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Literature in Rochester 1865-1905

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At the end of the Civil War, Rochesterians—along with Americans elsewhere—became increasingly absorbed in the commercial and industrial activities which were mushrooming all over the land. A city far different from the Yankee town of the fifties was developing along the Genesee. In the bustle of expansion, much of the old classical tradition was neglected and many conventional social patterns were outgrown. But in due course, increasing wealth, a new emphasis upon social events and social accomplishments, provided the occasion for an earnest, if somewhat indiscriminate search for culture.

Social pretensions alone could not account for the revival of the literary arts however. The club movement, growing from a need to replace the inadequate social groups of earlier days, and accelerated by the increasing activity of women as society leaders, gave real nourishment to literary interests. It was in these social-literary clubs that the sober scholarship of local professors and theologians, at a discount for many years, worked best to provide a sound base for the creative and critical efforts of those newly awakened to the pleasures of literature.

Out of an abundance of amorphous material, we have tried to choose those groups and individuals who most surely represent the significant trends and tastes of the period rather than to select our own favorites or to establish an arbitrary standard of the best which Rochester has contributed to prose and poetry. We have tried as well to limit our discussion to the period between 1865 and 1905—but without com-

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plete success, since our Victorian authors were not to be contained easily within a brief span of years. If, from an interest in what these unselfconscious folk read and wrote, we can reach an easier understanding of their time, our purpose will have been accomplished.

Literary Clubs and Fashions

The first of Rochester's literary clubs was founded in 1854 when Lewis Henry Morgan and a number of his friends organized a dinner and discussion group which they called simply The Club, although it became locally famous as the Pundit Club. The membership of this rather scholarly society was drawn from the more venerable men of the city's professional classes—the doctors, lawyers, professors and theologians of Rochester. Each of the fortnightly meetings was devoted to the reading and discussion of a paper prepared by one of the members upon a subject of his own selection.

When Pundits referred to their club as a literary organization, they intended the word in a broad sense. Science and politics contended with literature and ethics for attention, providing hearty fare for strong intellects, not afraid of exercise. It was not until 1856, at the twenty-seventh meeting, when Professor Albert H. Mixer presented a paper on the *Nibelungenlied*, that the Pundits seriously turned their attention to literature. Mixer, a professor of languages at the university, provided an impressive series of philological studies during his long membership, and the presence of so excellent an authority and so liberal a scholar of literature as Professor Kendrick must have contributed much to the enjoyment and profit of the discussions.

The relish with which the Pundits heard these two philologists, the evident enjoyment they had in frequent translations and commentaries upon Greek and Roman literature from Judge Harvey Humphrey and Frederick A. Whittlesey, were illustrative of the fact that these men were products of an education and a tradition which even then were fading perceptibly. It is significant that no author more modern than Shakespeare was discussed during the club's first fifty years of existence. In none of the other literary clubs was this ready acquaintance with the classics, this total disregard for modern letters, so apparent.

The second literary club to establish itself firmly in Rochester's roster of organizations was the Shakespeare Club, founded by the Reverend Dr. John Holland of the Unitarian Church in 1865. The program of the meetings, as originally projected, was the reading and

study of Shakespeare's plays, and the group adhered faithfully to this schedule every winter from its establishment through the late nineties. Judge James F. Angle was for many years the guiding spirit of the club, serving as its president from 1868 until his death in 1891, when DeLancey Crittenden, a lawyer and one of Rochester's outstanding Shakespeare students, took his place. Frequent semi-public readings were given in Judge Angle's parlors, complete with appropriate musical accompaniment and program notes.

Several other Shakespeare clubs were organized at various times in Rochester, one of them by Miss Louise Daniels. It became apparent that interest in the great English dramatist could not be circumscribed by the necessarily narrow limits of one group. So universal an author was the property of all, both in the Shakespeare clubs and in the small reading or literary groups which cropped up in Rochester social circles throughout the sixties and seventies. The ladies were often included in these circles, and in some cases were responsible for them. (Mrs. George W. Fisher, for example, early established herself as a patron of literary groups in the Third Ward.) However, it was not until the eighties that social and literary Rochester came into full bloom. Organizations grew up so rapidly and were so enthusiastically sponsored that by the end of the century he was an indifferent man who could not find some club to share or improve his literary interests, no matter how simple or esoteric they might be.

The success and the exclusiveness of the Pundit Club made the appearance of rivals and imitators a foregone conclusion. The most successful of these was the Fortnightly Club, organized in 1882 at the instigation of Charles E. Fitch, editor of the *Democrat & Chronicle*. Although the Fortnightly Club was nearly identical with the Pundits in its pattern of organization, and in the type of men from which it chose its membership, still it was far from a slavish copy of the older group. In the first place, the Fortnightly Club—while composed, like the Pundits, of lawyers, clergymen, physicians and professors—was a far younger group, both in age and outlook, a difference expressed in telling fashion in the range of subjects, and in the more sprightly treatment which these subjects received when dealt with by the Fortnighters.

Such members as Robert Mathews, a prominent merchant, Dr. Porter Farley, Reverend Newton Mann, Dr. Max Landsberg and Charles

A. Dewey gave promise of intellectual vigor as well as a healthy divergence of opinion to enliven club meetings. The Fortnighters devoted a greater number of their meetings to literature than did the Pundits at any time in their career, and their criticisms were more likely to bear the stamp of the author's personality than to have the academic flavor of the older critics.

Among the notable papers delivered before the Fortnightly Club were Martin Cooke's studies of *Hamlet*. Cooke, a prominent lawyer and political leader, found this tragedy an absorbing study in psychology, ethics and dramatic technique. His most ambitious essay, "The Parallelisms of *Hamlet*, *Electra*, and the *Aeneid*," received wide praise from his fellow members and was subsequently published. Coleridge and Southwell, Burns and Byron received due attention at the bi-weekly meetings, and time was found for such a wide variety of authors as Milton, Voltaire, Lucretius, Herrick and Mencius, men of widely different times and philosophies. In addition there were papers on "Poetry and Science," on "Biography" and on various books of the Bible. But even the Fortnightly Club, ready as it was to recognize the claims of all world literature, showed no concern with native American contributions until 1888 when William E. Peck, author and editor of several volumes on Rochester, finally wrote a paper on "Early American Literature."

Rochester's literary club members—despite the number of ardent Shakespeareans among them—were surprisingly calm in face of the current controversy over the authorship of the Shakespearean plays. The claims for Sir Francis Bacon received a great deal of publicity throughout the last half of the century, and indeed, developed quite sensational aspects. Rochester's interest appears to have been perfunctory at best, with men such as Cooke and Crittenden too staunch in their beliefs to entertain such specious arguments as these.

The Pundits heard two papers on the subject from Theodore Bacon (inspired perhaps by the lawyer's remote relationship to Miss Delia Bacon, who had been the originator and most ardent proponent of Sir Francis' claims), and then absolved themselves of all interest in the matter. William Peck gave the Fortnightly Club the benefit of his opinions on the subject, evidently without arousing response, for the subject was dropped until Joseph O'Connor's paper, "The Authorship of the Shakespearean Plays," was presented a decade later. If the validity

of the Baconian pretensions were ever discussed in the Shakespeare clubs the matter was not recorded; any such heresy must of necessity have been voiced in whispers.

A certain complacency in the face of this controversy might lead us to believe that Rochester remained aloof to other literary fads and scandals of the time. In general, a cool detachment was easily maintained, but Robert Browning was a man to whom almost no Victorian could remain indifferent, and some of Rochester's most haughty dowa-gers and most respected scholars were known to feel strongly about the current lion. No city with any pretensions to culture was without its Browning society at this time, and Rochester was in the vanguard in both enthusiasm and activity.

The Browning Club which has since become so famous in local legend was founded in 1884 by Mrs. George W. Fisher, who acted as its hostess until her death, when her daughter inherited the responsibility. Meetings began on the first Friday of Lent and continued for a season of from eight to ten weeks with the exception of Good Friday. Mrs. Fisher was blessed with unshakable convictions upon the proper place of women in this world, and it was understood that the score or more of ladies sufficiently fortunate to be invited to join this impressive circle were to play a passive role once the coffee cups were put away and were to listen in decorous silence to the discussion of the gentlemen. Despite the facts that its founder was a woman and that women comprised the main body of attendants, the membership list, true to Mrs. Fisher's scruples, entered only the names of the men.

During the first five years of its existence, the society devoted itself exclusively to the study of Browning, with Professor Gilmore leading the discussions. It was a select group which participated and maintained with honor the sedate traditions of the society. Professors Kendrick, Gilmore, True and Morey, Doctors Gannett, Rhees, Converse and Strong, Oscar Craig, Charles Fitch and Joseph O'Connor, all noted for their wide learning, were the backbone of the Browning Club. Dr. John Rothwell Slater, a member in later years, recalls the society in this fashion.*

In an old house on Troup Street a generation ago the Misses Fisher maintained . . . a Friday afternoon meeting known as the Browning Club. . . . This Browning Club took itself seriously. Arriving about four o'clock in formal attire (black cutaway or frock for the men, preferably a silk

*Dr. John R. Slater, "Rochester Forty Years Ago," *Rochester Historical Society Publications* XX:86.

hat), one found the parlors with heavy curtains drawn, artificial light, spring flowers, walls hung with family portraits in oils. They were filled with dignified ladies, mostly in black, seated in formal rows. If you came early enough, you had coffee in the dining room, with pleasant amenities suitable to the solemn time and place, in voices carefully subdued. In the front room the guests conversed chiefly in whispers. Among thirty or more dowagers, dames and demoiselles, there were often not more than eight or ten men. These latter worthies were apparently selected either for heavy respectability or alleged literary gifts, also for having unobjectionable wives.

One of these men each week had to read a paper, which was then discussed (or discreetly flattered) by the other men, called on by the chairman in order of seniority. No woman ever said a word. It was not expected; they knew their place A man either had to have his nerve with him, or pretend he was in a play; indeed, he was. The only thing you must never do was to laugh Probably the whole place would have vanished in a puff of smoke.

On Browning's death in December, 1889, the *Democrat & Chronicle* editorial page bore an article of one and one half columns on the poet. It appears that Charles Fitch, the editor, (and a staunch member of the Browning Club) must bear the responsibility for the article which, while it maintained Browning's greatness as a social prophet, denied his right to the name of poet. True poetry, maintained the author, was "a form of writing not meant to be toiled over." As for Browning's verse, "Its labored form—or lack of form—its severe condensations, its intricacies, its involutions, its labyrinths of digression, its obscurities, forbid it from being considered poetry."

Whatever effect this seeming apostasy had on the Browning enthusiasts, however well it might have reflected general impatience with new poetic forms, the editorial did not mark the end of the Browning vogue in Rochester. In 1890, a well known bookseller stated that Browning's many books were the only volumes for which there was a steady and heavy demand (although Bellamy's *Looking Backward* was selling remarkably well), and his further remarks lead us to believe that there were at least two, probably three, literary clubs then active which were devoted to the study of Browning. Six years later an appreciation of the poet given by a local priest to a Catholic reading club was considered of sufficient popular interest to receive two columns in the crowded pages of the *Democrat*.

It was in the eighties that the ladies entered into the spirit of the club movement with real enthusiasm and began to establish literary clubs entirely independent of the men. The Ignorance Club, founded by Jane Marsh Parker in 1881, while not primarily a literary club, is still of some interest. In theory, each woman was to keep an "Ignorance

Book," in which she noted the unfamiliar subjects and ideas encountered in reading or conversation. With these journals as starting points, it was not surprising to find much of the ladies' time occupied with the discussion of ancient and contemporary literature. Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was evidently the cause of some rather heated sessions, but the works of James Russell Lowell and Matthew Arnold were found equally interesting and perhaps more suitable for ladies of refinement.

Another group, the Roundabout Club, was founded in 1885 and proudly numbered Mary Jane Holmes, the famous novelist, among its members. This organization favored literary subjects from Mme. de Stael to Goethe and Hawthorne, but not infrequently the ladies lapsed into more gossipy themes, such as "The Domestic Life of Mary and Martha Washington." While Mrs. Holmes' wide travels kept her away from many meetings, she did manage to make at least one contribution for the edification of her fellow clubwomen. Her paper on "The Style of Disraeli" received such extravagant praise in the local society column that Mrs. Holmes might easily have been won over to the field of literary criticism—though in fact she persisted in her lucrative career as a teller of sentimental tales.

The Wednesday Morning Club was the smallest, the youngest, and undoubtedly the best of the women's literary societies. Founded in 1890 by a quartet of women eager to prove their ability to match interest and erudition with the gentlemen, the club was restricted to a small circle chosen for ability to contribute something of real worth to the discussions. Mrs. Myron Adams, Mrs. Charles Fitch, Mrs. Granger Hollister, Mrs. Joseph Alling, Mrs. William Hoyt, Mrs. Max Landsberg and Mrs. Joseph O'Connor (whose husbands were all staunch members of the Fortnightly Club) were the backbone of the club for many years. Miss Sara Fisher, a shy and gentle lady, was chosen in preference to her mother, and served the club as secretary for more than two decades.

Mrs. O'Connor, who shared her editor husband's studiousness, opened the first meeting with a paper on "Emerson, the Poet." The same season produced papers on Tolstoy, *Faust*, and "Skepticism in Modern Poetry," setting a high mark for the ladies to maintain over the years. George Eliot—always of interest to intellectual women—Howells, Browning, Schiller, LaFontaine were among those to receive attention, while *Faust* and Tolstoy, as it later appeared, were of perennial interest.

Two symposiums were held before the Wednesday Club celebrated its first decade. At the first of these, the members chose their two favorite poems, read and discussed them and justified their choice. Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar*, Hunt's *Abou Ben Adhem*, Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* and Field's *Little Boy Blue* were the favorites. A touch of brightness in this rather weighted Victorian list was Mrs. Hiram W. Sibley's choice of Carroll's *The Walrus and the Carpenter*.

The second symposium, held in 1900, was devoted to a discussion of favorite contemporary novels, with Hewlett's *Richard Yea and Nay* carrying off the honors. Irving Bacheller's *Eben Holden* and *Elinor*, by Mrs. Humphrey Ward followed closely.

Mrs. Alling has written a delightful reminiscence of the Wednesday Club's early days, filled with anecdote on the foibles of its members. We glean from this a happy picture of women reared with most of the social advantages of their day putting forth serious effort to comprehend the literary trends of their time and finding the effort both pleasurable and profitable. Mrs. O'Connor's contributions were undoubtedly the most erudite, while Mrs. Landsberg's papers illustrated a continuing interest in the important European developments in the drama, novel and poetry. On the other hand we must note Miss Sara Fisher for her sensitive appreciation of such men as William Blake and Andrew Marvel—poets not generally noticed in those days.

Perhaps what most recommends the ladies of the Wednesday Club is their recognition of their responsibilities and their easy, good humored acknowledgement of their limitations. Frequently papers which were thought worthy of attention were borrowed from a husband's file for the Fortnightly Club, and on other occasions papers which had first hearing at the Wednesday Club were often given wider circulation at the meetings of the Ethical Society or the Ignorance Club. The club had for its aim not withdrawal from, but a more active and intelligent participation in, society.

A club which expressed a broad range of literary interests and which included men and women on an equal footing was the Literary and Elocutionary Club, founded in 1879 by a local dramatic teacher. DeLancey Crittenden assumed the leadership of the group about 1890 and we can in part explain the emphasis upon Elizabethan literature (Christopher Marlowe in particular) which was so noticeable that season by Crittenden's known affection for Shakespeare. Other tastes

were not ignored however, and Byron, Racine, Emerson and Moliere were among those whose works were studied and performed. In addition the club welcomed original contributions from its members, among them some poems by Miss Florence Alt, one of Rochester's younger and most successful poets.

These groups are only a few of the great number—so often short-lived—which were established during the last two decades of the century. Evidences of superficiality may be found even in the best of them, but they nonetheless served to take literature from the libraries of the few into the realm of active interest. If literature in many cases served only as a prop for society, she was well rewarded, in the long run, for her service.

After Browning, there was no great literary fad in Rochester. The excitement over Ibsen left the city almost untouched, and only a few—Jane Marsh Parker, Dr. Landsberg, Evangeline O'Connor—appear to have been aware of his existence. Indeed, except for the papers on Zola and Ibsen which Dr. Landsberg read at the Fortnightly Club, and several read by his wife at the Wednesday Morning Club, we should be forced to conclude that Rochesterians were content to remain either ignorant or intolerant of the great movements in contemporary European literature. But an interest in reading, once aroused, often goes beyond its original narrow limits, and the clubs and the bookstores—responsible for a great deal that was tawdry—nevertheless deserve credit for broadening the appreciation and interest of many a Rochesterian who had devoted little thought to literature before.

The Ladies and Their Works

While the reading public swelled to many times its former size in the decades following the war, critical standards fell noticeably. To those caught in the hurly-burly of post war expansion, quantity was far more important than quality; yet these same people sought in their reading an antidote to the vulgarity and corruption which characterized so much of the social, business and political life of the time. The answer was found in a flood of novels of appalling sweetness and sentimentality, the greater part of them written by good women in the name of morality and virtue.

It was a commonplace, in those days, that women had a natural and intuitive knowledge of virtue, that it was their proper province

in which men could not presume to compete. And it had recently become perfectly clear that the novel—lately regarded as wicked—had found its proper uses as an instrument for the propaganda of virtue. Armed with these convictions, many a meek woman was suddenly transformed into a militant propagandist of morality, a prolific, and often well-paid, author. All she needed was a high moral purpose and some natural facility with words.

Mary Jane Holmes, the wife of a Brockport lawyer, had these essentials for success and made the most of them. A native of New England, her professional career began only after her arrival in Brockport in 1853. In the following year, her first novel was published; her fourth and most famous book, '*Lena Rivers*' came out just two years later. When a sentimental public took '*Lena*' to its heart, Mary Jane's success was assured. Her 37 novels, all of them long and lugubrious, were produced with amazing dispatch during the next half century. Although this particular period was notable for the important changes it wrought in the structure of American society, particularly the position of women in that society, Mrs. Holmes' heroines remained flaxen-haired and improbable examples of the romantic ideal of the age.

A recital of the wonderful plots and florid dialogues, the secret trysts and sudden flights in Mrs. Holmes' works would amuse us now, but they wrung her readers' hearts. Lest her readers be overwhelmed by the resourcefulness of haughty rivals, and the obtuseness of an unappreciative husband or jealous lover, there was always the assurance of a happy ending, and the ultimate triumph of virtue. In addition, one chapter was always devoted to comic relief in the character of a rustic New Yorker or parsimonious Yankee.

It is valid (though the point should not be labored) to view Mrs. Holmes' work as a long protest against those social changes which appeared to undermine the security of the home and to deprive woman of her sheltered, respected place. Actually, Mrs. Holmes understood the currents of American business and social life no better than her readers, and instead of supplying honest answers to their doubts, she provided only a never-never land where all was either black or white. No real tragedy, no bitter poverty ever soiled the pages of one of Mary Jane's novels. While the source of all woe was found in wealth, sophistication and "city ways," this evil environment never failed to produce

a hero of impeccable virtue, and wealth was inevitably the reward of the good.

So strong was Mary Jane's appeal, so urgent the desire to believe the pictures she painted, that her copyright income rose until it was exceeded by that of only one other woman, Harriett Beecher Stowe. Her books were extensively reviewed, the critics often concluding with the injunction that "every woman should read it and every mother should see that it is placed in her daughter's hands."

Within a few years, more and more local women entered the literary field on a professional basis. The neighborhood did not produce another Mary Jane, but it did give us a number of women who, through their work in Sunday schools and church groups, naturally found their way to writing for children. If the women were sincere in their desire to create a society where virtue was triumphant, the best possible place to begin was among the children, and some of the ladies set to work with an energy which must have done more harm than good to their cause. In an unthinking enthusiasm for model-boy heroes and seraphic heroines, they turned out a series of prigs of the Elsie Dinsmore stamp—enough to drive the most well-disposed child to rebellion.

One of the worst offenders in this respect was Isabella MacDonald Alden, born here in 1841. However, "Pansy," as she was popularly known, wrote all of her more than 120 books after she had left Rochester behind her, and Rochesterians can claim no more than a passing interest in the woman who made the significant comment that, "Whenever anything went wrong, I just went upstairs and wrote a book about it."

Two maiden ladies well known in Rochester for their philanthropies acquitted themselves much more gracefully as writers of juvenile fiction. The Misses Clara and Lucy Ellen Guernsey were born in Pittsford, attended Miss Araminta Doolittle's academy on South Fitzhugh Street, and subsequently settled in Rochester. Even among Miss Doolittle's exemplary young ladies, the Misses Guernsey were noted as models of decorum and studiousness, and the restrained and modest tones of their later writing are a tribute to that good lady's instruction. As the sisters grew older, they devoted their full energies to church work and to charity, Miss Clara as a member of St. Peter's congregation, and Miss Lucy as a communicant of St. Luke's. It was in connection

with these activities that most of their editorial and creative work was done.

Although the Guernseys were nearly as prolific as Mrs. Holmes, very little of their work has survived. What does remain shows an understanding of the young reader and a respect for composition so noticeably lacking in the work of many of their colleagues. A certain tolerance of view and a generosity of spirit are found in their works which distinguish these stories from the greater part of denominational literature published at the time.

One novel written by Lucy Ellen Guernsey is set in the period of the Restoration, and deals with the religious development of a young girl who had had experience of most of the sects which were developing about that time. Despite preoccupation with this theme, the author does not neglect to furnish a simple love story for a plot, nor to tell it coherently and pleasantly. A boy's life of Washington, upon which the sisters collaborated, and a poem by Clara Guernsey all support the thesis that these ladies had knowledge of literary discipline and technique, and were aware of the fact that good purpose did not necessarily make good literature. Their good taste and restraint do much to redeem the reputation of the Sunday-school writers of their time.

A more aggressive and outspoken personality than any of these women was Jane Marsh Parker, who came to Rochester in early childhood and became one of the city's most devoted daughters. Jane got an early start on her professional career, and as a schoolgirl wrote a multitude of stories and poems indistinguishable from the great portion of sentimental verse and story which flooded the market. Her first novel, published in her twentieth year, was a woeful tale indeed.

In the same year, 1856, Jane married a Rochester lawyer, George Tann Parker, and her home and growing family distracted her from literary pursuits for some years. She became very active in the Sunday school work at Christ Church, however, and published a series of books called the *Little Churchman's Library*, in addition to other stories and articles for church periodicals. Most of these are composed in the somewhat pompous style common to the juvenile literature of the period, and it was not until later years that Mrs. Parker gave young readers the benefit of her wit and humor.

Mrs. Parker was a woman of great vitality, and undoubtedly her greatest asset was her receptiveness to new ideas and activities. The

woman's club movement brought her to the forefront of Rochester affairs; civic and charitable programs always aroused her interested comment, and often her active participation. This alertness and her ever-expanding range of interests are clearly reflected in her writing.

It was not until Mrs. Parker had reached middle age that she broached the subject which she was to treat with most effectiveness, the Millerite religious enthusiasm of the forties. It was a subject of which she, as the daughter of a Millerite preacher and editor, had had direct and painful experience, and the forceful, impersonal indictment of fanaticism which she wrote in "The Housewarming at Larchdale," and *The Midnight Cry* is a personal as well as a literary triumph.

During the late eighties and the nineties, Mrs. Parker was a frequent contributor to such magazines as *The Atlantic*, *Harpers*, and *The Century*. Her wide reading, her interest in philosophy and religion are all set forth in her articles here, while the Rochester press often benefitted by her interest in local history.

Another province which the ladies were inclined to consider peculiarly their own was that of poetry. Versifying was considered something of a parlor accomplishment in those days, and there were few women of sensibility who had not written a stanza or two. Most of the poetry so produced was either of a religious or a sentimental nature. Mrs. Maria Barnes, the wife of a local physician, was a prolific writer of religious verse. She wrote under the pseudonym Kate Cameron, publishing the greater part of her work in cooperation with the famous composer of hymns, William B. Bradbury of New York.

Rochester's most famous sentimental poet was probably Mary Riley Smith, well known in local circles when she was still a young girl in Brighton. Miss Riley's favorite subject for poetical composition was the rather limited theme of bereaved motherhood. It was a morbid topic for one so young, and completely foreign to her experience, but the poetess continued to dwell upon it almost exclusively even after an exceptionally happy marriage to a young lawyer of Illinois and New York. Her persistence in this vein forced even her most ardent admirers to question her taste after a time, but Mary Riley Smith had a gift for poetical tears which pleased a sentimental public.

Alphonso Alvah Hopkins, local editor, critic and author, probably deserves some of the credit for Mrs. Smith's popularity, for a great deal of her work was published in the *American Rural Home*, of which

he was literary editor. Hopkins judged his protegee a greater poet than Swinburne on the ground that she was "truer to the purest instincts of the soul," and he praised her even more extravagantly because her poems were "not cold, icy bits of intellectuality . . . but come welling up warmly from her heart and sink tremulously into yours." We shall agree that there was nothing cerebral about Mrs. Smith's compositions, and we shall even grant that her lines rhymed and scanned; but we cannot say that they show the imagination, conception or technique essential to true poetry.

There were innumerable women in Rochester who received local tribute for the poetry which they wrote chiefly for their own pleasure and that of their friends. Mrs. George W. Fisher, Miss Mary Doolittle, Bertha Scrantom Pool, Rose Lattimore Alling and many others fall into this group. Mrs. Parker wrote many verses, some sentimental, some witty, even in her early years. Those penned in the eighties and nineties are of a reflective, philosophical nature, illustrative of a great improvement in expression and technique.

While the writers of verse were many, the true poets were few indeed. Florence May Alt, who published her first volume, *A Child of Song*, in 1891, was one of Rochester's more successful women poets. Many of her poems had already received local publication or an audience at the meetings of the Elocutionary Club. After her graduation from the Free Academy, Miss Alt continued her study of English literature independently, and her verses have a grace of expression which must have demonstrated to her less studious sisters the value of discipline as opposed to simple reliance upon so-called inspiration. Edith Willis Linn, who had just begun to publish in the last years of the century, achieved greater success and recognition, and is probably most worthy, of all these women, of the name of poet. It was encouraging to see in these last years a developing consciousness of poetry as an art, not simply as a medium for sentimental expression.

One woman stands apart from the pattern of her Victorian sisters in Rochester, Evangeline Johnson O'Connor. Active in the Wednesday Morning Club, the only woman to contribute two papers to the Browning Club, interested in civic affairs, Mrs. O'Connor won a name as a serious student of literature.

As a young girl and in later years, Mrs. O'Connor was particularly fortunate in her associations, and probably the extraordinary encourage-

ment she received in her studies accounts for the great difference between herself and her friends. The beloved Professor Kendrick had fondly regarded "Evie" as his adopted daughter and protegee and had encouraged her study of Greek, Italian, and other modern and ancient literatures. After the completion of her formal education, Evangeline taught for several years in Cincinnati and then at Brockport Normal School, and in 1877 she married Joseph O'Connor, one of Rochester's most gifted journalists. The O'Connors returned to Rochester in 1886 when he assumed the editorship of the *Post Express*, and Evangeline continued her studies in conjunction with the literary interests of her husband.

Mrs. O'Connor's talent was critical and interpretative rather than creative, and she published an index to Shakespeare's works and another index to Hawthorne, both of them thorough and competent. In addition there is still available her translation of a history of Italian literature, and we are told that she was the author of many translations from the lesser German and Italian poets and dramatists. She wrote frequent essays on the world's great literature for her clubs, and was a contributor of poetry and articles to such magazines as *Lippincott's* and *The Advance*. Her poems are in general restrained and thoughtful, and suggest a woman given to a more penetrating analysis of social and literary problems than most of the good ladies of her time.

On the whole we can look back upon these women and their work with some justifiable pride. Although they contributed little of permanent worth to American letters, they had, nonetheless, the courage to enter a relatively new and a highly competitive field. For some of them the opportunity to express themselves in print was an indication of widening horizons for American womanhood; for others a respectable occupation by which a lady thrown upon her own resources might make a living; for most of them it was a means of defending and propagating those values which they held most dear, and upon which they were most dependent.

They had small conception of literature as an art, it is true, although Mrs. O'Connor, Mrs. Parker and Miss Alt, in the latter part of this period, made some excursions into literary criticism. Their education and experience was after all closely circumscribed, and it is probable that a good number of the bearded and respectable gentlemen of Rochester were somewhat aghast to discover that the ladies were

beginning to take themselves—and their literature—quite seriously. It would have been difficult for any of these women, no matter how ambitious, to realize that, in a few years, Adelaide Crapsey, a young woman as fragile as any of Mrs. Holmes' heroines, would be not only permitted but encouraged to go abroad and to study so esoteric a subject as English prosody, and that she would become the only true poet Rochester had produced.

The Amateurs

During the seventies and eighties, the gentlemen had confined themselves quite strictly to the critical and rather academic approach to literature, while the ladies had dominated the professional field and had even begun to encroach upon masculine domain with essays and papers. In the late eighties, however, the men were no longer content with scholarly discussions, and several of them began to seek pleasure in the creative aspects of literature as well.

We must not pretend that this was a sudden phenomenon, for during the previous decades the professors and scholars had written a large number of poems and truly creative essays; Joseph O'Connor, for one, had already won a local reputation as a poet. However, the group which draws our attention now is the relatively small class of men who had in common sufficient wealth to afford the leisure, the education, and the environment which contribute so much to an amateur's appreciation of the arts.

The first Rochesterian to venture extensively into literature on this basis was H. Pomeroy Brewster, a wealthy businessman who lived here all his life. After retirement he devoted the greater part of his time to literary and historical studies, and collected an excellent library stocked with the famous English periodicals of the eighteenth century, *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, and others.

Brewster's favorite topics were early Christian art and symbolism and the lore of eighteenth century London. The latter subject supplied the setting for a rather unfortunate novelette, *The Old House in Size Lane*. Atmosphere, characters, and plot are all strongly reminiscent of Dickens, and the setting shows the great interest and research which Brewster had devoted to the city of London. Further results of this work are shown in the essays on the *Coffee Houses and Tea Gardens of Old London*. *The Mystery of an Old Maryland Mansion*, another of

Brewster's long stories or short novels, is an involved tale of mistaken identity and family honor. More than any of the men we shall discuss, Brewster was a sort of literary hobbyist, who found pleasure in research, in absorbing the flavor and techniques of a past era.

The city's newspapers had on their staffs many of Rochester's best known literary men, and foremost among these was Joseph O'Connor. When O'Connor returned from Buffalo in 1886 to assume management of the *Post Express*, Rochester recovered one of its best newsmen and most respected citizens. A native of Tribes' Hill, a graduate of the University of Rochester, and a former reporter for the *Democrat*, O'Connor cherished Rochester as his home, and the most pressing and flattering invitations from metropolitan journals could not again lure him away.

A member of the Fortnightly and Browning Clubs, O'Connor seems to have won more general, unqualified praise for his literary gifts than any of his local cronies. Charles Fitch said of him that he was "a poet of lofty measures, an essayist upon a wide range of subjects, a journalist of high repute—the master of an English style singularly lucid, coherent and forceful." Perhaps Rochester's admiration for the integrity and political independence of this bearded, studious man had as much to do with his literary reputation as admiration for his writing. His essays on politics, literature, or any other subject of interest to him were printed in the *Post-Express* under the heading of "The Rochesterian." Collected and published after his death, these essays show a gift of seriousness without pedantry, and exhibit that lucidity and forcefulness which Fitch praised so highly.

O'Connor's poems have also been collected, and are certainly better than the average amateur verses. They are sober poems, some of them narrative, a few lyrical, many of them patriotic, and of them all the narrative are probably the best. As a literary critic, O'Connor showed a good, studious, critical sense; his tastes were conservative, but without prejudice against the new and apparently revolutionary, and his judgments seem always well-considered.

William and George H. Ellwanger, while they can hardly be called professional newspapermen, did own an interest in the *Post Express*, and both of them worked on its editorial staff for several years. The brothers provide something of a study in contrast, George Ellwanger being the epitome of the urbane, cosmopolitan gentleman, just appearing

in American society, while William D. Ellwanger was representative of a less elegant American tradition.

The son of Rochester's pioneer nurseryman, George H. Ellwanger was given a liberal education both at home and abroad; his schooling was begun at Myron Peck's academy and continued at institutions in France and Switzerland. As a young man he studied at Paris and Heidelberg. Ellwanger was heir to both wealth and responsibility in those proportions most favorable to the production of a cultivated gentleman. He managed his father's business, and was owner and editor of the *Post Express* for several years.

In 1892 he was elected to the Pundit Club, and his papers were the first submitted to that group which could be classified as creative or imaginative essays. Probably some of the more austere members felt mild surprise at the informality of Ellwanger's delightful essays, but any thought of disapproval must have vanished with dawning appreciation of the author's obvious respect for words and writing. Some of the members must have noted the difference between Ellwanger's ability to recapture the mood of Walton's *Angler*, his skill in conjuring up the tones of a Hardy landscape, and the somber pedestrian essays of Dr. Strong upon Wordsworth's nature poetry, for example.

George H. Ellwanger was one of the early representatives of the new cosmopolitanism which was coming to America and to Rochester. Here was a man largely a product of European education, and strongly continental in his tastes—a far cry from the hardy, austere, and sometimes narrow character produced by unmodified Yankee ways. Probably Ellwanger's outstanding characteristic was his appreciation of the beautiful. His unhesitating and perfect expression of this love for beauty, whether it be a naked tree in a November swamp, a formal garden or a perfectly appointed home, antagonized some and was thought by others to be mere affectation. His epicurean tastes were a constant source of bewilderment and even revulsion to many of his acquaintances, but were a delight shared by a few. It is not strange to find some of the most charming work of such a man written upon *The Pleasures of the Table* or *The Story of My House*.

Ellwanger's acquaintance with the old masters of the essay, with Montaigne particularly, is evident all through his work. His delight in a particularly well-turned phrase, the perfect word or cadence, may have been a bit too conscious for some tastes, but his literary skill, his

wit and his charm endear him to many, and the collections of his essays are veritable collectors' items in these days.

William D. Ellwanger, the brother of George H. Ellwanger, was by profession a lawyer and a journalist, but he ranks as a poet and an essayist in his own right. Despite his interest in the *Post Express* and his practice at the bar, Ellwanger managed to devote the greater part of his time to literary work, and was a frequent contributor to nationally known periodicals and metropolitan newspapers. A comparison of his work with his brother's reveals a marked contrast in character and education. William Ellwanger was less the dilettante; his essays lack the marked literary elegance of his brother's work and are sober and thoughtful, relieved by occasional quiet humor. Nonetheless fluency, balance and good composition make them excellent reading.

One of the younger members of the *Post Express* staff was Charles Mulford Robinson, who came to the newspaper after his graduation from the University of Rochester in 1892. As an undergraduate Robinson had made a name for himself as a librettist for several comic operas produced by the university students and by the young society people of the city. The work which is of most interest to Rochesterians is probably the satirical and whimsical memoirs of the Third Ward. A native of the ward himself, Robinson could afford to poke fun at the eccentricities and extravagances of the old neighborhood, but always with a humor and secret pride which could not fail to charm all Rochesterians alike.

The city's other newspapers did not fail to contribute to Rochester's literary life. Samuel Halstead Lowe, chief editor of the *Morning Herald* until 1892, was probably most famous for his patriotic verse, particularly for that poem written for the dedication of the Soldiers' Monument on Memorial Day, 1892. Edward Sanford Martin, an editor of the *Union & Advertiser*, published his first book of poems, *Sly Ballads in Harvard China*, in 1882, and a profusion of essays and poems followed over the next three decades.

Martin, who lived in Rochester for about thirteen years during the eighties and nineties, was one of that circle of men who gathered around the fireside of the redoubtable Sherlock Andrews for good talk and good wine, probably the closest approximation of a *salon* in the city. If the great majority of Rochesterians, literary and otherwise, took themselves with more than due seriousness, there were nonetheless a few who smiled. Andrews, Breck Perkins, Arthur Smith, E. S. Martin,

Samuel Wilder, were all included in this group, and among them we can find at least two of Rochester's most important literary figures.

Arthur Smith deserves attention as the city's only successful writer of short stories, and as its most urbane and delightful amateur of fiction. The son of the New York State Supreme Court judge at Canandaigua, Smith was educated at Hobart College and Columbia. He opened his law practice in Rochester in 1879, after his marriage to Elizabeth Storrer Atkinson, and became a prominent member of East Avenue Society.

In 1900 Smith published his first book of short stories, *The Monk and the Dancer*. His second volume, *The Turquoise Cup*, was issued three years later. According to a local newspaper, he was at this time the highest paid author in the world, receiving twenty-five cents a word for his work. This claim is a doubtful one, and at any rate unimportant to us as it was to Mr. Smith.

Despite the fact that New York and Boston critics were generous with their praise, Smith was practically unknown to the reading public of Rochester, as he probably was in the rest of the country. His stories were very few; not more than a dozen were published, and some of those appeared only in the small literary magazines. But Smith's public, though small, was select. A class in creative literature in Boston used his works as models of style. Those who knew his stories treasured them for the sophistication and skill of the author. One critic sought to persuade Smith to give the public more of these exquisite tales only to be squelched by the reply that writing, after all, was merely a beloved hobby, and must yield to the pressure of business.

The clues to Smith's character are few but illuminating. Despite his reply to the critic, there is evidence that he took his legal practice very lightly indeed. Certainly it never hampered him in his frequent and lengthy absences abroad, and he and his family appear to have spent the greater part of their time in Europe. George Haushalter says of him that "His clothes were made in London He dressed the part of a gallant gentleman, living and dying consistently." Haushalter's happiest memories of Arthur Smith are those of the congenial midnight circle at Sherlock Andrews'. "He wept easily . . . thoroughly enjoying his own sobs." James S. Watson knew Smith as the last gentleman in Rochester.

The continental flavor is dominant in Smith's work, and shows a love for the courtliness and grand manners of the European. His hero might be a cardinal of surpassing urbanity, an impecunious English lord, or a French count turned abbot. Didacticism had no place in these small comedies of manners, and it was evident that Smith did not subscribe to popular fashions in morality. While most American authors still patterned their work after that of Richardson and Sterne, Smith turned aside to find his inspiration among the Gallic masters of wit and irony. Only one of his stories has an American setting, and that one provides a sharp satire on American mores of the nineties.

Smith's small production is significant. Every phrase gives evidence of the fastidiousness and the great care of the author. Each word seems to have been selected and polished to fit its peculiar setting. Sophistication here is no synonym for shallowness, and these pat little stories are perfection of their kind.

The Main Stream

E. S. Martin, whom we have mentioned in his Rochester connection, belongs in truth to the larger literary world of New York. As a founder and editor of *Life* he won over the years a national reputation as an essayist upon current events and problems. Shortly after Martin came to Rochester in the eighties, he married the daughter of George J. Whitney, the local railroad magnate. He grew to love Rochester and never severed his friendships here throughout his long life. Sherlock Andrews was among those whom Martin never failed to visit, and George Haushalter remembers him as a witty gentleman with a terrifying habit of deliberately removing his ear trumpet, upon which he was almost completely dependent, as a means of self defense against dull talk.

Martin's very real concern over the problems of his time was often expressed in pseudo-comic fashion which made his essays and poems enjoyable as well as instructive reading. This gift for humorous introspection was demonstrated in one of his earlier poems which gained wide popularity, *Little Brother of the Rich*, in which the author dedicated himself to the succor of the pitiable rich, even to the point where he must "use my own inside to keep their wine and victuals warm."

Another literary figure claimed by Rochester as its own was Rositer Johnson. Born here when the city was still a small town, Johnson was educated at the University and remained always one of Rochester's

most devoted sons. Shortly after his graduation from the University, he married one of Dr. Kendrick's daughters, and left for New Hampshire, where he edited a small newspaper. A few years later he went to New York and soon made his reputation as an editor and anthologist. One book which must endear him to all Rochesterians is his novel of boy life, *Phaeton Rogers*, a delightful story based upon reminiscences of his childhood in the city on the Genesee.

At least two other native Rochesterians became well known as authors in the literary schools of New York and San Francisco, both of them having first sought expression in the newspapers.

Henry F. Keenan was born here in 1849, was educated in the local schools, and later studied at Heidelberg and Paris. After the Civil War, he joined the staff of the *Chronicle*, where his promotion was rapid. His success probably owed a great deal to his resourcefulness and imagination, both of which were amply exercised when he wrote so vivid an account of a balloon voyage which he had failed to cover that no valid report could compare with it for news appeal. His journalistic career took him later to Chicago, Philadelphia and New York, and he subsequently served as a correspondent both in Washington and in Paris.

In 1883, Keenan retired from his editorial work in New York to devote himself to writing novels. His first, *Trajan*, was published in 1884, and received a favorable review from *The Nation*, which concluded, "He can construct a plot, conceive rather brilliant and original characters; . . . he commands a wealth of picturesque and poetic expression. But everything is in excess."

Keenan's interests, experience and talent led him to portray the contemporary scene in urban society. As so many authors seem to have realized a few years later, the picture was not an attractive one. His experience as a journalist had given him a wealth of insight and information upon American political and business ethics which he incorporated into his books. *Trajan* was concerned with the corrupt Parisian society of the decadent Second Empire, a society of which he had direct knowledge. His next novel—and from all reports his most successful one—*The Money Makers*, was a canvas of intrigues in financial and political circles in Washington and New York.

Keenan was not a muckracker, antedating that school by at least a decade. His technique was that of the realist, or rather of the natural-

ist, in his faithful recording of detail and his dispassionate reporting of the less agreeable aspects of contemporary society. He has been called an economic novelist and perhaps it is this phrase which describes him most accurately. He was a capable author and craftsman—not an artist—his faults being those of the journalist. In his awareness of every variation of social viciousness, Keenan seems to have lost his perspective. His pages are overcrowded, and tragedy is lost.

Two more novels, *The Aliens* and *One of a Thousand*, followed *The Money Makers* before Keenan returned to a career of professional journalism in New York, Scranton, Baltimore, and finally Philadelphia.

Probably the name of Charles Warren Stoddard will be more readily recognized than that of Keenan. Stoddard was born here in 1843, the son of Samuel Burr and Harriett Freeman Stoddard. In 1855 he moved to California with his parents, and except for an unfortunate trip to New York, the young boy spent his youth in the rough and ready San Francisco of the fifties and sixties. He was a shy and sensitive child, troublesome only in that discipline of any kind was completely incomprehensible to him. It is no surprise that his formal education was not of long duration, although he did receive a fairly sound background in the schools of Rochester and San Francisco.

Publicity and criticism were always to cause him a certain amount of honest anguish and, to shield his self-consciousness, he published his first poems under the alliterative anonymity of "Pip Pepperpod." He became a close friend of Francis Bret Harte and Ina Coolbrith, the leaders of that San Francisco school of writers which left so great a mark upon American fiction. The patience and sympathy of such friends as Harte, Joaquin Miller and, later, Mark Twain, had much to do with Stoddard's eventual success.

After periodic, despairing threats to go off to the hills and become a shepherd, Stoddard finally found his literary forte in descriptive essays, and he was instrumental in popularizing the South Sea locale which Stevenson later found so fascinating. There was something in Stoddard's nature which responded to Tahitian or Polynesian manners more readily than to the more formal society of Europe and America. His easy, relaxed style, sensuous, occasionally extravagant, was eminently suited to that subject. William Dean Howells, then the dictator of American letters, was enchanted with Stoddard's *South Sea Idylls* and in his introduction to the volume wrote that Stoddard "had done

these things once for all; no one need ever write of the South Seas again." Another critic lamented that America criminally ignored its two greatest living authors, Melville and Stoddard. (It is interesting to note that the subject which brought Stoddard to fame, the South Seas, was that which was in part at least, responsible for Melville's fall into disfavor.)

The career of Charles Wolcott Balestier, who seemed destined for real literary fame, was unfortunately cut short before that ambitious young author and publisher had reached his thirtieth year. Born in Rochester and educated here in the public schools, Balestier left Cornell after a year's study and returned to Rochester to become dramatic reporter for the *Express*. He is remembered as an eccentric, rather feverish youth, given to bicycle riding and Oscar Wilde fashions in knickers. He is said to have written several short stories for publication in the local press, and one of his novels, *A Potent Philter*, was published in the *Herald* in 1884. However, his devotion to literature took him to New York where he worked on the *Tribune*, and later to London and the continent where he won success as both author and literary agent.

Whatever Rochester's opinion of him was (and his eccentricities are recalled with greater ease than his talent), the men then important in literature thought highly of Balestier. Henry James, Edmund Gosse, Howells and Kipling, with whom he collaborated on one occasion, all mourned his death as a great loss to the literary world.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: Among the materials which proved of real value in preparing this study were George Haushalter's unpublished portrait of "Sherlock Andrews," Jane Marsh Parker's series, "Literature in Rochester," published in the *Union & Advertiser* in 1884, and a number of obituary scrapbooks. These and practically all of the works discussed here are on file at the Rochester Public Library. I should like to express my appreciation to Miss Emma B. Swift of the Local History Division for her generous cooperation in locating these and other reference materials for me. It was through the courtesy of Miss Jeanette Huntington that I was privileged to read Mrs. Alling's enlightening history of the Wednesday Morning Club.

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