chiefly to women. "We are proud to place before the public a truly Western Magazine—the first publication of the kind ever issued in our great Northwest." The *Busy West*, she added, would not be a party organ but would support the cause of education for women with a circumspect glance at the ballot. It would also campaign for temperance rather than for prohibition. And in its inclusion of stories, verse, articles, recipes, and household hints, it would deliberately cater to women.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Busy West* exemplified its editor's strong interest in regional history. Miss French, the first woman editor of a periodical in Minnesota, was a versatile and talented person, a poet,

<sup>4</sup> *Minnesota Monthly*, 1:42 (February, 1869).

<sup>5</sup> *Minnesota Monthly*, 1:43 (February, 1869). Contributors to the periodical included such well-known pioneer figures as Dr. Brewer Mattocks, C. C. Andrews, and Oliver H. Kelley.

<sup>6</sup> *Busy West*, 1:30 (April, 1872).

musician, and storyteller as well as an editor, and her interest in the Northwest led her to publish articles and tales with a regional background. In October, 1872, she wrote: "We solicit articles from our western people on the various subjects which go to fill up the departments of this magazine. Art, Science, Agriculture, History, Romance, Poetry, &c., will all be represented, but we would like each article to be complete in itself."<sup>7</sup> Such catholicity of taste induced a commendable variety. Biographical studies of Minnesota notables like Horace Austin, Joseph R. Brown, and Captain Martin Scott appeared. Articles dealt with the Red Wing Seminary, the Winona and Rochester Normal schools,—the latter recently completed at a cost of a hundred thousand dollars,—the Falls of St. Anthony, western railroads. Much attention was paid to music, and J. H. Hanson wrote frequently on musical activities, especially in St. Paul. Sketches of European travel were provided by J. S. Bliss. Other articles concerned horticultural, botanical, and medical subjects. Every issue contained some fiction, often by Bella French herself, and a considerable amount of short verse was contributed by such poets as Ella Wheeler (better known later as Ella Wheeler Wilcox), Eben E. Rexford, Mrs. M. M. Elliot, Hanford L. Gordon, George Godfrey, Ninette M. Lowater, Helen A. Manville, Alice Hedge, and Marietta Holley. There were occasional editorials and miscellaneous notices.

The *Busy West* survived for more than a year, but unmistakable signs indicated that its prosperity was not unlimited. The issue of June, 1872, announced that agents for the periodical were badly needed and offered various premiums for subscriptions—premiums obviously intended for feminine readers: dress patterns, wax dolls, chinaware, jewelry, albums. Like many another editor of early Middle Western magazines, Miss French took on herself more and more of the burden of filling the monthly pages, until the early issues of 1873 were composed largely of her own verse and prose. The quality of contributions likewise fell off, despite the brave array of journalists and educators who had been listed in December, 1872,

<sup>7</sup> *Busy West*, 1:192 (October, 1872).

as dependable contributors. By the spring of 1873 the *Busy West* was moribund.

In many ways, however, it showed improvement over earlier periodicals. The material was more lively and more varied. Writers of greater competency contributed their work, and the articles especially revealed substance and merit. The fiction naturally reflected the prevalent sentimentalism of the day and the verse was stereotyped and anemic. But Bella French's own vigor and determination shaped the magazine. As an early feminist periodical in a young state, the *Busy West* had interest and value.

In 1878 another periodical was launched in St. Paul by an editor fully as ambitious and optimistic as his predecessors. The prospectus of H. H. Young's *Northwestern Monthly Magazine* grandly indicated an "eighty page medium octavo, set in clear plain type and well printed." The magazine was designed to appeal to the agricultural, commercial, and industrial interests of the region, and its editor took pride in eschewing party patronage. Honest and impartial analysis of current problems, he claimed, would be his byword. He expressed his faith in the project in his opening editorial: "The Northwest is an extensive and productive region, with a variety of especial interests which necessarily array it in competitive antagonism with other sections of our common country, and the chief object had in view in starting this magazine is to afford a medium for the thorough discussion of topics particularly important to the citizens of this locality." These topics ranged from apple culture and farm machinery to loan associations and Mississippi navigation. But Young's *Northwestern Magazine* lasted for only one issue. One can merely infer that it found no audience sufficiently appreciative of its impartiality and eclecticism.

The period of the 1880's was a fallow one for literary journalism in Minnesota, but the last decade of the century again saw the establishment of various periodicals, including *The Literary Northwest*, which, despite its short existence, was undeniably the most successful of the early magazines. Published in St. Paul from March, 1892, to July, 1893, after which date it was consolidated with *The Mid-*

*land Monthly* of Des Moines, this magazine was attractively printed and amply illustrated; moreover, with its melange of articles, sketches, reviews, and short fiction, it was the most obviously literary of the early Minnesota periodicals.

The editorial introduction to the first issue of the *Literary Northwest* is worth quoting at some length because of its vigor and tone. "The Literary Northwest owes no apology for its birth," it reads, "and its editors mean to make none for it. It is their purpose to present to the readers of this magazine, the best brain-work to be had. They will not disgrace literature by publishing the products of people who merely sign their names to articles written by others, nor is it a part of their program to advertise TLN by means of individuals who have no message for the world, and whose chief claim is that of notoriety. The editors recognize no aristocracy, save that of letters. Into this charmed circle will be admitted all who have anything worth saying, provided they will say it in approved literary fashion." The editor goes on to explain that "Every one who has light to give, whether in Science, Literature, Art, History, Theology, Philosophy, Philanthropy, or any other subject of human interest, has but to express it in good style, and he is welcome to these pages. Those whose souls are full of song, need not die with all their music in them. There need be no mute Miltons in the Northwest. Masters of recognized ability have kindly promised their aid; writers whose ability is not yet known will receive the fullest consideration. The editors will not encroach upon the domain of the newspapers by publishing mere news; nor do they intend to enter the precincts sacred to books." The introduction asserted, moreover, that the reviews of new books would be forthright and honest; mere puffs and literary log-rolling would find no place in the *Literary Northwest*.

The first issue contained an article on "Our Literary Possibilities" by Cyrus Northrop, then president of the University of Minnesota, verse by Franklyn W. Lee and Mrs. W. J. Freaney, a sketch of Henry Ward Beecher, an article on the church and the stage, music notes, and a discussion of the new books. In all it included sixteen

pages quarto size, but this size was to be doubled and even quadrupled in subsequent issues.

Throughout the year and a half that the *Literary Northwest* was published in St. Paul it maintained its miscellaneous nature, but its quality improved as the monthly numbers appeared. Its conspicuously literary tone was apparent in the carefully proportioned contents: fiction, verse, reviews, sketches, articles, comment. Among the poets who were represented in the early issues were Katherine Lee Bates, Clifford Trembly, John Talman, Ninette Lowater, St. George Best, Ida Sexton Searls, M. E. Torrence, and Kristofer Janson, the Minneapolis clergyman who befriended Knut Hamsun. Samuel McChord Crothers, who then occupied a Unitarian pulpit in St. Paul, contributed articles on Whittier and Whitman. Alice Freeman Palmer discussed reasons for girls to go to college, Maurice Francis Egan wrote on literary dinners, and Ignatius Donnelly described London buildings. A novel by Janson ran serially, and there were shorter fictional sketches and accounts of travel. Among the new books noticed in substantial reviews were Emile Zola's *The Downfall* and Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads*.

The issue of December, 1892, announced a change of publishers from Hall's Library Company to the D. D. Merrill Company, and named as editors Mrs. Mary Harriman Severance and the Reverend John Joseph Conway, with Horace Thompson Carpenter as manager. Subsequently Mrs. Severance became sole editor, although Mary J. Reid contributed frequently and probably helped with the editorial burdens. The editors apparently felt satisfied with their achievement, for in the issue of March, 1893, they allowed themselves an expression of self-congratulation. They reaffirmed their belief that "in the midst of our vast material growth there ought to be found room enough for a literary and intellectual product worthy of an enlightened Northwest." In this anniversary issue they declared: "There has been no lowering of the standard of excellence first established. There has been no resort to expedients which the necessities of expensive publication too often dictate. The appeal has been, and must continue to be, to the friends of true literary art.

. . . With the approach of another year the hope may be safely indulged that these pages will rival in general interest and literary merit the most favored publications in periodical literature."<sup>8</sup>

In many ways these claims were justified. No Minnesota periodical before the *Literary Northwest* could boast as many competent local contributors. In addition to the poets who were represented in the earliest issues were found the names of Kenyon Bruce, H. L. Gordon, Dr. Brewer Mattocks, and Ralph Nisbet. Articles by Elaine Goodale Eastman on Indian medicine and superstition, Alice Ames Winter on foreign travel, Edward C. Gale on a trip up Rainy Lake River,<sup>9</sup> the Reverend John Gmeiner on Minnesota aborigines, the Reverend Marion D. Shutter on religion, and Marion Jean Craig on art (with particular reference to the galleries of James J. Hill and Thomas B. Walker) suggest the diversity of the audience catered to. A segment of Garland's novel *Jason Edwards* appeared in the last number published before the magazine was moved to Des Moines, and earlier issues contained discussions of such topics as cholera, autographs, the military rifle, Minnesota charities and institutions of correction, and economic problems. Miss Reid not only wrote most of the book reviews, and did them creditably, but also contributed longer analyses of such authors as Tennyson, T. W. Higginson, and E. C. Stedman. Miss Reid, in fact, recommended the establishment in St. Paul and Minneapolis of western magazines and good publishing houses; she predicted that the Twin Cities would become literary centers of importance in the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the maintenance of high literary standards and despite competent editing, the *Literary Northwest* had no greater longevity than most of the journals which preceded it. The hindsight afforded by time can sometimes explain the demise of a magazine on the basis of a low subscription list, editorial vacillation, and undependable financial backing. But the *Literary Northwest* also had a rival in Johnson Brigham's *Midland Monthly*, a periodical which flour-

<sup>8</sup> *Literary Northwest*, 2:348 (March, 1893).

<sup>9</sup> Reprinted under the title "From Kenora to Fort Frances with Edward C. Gale," *ante*, 24:275-286.

<sup>10</sup> *Literary Northwest*, 3:267 (June, 1893).

ished for five years at Des Moines and through intelligent editing appealed to a wide audience. When the Minnesota magazine was discontinued it was only natural that its assets and circulation list should be transferred to Iowa, and with them went Miss Reid as a contributing editor of the *Midland Monthly*.

The *Literary Northwest* was easily the best Minnesota literary periodical published before 1900, but it was not good enough to survive. Its verse was brief and trite and its fiction flabbily sentimental, but its articles were usually clear and vigorous discussions of fresh subjects, and both its literary criticism and its reviews were commendable. Probably its most fitting epitaph is the statement that it was a worthy forerunner of the best literary periodical which Minnesota has so far produced, William C. Edgar's *Bellman*, founded in 1906.

But before the advent of the twentieth century inaugurated this well-known weekly, two other magazines with some literary pretensions appeared, one published in St. Paul, the other in Minneapolis. For four years, from 1897 to 1901, Edmond L. De Lestry edited in St. Paul his monthly, *De Lestry's Western Magazine*, a journal with a particular interest in the preservation of historical data. Almost every issue contained an account of some early Minnesota celebrity or a narrative of some historical event. Thus figures like Willis A. Gorman, Henry H. Sibley, Bishop Jacobus Trobec, Monsignor Louis Caillet became the subjects of biographical articles, frequently written by the editor, while events such as the battles of Wounded Knee and of Sugar Point on Leech Lake, and the exploration of the Missouri were carefully chronicled. Contributors were generally local figures, such as the scientist Jacob V. Brower, the clergyman Humphrey Moynihan, the journalist Olin D. Wheeler, all of whom wrote on their special fields. De Lestry occasionally published articles on such subjects as transportation, architecture, osteopathy, and river navigation, but his interest was obviously more in the past than in the present, and he made no attempt to keep his magazine *au courant* with contemporary life. Thus *De Lestry's Western Magazine* had a limited field and a limited value.

Circumscribed in another way was *Kennedy's Own*, "a monthly magazine of Education, Literature and Civics," published in Minneapolis by William Kennedy. The editor declared in his first issue, September, 1896, that his purpose was "to furnish a medium through which the best literary and educational thought of the land may be freely and fearlessly expressed."<sup>11</sup> This and subsequent numbers quickly revealed the editor's bias toward education and Catholicism. The technique of classroom instruction, education for the impoverished and for Negroes, the relation of the Catholic church to public schools became familiar topics to readers of *Kennedy's Own*. Catholic bishops prominent in the educational world were given special attention. Among the contributors were Booker T. Washington, John W. Willis, the Reverend J. M. Cleary, and the Reverend Marion D. Shutter, and the monthly contained in addition to a plenitude of educational articles a small amount of verse, a woman's department, and later a children's department. Kennedy, a Minneapolis lawyer, also ran a lecture bureau and advertised in his own magazine the services of such celebrated local figures as Ignatius Donnelly, Archbishop John Ireland, Father Cleary, John W. Willis, and Frank Nye, brother of the western humorist, Bill Nye. *Kennedy's Own* made no pretense of being a general literary magazine, but its articles were competently written and its interest in education was serious and intelligent.

None of these periodicals, however, had the quality, the liveliness, the miscellaneous appeal, or even the physical stamina of the weekly which William C. Edgar started in Minneapolis in 1906 and which he christened *The Bellman*. And the *Bellman* was unique among Minnesota literary journals in being both local and national—even international—in its focus; in attracting to its pages the work of widely known contributors; in succeeding at once as a journal of political comment, literary and musical and dramatic intelligence, gossip, and fashion; and in lasting thirteen years—dying not because of inanition but solely because the editor grew tired of his responsibilities and was reluctant to see his sturdy journalistic child wither away in other hands.

<sup>11</sup> *Kennedy's Own*, 1:12 (September, 1896).

In his initial editorial Edgar clarified his purpose and outlined his expectations in inaugurating a new magazine. The *Bellman*, he asserted, would strive to gain a hearing and acquire lasting friends despite the multitude of printed matter already clamoring for attention. He vouched for his journal's honesty and fairness and hoped that "by the grace of doing things differently, not to say better, than others, this attempt may not fail to receive the recognition it seeks." Quite frankly, he added, "The Bellman has little else to offer its readers. It holds no ticket to the seats of the mighty; it can not promise to be wittily wicked, or cleverly caustic. It is not endowed. It represents no special social, religious, commercial, municipal or political interest in the community." Edgar then pointed out that the new periodical's "owners have absolutely no object, direct or devious, to attain by its publication except to print a decent, acceptable and successful paper. If ever a publication were in a position to be independent, The Bellman, so far as its modest limits extend, is thus happily situated. It may tell the truth without let or hindrance and it is full of good intentions in this direction."<sup>12</sup>

The curious reader who turns the pages of a file of the *Bellman* twenty-five years after it ceased publication will not be disposed to quarrel with its editor. Even today the magazine is readable, and many of its contributions retain the lightness and verve which once won for it a fairly wide audience. From its inception the *Bellman* adhered to certain editorial policies. As Edgar himself itemized them in the tenth anniversary issue, they included careful editorial scrutiny of all contributions submitted, prompt payment on acceptance of manuscripts, and rejection of all material of a suggestive or doubtful character. The *Bellman*, declared the editor, "has avoided the abnormal, sensational and decadent in its choice of literature to place before its readers, although in so doing, it has been necessary frequently to reject contributions brilliantly written." The editor also prided himself on the *Bellman's* fairness and took pleasure in its breadth of interest.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Bellman*, 1:5 (July 21, 1906).

<sup>13</sup> *Bellman*, 21:91 (July 1, 1916). In the issue of August 18, 1906, Edgar editorialized: "Knowingly and wilfully, The Bellman will never misrepresent or misstate facts.



THE BELLMAN

[From the first issue,  
July 21, 1906.]

The *Bellman* began as a rigidly departmentalized magazine so that consistent readers could turn at once to their favorite section. Editorial discussion of public policy and of matters literary, religious, or cultural usually filled the opening pages. Shorter discussions or paragraphs of editorial comment were often printed under the label "The Town Crier." The regular features included a column on New York events by Helen C. Mansfield and a similar column dealing with London by Perry Robinson. Subsequently Nathan Haskell Dole contributed a weekly discussion of events in Boston and Warwick James Price performed the same service for Philadelphia. In the anniversary issue, however, the editor commented that these departments were eventually dropped to provide greater elasticity and to permit the occasional appearance of longer articles.<sup>14</sup>

Many numbers of the *Bellman* included a short piece of fiction entitled "The Bellman's Tale." Milton O. Nelson frequently discussed morals or theology under the heading "The Bellman's Sermon," and "The Bellman's Notebook" was given over to familiar essays, contributed largely by Charles Macomb Flandrau and Richard Burton. Throughout its thirteen years of prosperity the *Bellman* published book reviews, a good majority of which were Burton's work; in later years he was assisted and occasionally supplanted by Henry A. Bellows, Carl Becker, Hardin Craig, and others. Burton also supplied occasional theatrical criticism, while reviews of concerts and musical events were contributed by Robert Griggs Gale and later by Bellows. The final volumes included also "The Bellman on the Bourse," a column of news about stocks and investments by William J. Boies. Augmenting even further the heterogeneity of the magazine were departments entitled "Familiar Chimes," given over to reprinted poetry; "Pillory and Stocks,"

. . . It will not distort the truth for purposes of its own. No honest man, no good and sincere cause has anything to fear from this journal."

<sup>14</sup> *Bellman*, 21:17 (July 1, 1916).

quoted jokes and aphorisms from the newspaper press; "Over Pipes and Ale," anecdotes about celebrities; and "The Village Gossip," social news not only of Minneapolis and St. Paul, but also of such neighboring communities as Stillwater, Red Wing, Winona, La Crosse, Fargo, and even Winnipeg. Obviously an editor burdened with so many departments could devote little space to special subjects and enjoyed small flexibility. That Edgar realized his difficulty is apparent in his decision to terminate such departments as "The Village Gossip," "the Bellman having outgrown his original office as a purveyor of social news."<sup>15</sup>

In the beginning the *Bellman* was sustained largely by local talent and was fortunate in being able to command so many able pens. The first manuscripts purchased by Edgar were several poems by Arthur Upson, who remained a contributor until his untimely death in 1908.<sup>16</sup> Flandrau, signally praised in after years by the late Alexander Woollcott, contributed tales and essays as well as a good many sketches of Mexican life. Lily A. Long wrote various brief stories, Frances Densmore discussed Indian legends and culture, William P. Kirkwood reported on lumbering and mining activities in northern Minnesota, Estelline Bennett surveyed the western art of the Montana painter Charles M. Russell. At least one speech of James J. Hill, a discussion of national wealth, was reprinted in full.<sup>17</sup> Burton's book criticisms were urbane and appreciative, usually laudatory, but at times penetrating and shrewd.<sup>18</sup> And in the closing volumes of the *Bellman* his reviews were supplemented by those of his colleagues at the University of Minnesota, notably Becker, Wallace Notestein, Craig, and Guy Stanton Ford. Among the local poets who contributed frequently were Upson, Lewis Worthington Smith, Joseph Warren



THE BELLMAN  
[Another pose from  
the first issue.]

<sup>15</sup> *Bellman*, 21:17 (July 1, 1916).

<sup>16</sup> *Bellman*, 21:16 (July 1, 1916).

<sup>17</sup> *Bellman*, 4:654-659 (June 13, 1908).

<sup>18</sup> For representative reviews, see Burton's articles on George Woodberry's life of Emerson (2:195), Edith Wharton's *Madame De Treymes* (2:319), R. W. Gilder's *Book of Music* (2:287), and Robert Herrick's *Together* (5:991).

Beach, A. J. Russell, and Herbert J. Hall, but the verse was usually lyric and descriptive and rarely excelled the quality of the ordinary magazine "filler."

As the *Bellman* grew in prestige and stature, however, it elicited contributions from writers whose reputation was not limited to the Northwest, and even such names as H. G. Wells, Hilaire Belloc, and Arthur Quiller-Couch were not unknown to its pages. The better-known poets who contributed to the magazine numbered George Sterling, Louis Untermeyer, Alfred Noyes, Joyce Kilmer, Sara Teasdale, Madison Cawein, Stephen Phillips, William A. Percy, and Christopher Morley. Montrose J. Moses wrote frequently about various dramatists and the theater. The contributors of short fiction included Homer Croy, Booth Tarkington, Joseph Husband, Carl Van Vechten, and Elsie Singmaster. Quiller-Couch's long tale "Aunt Trinidad" ran serially through six numbers of the 1916 *Bellman*. R. A. Scott-James, O. W. Firkins, and Henry J. Forman supplied critical prose.

Probably the miscellaneous interests of the *Bellman* are visible chiefly in the editorials, largely the work of the editor William C. Edgar, but occasionally written by Bellows, Randolph Edgar, Stanley Went, Addison Lewis, and Carroll K. Michener. The range of these editorials was wide, and their writers commented lucidly and intelligently on politics, literature, economics, the theater, religion, and finance. For example, volume 13 of the *Bellman*, published from July to December, 1912, contained ninety-seven editorials, on such subjects as Pope and Byron, Wilson's election to the presidency, subsidized theaters, the Southern demagogue Cole Blease, slang, the educated man, public libraries, Canadian reciprocity, political conditions in Austria and India and the Balkans, felicitations to the contemporary periodical *Svenska amerikanska posten*, and finally—and this was thirty-three years ago—"Understanding Japan"! In cultural matters the editorial tone was conservative and judicial. High standards were maintained, and qualities such as sobriety, sanity, and order were deemed more important than originality and innovation. Politically the *Bellman* stood perhaps a little left of cen-

ter, although it grew increasingly conservative toward the end. In many of the early issues the editor carried on a private war with the *Minneapolis Tribune*, badgering that "organ of the Worst People" (as he baptized it) for its stand on municipal taxation and its general obstructionism. Subsequently Edgar focused less on local than on national politics, and in 1907 it is pleasantly familiar to find the *Bellman* campaigning for a third term for President Roosevelt—T.R., not F.D.R.

For thirteen years the *Bellman* proved that it was possible to edit profitably in an inland city an intelligent journal of comment and discussion. But by 1919 Edgar found that the struggle to perpetuate the magazine was personally too costly and that he had acquired other responsibilities which demanded his time and energy. Consequently, he determined to stop publication. In his valedictory editorial he spoke proudly of his periodical's thirteen-year existence during which there had been "no compromise with principle for the sake of profit or expediency." The *Bellman*, he averred, had reflected his personal views on many subjects and had become an intimate part of his life. He had considered selling it, but decided negatively. "Rather than permit The *Bellman* to pass into other hands and possibly, in course of time, suffer deterioration, my associates and I prefer that the publication be discontinued," Edgar wrote. "It has no liabilities and its assets are ample to reimburse its stockholders for their investment."<sup>19</sup>

In an article in the same issue Edgar gave some interesting comments about the magazine's economy. During its life, he claimed, some forty-three thousand unsolicited manuscripts were considered, seven thousand of which arrived during the preparation of the final volume. Of an average of sixty-five such manuscripts submitted weekly, two were used and sixty-three were rejected. During its thirteen years of life the *Bellman* earned \$457,000 from advertising and subscriptions, and its total expenses reached \$427,000, of which \$95,000 went to contributors on the regular staff. The editor declared that the original capital stock had been set at \$25,000, a figure

<sup>19</sup> *Bellman*, 26:706 (June 28, 1919).

later raised to \$50,000, this amount proving ample. From these figures Edgar concluded that by hard work, business intelligence, and patience, it was possible to publish at a profit a weekly illustrated periodical of good quality.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the best epitaph for the *Bellman* is not the editor's farewell but the final contribution of Richard Burton. In a familiar essay dealing with the demise of the periodical to which he had given so much, Burton pointed out its consistent advocacy of truth (*veritas nos liberavit*), idealism, righteousness, high standards. "This has no doubt made him [*The Bellman himself*] seem old-fashioned to some, for another reason than his quaint eighteenth century garb. But those standards have been such as to give him a welcome place on countless reading tables of men and women who still cherish the notion that law and order and decency, reserve in art and the inherited traditions which make for a belief in the higher things of our national living, are still vital and to be cherished."<sup>21</sup>

As one glances back over the handful of literary magazines which flourished briefly in Minnesota before the First World War, one notices of course their limitations and their dullness but also the definite progress they collectively showed. Excluding certain editorial biases which dedicated, for example, the *Busy West* to feminism and domesticity, the *Minnesota Monthly* to the collecting and recording of historical data, and *Kennedy's Own* to education, the reader can observe an improvement in the selection and variety of material, in the clearness of presentation, and in the tone and quality of the writing. Gradually the pompous dignity of the early journals disappeared, to be replaced by the ease and grace and lucidity which always characterize good writing. Tribute should also be paid to the format of at least two of the magazines. The *Literary Northwest* and the *Bellman* were both well printed and handsomely illustrated; their typography and their illustrations would do credit to any modern periodical; and their paper was certainly better than that to which we are currently accustomed.

Since the *Bellman* became defunct, Minnesota has had neither a

<sup>20</sup> *Bellman*, 26:706 (June 28, 1919).

<sup>21</sup> *Bellman*, 26:709 (June 28, 1919).

literary magazine nor a journal of comment on cultural matters peculiarly its own. The usual "little" magazines have arisen and have succumbed in monotonous succession, but no editor as shrewd and as competent as William C. Edgar has come to guarantee prosperity. Such journals as have proved vigorous and long-lived, like the *Commercial West*, *The Northwestern Miller*, and *Northwest Life*, have subordinated literature to other interests. Modern publishing conditions increasingly demand an enormous capital investment and usually the establishment of a magazine in a large city; thus today there seems small chance of founding a literary periodical which will not only serve Minnesota and the Northwest but will appeal widely as well. Yet the conspicuous success of *The Virginia Quarterly Review* and *The Southwest Review* suggests that the establishment of a Northwestern regional magazine of high literary quality is not vaguely utopian. Many an older citizen of Minnesota would like to have a new Bellman ring his bell once more.



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