

CHARLES WILBERFORCE AMES

St. Paul lost one of its foremost citizens in the death of Charles W. Ames, who passed away at his home on April 3, 1921. He was a man of rare qualities, combining idealism with practical judgment in a degree possessed by few. He was of large vision, seeing the need of improvement in social and political conditions and striving with unsurpassed energy to bring about beneficial changes. In his public work he was zealous and untiring and wholly devoted to the task of benefiting his fellow men. As a citizen he stood in the foremost rank, and as a man he had no peers.

His ancestry endowed him with strong traits. He was born in Minneapolis, on June 30, 1855, the son of Charles Gordon Ames and Sarah Daniels Ames. He was educated in his early years at the Albany Academy, a school for boys at Albany, New York. When his family removed to California, he entered the public schools there, and later he was graduated from the Minneapolis high school and from Cornell University, receiving his degree of Bachelor of Literature in 1878. Between 1869 and 1871 he worked as a printer's apprentice for the *San José Mercury*. After his return to Minnesota he joined the railroad surveying party obtaining data for the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad, and he subsequently engaged in similar work on the Pennsylvania Railroad. In the intervals of his college work at Cornell he was engaged in geological work with the Pennsylvania Geological Survey. After his graduation he assisted his father for two years in the editing and publishing of the *Christian Register* in Boston.

His taste and experience being largely along the line of newspaper and publishing work, it was natural that he should incline toward that vocation, and in 1880 he became associated with the George H. Ellis Publishing Company of Boston. In 1882 he removed to St. Paul and purchased an interest in the

West Publishing Company. He served at first as secretary, then as general manager, and for a long period of years as president of the company. As a business man, Mr. Ames was of rare capacity. He united a keen sense of fair dealing with unusual energy and good judgment. Under his excellent business guidance the company became very prosperous, and for many years it has been the largest law publishing plant in the world. No small share of its success is due to his energy and foresight. He was also a director of the Northwestern Trust Company and of the First National Bank of St. Paul, and of the American Law Book Company of New York; and he was actively interested in many lesser companies to which he gave much time and attention.

But while interested in business, Mr. Ames did not allow it to absorb his whole attention. Early in his life in St. Paul he began to take a large part in public affairs. No worthy enterprise was too onerous to engage his active mental and physical coöperation, and it was his fortune to see many small institutions and ventures of a public nature blossom into large and healthy maturity. Education was with him a never-failing source of enthusiasm. He organized the Loomis School for girls; he was active in the inauguration of the St. Paul Academy for boys; and, later, he was the prime mover in the establishment of this academy's country day school at Randolph and Snelling avenues. In the work of the public library he was particularly interested. During his long membership on the board of directors he brought about many wise innovations and developed the usefulness of the library by promoting the establishment of branches in a dozen parts of the city, which enabled the institution to serve a much larger constituency. When the agitation for the new library building was started, he took up the work with energy, and he was largely responsible for the splendid building which now is one of the architectural features of the city.

In the religious field Mr. Ames's activities were very productive. His father was a Unitarian clergyman, and the son,

in no less degree, applied his energy and zeal to the work of this creed. During the pastorate of the Reverend Samuel Crothers at the old Unity Church on Wabasha Street, Mr. Ames took an active part in church work, developing the Sunday school and occasionally occupying the pulpit in the absence of the pastor. The influence of his deep religious feeling was always shown in his keen interest in and healthy sympathy for others. No man had a larger or more healthful influence upon his friends and acquaintances, largely because of his broad charity and his keen sense of responsibility for his spiritual as well as his physical welfare. His religious nature was not obtrusive but showed itself rather in a kindly and friendly interest in his fellow men.

Mr. Ames was largely responsible for the founding, in 1908, of the St. Paul Institute, to which he devoted much of his time and money and which he brought to a successful and flourishing condition. He was impressed by the fact that, after the termination of the instruction received in the grade schools, the man of mature years had no opportunity to pursue his studies further. The idea that night schools should be established led to the conception of the institute, the scope of which later was broadened to meet the requirements, in art, natural history, and other cultural matters, of all classes of people. The work of Mr. Ames in inaugurating and rendering possible the completion of this great public institution is among the most valuable of his accomplishments as a citizen. Through this conception the desire of the public for education, not only in practical but also in cultural fields, is gratified. The institute has made St. Paul a better place to live in, for it has improved the opportunity for good citizenship and for the enjoyment of the cultural things which really are essential to normal life and development. Mr. Ames was much interested in art. He fostered exhibitions of the paintings of local and western artists, and he contributed not a few paintings to the institute gallery. His contributions to the institute's natural history museum were frequent and valuable. Through his

efforts the institute has become one of the city's greatest educational and cultural factors.

Another of his interesting achievements is the Informal Club, of which he was secretary for twenty-seven years. With a few others he organized this club, composed of sixty of the leading business and professional men of the city, for the purpose of discussing topics of general interest. The club was held together by the slenderest official ties, and it was almost wholly the genial personality of Mr. Ames, together with his bright wit and original point of view, which infused vitality and interest into the group. Those who were fortunate enough to be members have the most pleasant recollections of the temperate and scholarly atmosphere he lent to all discussions and the keen logic with which he analyzed the debates.

In philanthropy Mr. Ames assumed more than his full duty as a citizen. Aside from his large contributions to the St. Paul Institute, he was ever ready with his purse when charity called. He was in close touch with all the philanthropic organizations of St. Paul, and for several years he was a director of the Amherst H. Wilder Charity. His last public service of this nature was in connection with the organization of the Community Chest, of which he was an ardent promoter and supporter.

He was interested in all activities which concern the average citizen, and he constantly endeavored to improve the facilities for business and social intercourse. It was largely due to his efforts that the former Chamber of Commerce and the Commercial Club were merged into the St. Paul Association of Public and Business Affairs, and that the St. Paul Athletic Club was united with the latter in the present commodious quarters. It was no easy task to bring together the three rather discordant elements of these organizations in one enterprise, housed in a single building, and united in the general effort to improve the social and business relations of our merchants.

Perhaps in no part of his life did the splendid nature of Mr. Ames manifest itself more fully than in his patriotic serv-

ice during the World War. Early in the war he perfected an organization for the French war sufferers; he made a visit to France in 1916 to confer with those who were administering relief to the suffering; and he contributed an ambulance to the cause. He converted his home into a workshop in which his family and friends labored unceasingly in providing bandages, clothing, and other necessities to bring relief to the destitute of the warring countries. His contribution of material as well as of money to this work was very large. He later organized a local committee of the Fatherless Children of France, which provided for the care of hundreds of orphans. Not the least of his war services was rendered as a member of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety. His energy and zeal contributed a great deal to the efficient work of that body. In recognition of the large share he took in relieving the French war sufferers, he was awarded by the French government the title of Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, which was conferred upon him at a large public gathering by M. Marcel Knecht in 1919.

Mr. Ames was married in 1883 to Miss Mary Lesley, daughter of Professor J. P. Lesley of Philadelphia. He is survived by his widow, his sons, Charles Lesley and Theodore, and four daughters, Mrs. Cushing Wright, Mrs. S. Eppes Turner, and Miss Elizabeth Ames of St. Paul, and Mrs. Bronson Crothers of Boston.

The very plethora of his activities and the variety of forms in which his genius showed itself make it difficult to give an estimate of the character and achievements of Charles W. Ames. There was scarcely any human activity during his life in which he did not take a part. He was unstinted in using his energy in behalf of every worthy cause, and he threw himself, without scrutinizing the cost, into every movement for the betterment of his fellow men. He was a man of tremendous force, and always worked his physical and mental powers at the highest pitch. Added to the zeal of his convictions was

the devotion of the man who submerged self that the great ideals he cherished might be attained. He was a practical idealist, holding high standards of human welfare, but never losing sight of the realities. He was a dreamer of large dreams, and fortunately most of his dreams came true. The wellspring of his activities was mainly his love for his fellow men. His life is one long story of things accomplished that tended to make life more agreeable, to make work more fruitful, and to create always a higher type of citizenship. His belief in the need of cultural things to smooth off the sharp and ugly corners of the daily life of the people led him to the interests in music, art, and education which have blossomed into fruition.

His personal character was very lovable. He was genial and kindly, always taking an optimistic view of life and seeking out and finding the best in his fellow men. He possessed a most sympathetic nature, a clear and logical mind, and a wit that was unexcelled. His extensive knowledge of current events enabled him to see with clear vision things that to others seemed confused and involved. He was a charming conversationalist and public speaker, a widely-read man in all good literature, a lover of art and music, and a devotee of the cultural things of life. He was a man of large influence, and his fellow citizens had unbounded faith in his wisdom and good intentions.

No higher praise can be given to a man than to say that in him was personified a good citizen. This means that, devoid of self interest, he constantly promoted the welfare of his neighbor and the community in which he lived. Looking back on his many accomplishments for the good of the city of St. Paul, we may say with truth that no man strove more greatly, accomplished more good, nor left a higher example of citizenship than Charles W. Ames.

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