

## HERSCHEL V. JONES<sup>1</sup>

Herschel V. Jones, eminent publisher and editor, patron of literature and the arts, and distinguished collector in both fields, was born in the village of Jefferson, Schoharie County, New York, on August 30, 1861. He was the son of William S. Jones and Helen Merchant Jones, of mingled Welsh, English, and Scotch descent tracing back to Revolutionary stock on both sides. As the name indicates, his paternal line was Welsh in straight descent from colonists who founded the town of Swansea in the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1663. From that ancestry perhaps came an inheritance of rugged determination and of strong religious feeling. His equally strong literary tastes are said to have come from his father's mother's family, the Warings. On his own mother's side, the Merchants, the Smiths, and the Brainerds were of sturdy stock reaching back to the beginnings of New England.

His grandparents on both sides, moving westward from New England with the tide of emigration that followed the Revolutionary War, took part in the founding of the village of Jefferson on the western edge of the Catskills. William Jones, the father, worked a small farm of twenty-six acres and operated a village store. The mother's father was a semi-retired farmer of the New England type, active and influential. The political affiliations of the family may perhaps be guessed from the fact that the boy born in 1861 was named Herschel in honor of Herschel Vespasian Johnson of Georgia, a strong Union sympathizer and candidate in 1860 for the vice presidency of the United States on the ticket with Stephen A. Douglas, put forward by the northern Democrats.

Early boyhood in the village home, it may be supposed, was well adapted to develop the sterner virtues, but not so con-

<sup>1</sup> A memorial read on January 21 at the eightieth annual meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society. *Ed.*

ducive to cultivating the more refined, if lesser, values of life. There were only nine books in the family library, but one was Abbott's life of Cyrus the Great, and whatever may be thought of that monarch from the modern viewpoint, he became a hero to the imaginative and purposeful boy. Education was afforded him up to the age of fifteen in the public school and in the Delaware Literary Institute in the neighboring village of Franklin; and there it stopped. But if he did not have a formal education in the usual sense of the word, he had what is more important—a fixed goal that he had set before himself together with a determination to reach it. As a youth he early resolved two things—at some time in his life to be “the proprietor of a great newspaper and the owner of a great library.”

Nothing can hold back a boy like that. At the mature age of ten he published his first newspaper, entirely composed and printed in pencil with his own hand, with a “sworn” circulation varying from six to eight—a “family” newspaper in the best sense of the word. At twelve he was haunting the printing office of the village newspaper; at fifteen he got a job in it; at eighteen he actually bought the paper and plant at a price of seven hundred dollars, paying down two hundred and fifty dollars borrowed from his grandfather Merchant and giving his note for the balance. Six years later, upon his removal to Minnesota, he sold the paper at double the price he paid for it.

Mr. Jones came to Minnesota and to Minneapolis in 1885, a youth of twenty-four, unknown, seeking his fortune, as so many others have done before and since. The *Minneapolis Journal* was then a small-town newspaper of four pages. It had been in existence just seven years. The youthful journalist soon obtained a position on the paper and became one of its reportorial staff of three members. Thus commenced a connection that was to last almost continuously for forty-three years, until the day of Mr. Jones's death. His “cover,” commencing modestly, soon developed as his talents revealed themselves into special “assignments” including the state legisla-

ture and interviews with famous men. Most notable, however, was his work as a market reporter, especially in the field of crop estimates, in which he gradually achieved a national reputation. His success and interest in this field led him in 1901 to establish the *Commercial West*, a weekly trade paper devoted to grain and finance, a paper that still maintains a high reputation, though in other hands.

After a brief excursion into the business world in the trade represented by this paper, Mr. Jones's great opportunity came in 1908, when, upon the death of E. B. Haskell of Boston, the owner of the *Journal*, his estate offered that newspaper, now grown to metropolitan size and character, for sale. Nothing daunted by the price of \$1,200,000 nor by the obligations of debt that it was necessary to incur to raise so large a sum, Mr. Jones with characteristic courage, some would call it very great courage, bought the paper.

For over twenty years until his death Mr. Jones carried the responsibility, wielded the influence, and enjoyed the prestige that accompany the control and direction of a great metropolitan newspaper. He unfurled to the breeze at the outset the flag that still flies from the *Journal* towers, bearing the inscription, "The principles that should govern the publication of a newspaper are honesty and fairness. The decision on any question should be submitted to this test — is it fair and is it honest?" Not less significant was the high moral tone that Mr. Jones endeavored to give his newspaper. In the character of its news and advertising, in the high level of its editorials, and in its almost daily quotations from the Bible there was evidenced the seriousness with which he took the responsibilities of his profession.

Two special honors came to him. He became one of the directors of the Associated Press and he was selected as one of a small group of American editors to visit the battle fields of Europe during the World War as guests of the English government. Thus he had gone far in the realization of one

of those ambitions to which he dedicated himself as a lad. He had become "the proprietor of a great newspaper."

The field of journalism is not far distant from the field of literature and art. Their paths cross and recross. Mr. Jones was self-educated to a degree, but self-education when it is in earnest has a wonderful way of sinking in. He early became interested in books and literature. His tastes led him by the well-known alluring stages eventually into the field of collecting. He had the unique distinction of having acquired during his lifetime four collections, all notable, and at least two pre-eminently great. His earliest venture was in the field of collecting first editions of modern authors, and to this he was originally led by picking up a first edition of Browning's *Inn Album*. This collection of about six hundred volumes was sold at auction some years ago. By this time Mr. Jones's appetite as a collector had been keenly whetted and his ambition thoroughly aroused. He turned to incunabula and the early English poets and dramatists. In this field he collected some two thousand volumes to form a library which it is no exaggeration to say was one of the outstanding private collections of the world. This entire collection was sold at auction at the famous Jones sales in New York in 1918 and 1919, realizing not far from four hundred thousand dollars.

His next venture was in the field of general literature. He gathered a "reading library" of some three thousand volumes, selected with rare judgment and taste, many of them first editions. This collection remains to his family. His last collection was of Americana, and this also remains at his death. It is a monument to the courage, boldness, and swiftness of attack, as well as the soundness of judgment that characterized Mr. Jones in all his many-sided activities. In less than six years, during a part of which time he was in ill health, and in addition to all his other activities, he gathered together some seventeen hundred volumes, largely original first editions, covering the salient periods and episodes of American history

from Columbus to the Klondike, a period of nearly four hundred years. One of his last acts before his death was to supervise the preparation of a catalogue *de luxe* in two volumes of about three hundred of the more valuable of these books, which he has entitled *Adventures in Americana, 1492-1897: The Romance of Voyage and Discovery*. This collection it is conservative to say is one of the notable collections if not the most notable private collection of Americana in this country.

Mr. Jones's interest in the field of art was no less marked, though less known. Long a member of the board of trustees of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, he secured and later presented as a gift to that institution the Jones, formerly in part the so-called Ladd collection of prints and etchings comprising over six thousand items, covering a wide range of the graphic arts from the earliest beginnings. The collection is valued at the present time at not far from three-quarters of a million dollars and it is growing more valuable with the years. To this gift will ultimately be added under the terms of Mr. Jones's will a rare group of prints and etchings of old masters which formed the nucleus of a private collection that he was assembling at the time of his death. Not less notable in quality also was his own private collection of paintings.

In all these adventures, Mr. Jones, while often displaying great business acumen in his purchases, was not actuated by a mere spirit of gain. He was really fond of his books and his prints as living things. He frequently collected in a field where there was no general interest and hence no reasonable expectation of money gain. He was a genuine book-lover; and he had realized the second of his youthful dreams—he had become the owner, if not the creator, of a great library.

Of his deep interest in the Minnesota Historical Society it is hardly necessary to speak. He became a life member of the society in 1904 and a member of the executive council in 1921. On repeated occasions his assistance given personally or through the medium of the *Journal* was of great value to this organiza-

tion. A crowning token of the high esteem in which he held the society and its work is the gift in his will, among other bequests of a public nature, of the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars to the society "for the purchase of books, pamphlets and manuscripts relating to subjects, individuals and events having a bearing upon the history and development of Minnesota." This gift is by far the largest measured in money that the society has ever received.

Mr. Jones was married to Lydia A. Wilcox, daughter of a leading lawyer of Jefferson, New York, on September 30, 1885. Four sons and three daughters were born of their union, all of whom, together with the widow, survive.

Mr. Jones died on May 24, 1928. He left his impress for good on his day and generation. May we not hope also that

Somewhere, somehow, in the sounding house vast,  
Is practiced that strength, beneficent, firm.

EDWARD C. GALE

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA



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