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THE HOOSIER SCHOOLMASTER IN MINNESOTA¹

On July 4, 1857, a boating expedition near Cannon City, Minnesota, ended catastrophically with the capsizing of the craft and the drowning of four people. When the time for the funeral arrived, it was discovered that the regularly officiating minister was unavoidably engaged elsewhere. At this juncture a stripling but recently arrived from Indiana announced himself a Methodist minister and volunteered his services. Thus it was that a lad of twenty who had journeyed to Minnesota chiefly afoot performed the memorial ceremonies. That stripling was Edward Eggleston, later nationally famous as the first of the Hoosier realists and everywhere known as the "Hoosier Schoolmaster," and that boating accident became one of the central incidents in Eggleston's only Minnesota novel, *The Mystery of Metropolisville*.²

But Eggleston's first visit to the territory had come over twelve months earlier. In the spring of 1856 the boy's health had broken down completely; lung hemorrhages had developed and he was apparently destined to an early death from consumption. Hoping to ameliorate his condition somewhat his mother took him on a river voyage to St. Louis. There the boy fell in with a group of similarly af-

¹A paper read on June 18, 1937, at the Little Falls session of the fifteenth state historical convention held under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society. *Ed.*

²William McKinley, *A Story of Minnesota Methodism*, 64 (Cincinnati, 1911).

flicted people who were en route for Minnesota, which had been represented to them as having an ideal climate for those suffering from tuberculosis. Eggleston, although obliged to leave his mother and having cash enough to defray only the cost of his passage, agreed to join the rest. So it was that he arrived in Minnesota in May, penniless and alone.³

But whatever the lad lacked in strength and endurance he made up in spirit. Undeterred by his physical condition, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the life of the frontier community. Jobs were plentiful if hardly remunerative, and Eggleston, demanding little but a chance to work in the open air, had no trouble in keeping himself busy. He was chain bearer for a surveying party, amateur surveyor himself, driver of a three-yoke ox team engaged in breaking the prairie loam, peddler of a recipe for making soap. In after years he was twitted for the unministerial character of some of his occupations, particularly the last. But his reply was firm: "I am prouder of my soap recipe selling than I am of my preaching there; for the soap was above criticism, while the sermons certainly were not." As his brother George, his only biographer, wrote, Edward's labors may have lacked dignity, but they were indubitably honest.⁴

By the end of the summer of 1856 the lad found his health marvelously improved, so much so that he determined for awhile to contribute whatever he could to the free state cause in Kansas. Securing a dirk pocketknife and equipping himself with a plentiful supply of cheese and crackers (they made up in economy for their lack of nutrition!), he wandered west and south as far as Cedar Falls, Iowa. There he decided that his zeal for the Kansans was hardly equal to the task of transporting himself on foot to the scene of action, and reluctantly he turned eastward. At

³ George Cary Eggleston, *The First of the Hoosiers*, 261, 264 (Philadelphia, 1903).

⁴ Eggleston, *First of the Hoosiers*, 265.

Muscatine he crossed the Mississippi, and at Galesburg he spent what little money he still had for railroad transportation back to his home at Vevay, Indiana. Although his months in Minnesota had not supplied enough energy to enable him to reach Kansas, they had done wonders for a naturally frail constitution, so much so that he walked between three hundred and four hundred miles before he finally deemed it wiser to journey by rail.⁵

Home once more, Eggleston decided to renew his studies for the ministry, and he succeeded so well, without the benefit of much formal education, that that very autumn he was ordained and was assigned a circuit containing ten different preaching stations in southeastern Indiana. Plunging into his work with characteristic abandon, he was a welcome addition, despite his youth and inexperience, to the ministry of the state. But he soon overtaxed himself and after a period of severe clerical labor he became convinced that he could not live longer in his native climate. "At the end of six months of zealous preaching," he wrote long afterward, "I was again a candidate for the grave." At that time the tide of immigration westward was at a crest, and Eggleston had no difficulty in turning his thoughts and aspirations toward the frontier. But his motive was not that which impelled the land-hungry mobs in the direction of the setting sun. "The only fortune he sought," declared his brother George, "was the privilege of living, the ability to go on breathing in spite of the condition of his lungs. Beyond that he had no hope or expectation, no desire, even, except to do well and faithfully the work in the world to which he believed that God had called him."⁶ Obviously it was the quest for health which led Eggleston back to Minnesota, just as it was the search for a more suitable climate that induced Thoreau to penetrate the trans-Mississippi country at

⁵ Edward Eggleston, "Formative Influences," in *The Forum*, 10:288 (November, 1890).

⁶ Eggleston, *First of the Hoosiers*, 305.

the tag end of his life. Nine years were to elapse before Eggleston again left the frontier.

At the session of the Minnesota Methodist conference held in Winona in August, 1857, the ministerial status of Edward Eggleston was discussed. His papers had not yet arrived from Indiana, but on motion of Bishop Edward R. Ames the conference waived the formality and examined the candidate regarding his orthodoxy and ability. According to one of his later colleagues, the Reverend William McKinley, members of the examining board were amazed by the contrast between the aspirant's youth and his mental maturity; they accorded him a hearty and unanimous recommendation. As McKinley asserted, "There was something about him that attracted people at once. His powers of observation, description, and conversation were phenomenal. He could talk more and talk better than any man I ever knew. His geniality, natural eloquence, and magnetic personality made him a favorite everywhere."⁷

Eggleston's first charge was at Traverse des Sioux, where he preached in one of the earliest churches built in southwestern Minnesota. His congregation was hardly numerous, consisting of fifteen members and twenty probationers. They included a few white settlers, hunters, trappers, half-breeds, and Indians. His duties involved an immense amount of travel, usually on foot, both in summer and winter. He lived in the open air almost as much as if he had been a *voyageur*—naturally the best possible existence for him. Sometimes he chose to walk only because he was too poor to buy or rent a horse, for salaries were meager and hardships common in the Methodist ministry of the day. Annual stipends ranged from nine to forty dollars, such pitiful returns in a sparsely settled land that the men were frequently obliged to resort to hunting in order to obtain food. One preacher was in the habit of shooting red squirrels for his dinner as he rode to visit his scattered parishioners.

⁷ McKinley, *Minnesota Methodism*, 64.

Eggleston himself pastured sheep part of the day. In some manner, however, the young clergyman must have managed to scrape together a pittance, for on March 18, 1858, he took himself a wife, Lizzie Snider of St. Peter.⁸

One incident of his first year's pastorate attests eloquently to Eggleston's energy and determination. Frail as he was, he once enlisted in a volunteer troop raised for a punitive expedition against Indian marauders. For some time all went well. But after a particularly long march his commander said to him, "Parson, you're a good fellow, but you're not strong enough for a soldier. Now, I've got more men than horses here, and I want you to quit as a man and let me have your horse for a strong young fellow to ride." Humiliated, but perforce consenting, Eggleston dismounted and returned to the settlements on foot. The state later paid him for his horse.⁹

Eggleston's probationary period on the frontier was short. Despite the fact that the annual roll of the church indicated a drop in membership in the Traverse and St. Peter parish, the young preacher was promoted in 1859 to the Market Street Church in St. Paul. In the *Minutes* of the Minnesota conference of the Methodist Episcopal church for 1859 Eggleston is listed as a full-fledged member—he had previously been included as "on trial"—and he was ordained in the same year. His services, moreover, were recognized in a different field, for the record contains this comment on his part in the dissemination of the Bible in the young community: "The American Bible Society has not abated its activity. Its auxiliary in this State, under the efficient agency of REV. E. EGGLESTON, has now sixty branch societies, five hundred local agents, and has raised \$1,000 during the year, and purchased \$1,500 worth of Bibles and

⁸ Eggleston, *First of the Hoosiers*, 314; Minnesota Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes*, 1858; Chauncey Hobart, *History of Methodism in Minnesota*, 166 (Red Wing, 1887); *Dictionary of American Biography*, 6:54 (New York, 1931).

⁹ Eggleston, *First of the Hoosiers*, 315.

Testaments from the American Bible Society.”¹⁰ Thus his record was so remarkable that at the age of twenty-one, in October, 1859, Eggleston found himself pastor, in the capital city, of one of the largest Methodist churches in Minnesota.

He remained in his St. Paul pastorate for a little over a year before the itinerant system of the Methodist church compelled his removal to Stillwater. During that period he became well known in the religious life of the city. At an anniversary of the Minnesota Sabbath School Society held in St. Paul on June 12, 1860, he gave the chief address of welcome to the delegates, and on the same evening at the meeting of the Minnesota Bible Society he opened the session with a few remarks about the distribution of books and with some pointed criticism of the sermon delivered by Bishop Thomas L. Grace on the previous St. Patrick's Day.¹¹ Of the second address the St. Paul *Daily Pioneer and Democrat* for June 14 remarked acidly, “Mr. E. is a fluent speaker, and made a good address, barring a little uncharitableness.”

But the most interesting incident of Eggleston's earliest St. Paul residence has no connection with his ecclesiastical career. In the early summer of 1860 a group of scientists from Cambridge, Massachusetts, passed through Minnesota en route to Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River, where they hoped to view a total eclipse of the sun on July 18. This party, led by Simon Newcomb, the distinguished astronomer, also included William Ferrel, the mathematician, and Samuel Scudder, the entomologist. During an enforced delay in St. Paul because of transportation difficulties the scientists extended an invitation to the young minister to join them, at least on part of their journey, and Eggle-

¹⁰ Minnesota Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes*, 1869, p. 7.

¹¹ *Daily Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), June 13, 14, 1860. The criticism of Bishop Grace evoked certain epistolary comments in which Eggleston's name figured. See *Pioneer and Democrat*, June 16, 17, 1860.

ton eagerly consented. So it was that the latter part of June and almost all of July found him absent on an expedition which was hardly consonant with his clerical duties. But Eggleston's health was always unreliable and there is little doubt that he accompanied the expedition chiefly for the opportunity it gave him to live in the open air.¹²

The party left St. Paul on June 16, 1860, and reached the Willis House at St. Cloud the same night, their conveyance being one of the stagecoaches which Burbank and Company had recently inaugurated between St. Paul and the Red River. From St. Cloud westward the progress of the party was recorded by Eggleston himself, who at intervals sent longish letters back to the *Daily Minnesotian* of St. Paul. These missives, signed "E. E.," are not only excellent first-hand accounts of the country and the almost insuperable obstacles met by the travelers; they are also remarkable for their graphic accuracy and they suggest Eggleston's later mastery of provincial scenes and characters. Certainly it is not difficult to see the mature realist in such a picture of a stage companion as the following. At one of the stops, according to the writer, a very amusing native entered the coach and at once began to denounce temperance houses. Whence ensued this colloquy:

"Do you sell whiskey?"

"Yes, I keep a leetle for a case of immergency, it's mighty good for colicky horses. You can tell one of these 'ere temperance houses by the great number of dead horses layin' about them."

"Ah, then you only keep liquor for horses?"

"I keep it for the public, sir, it's mighty good for sickness."

"Well," we rejoined, "then you don't sell to any but sick people."

"I don't axe 'em whether they're sick or not, there's a heap o' sick people passes along this road."

¹² Scudder, using the pseudonym of "A. Rochester Fellow," wrote an account of the trip, which was published under the title *The Winnipeg Country, or Roughing It with an Eclipse Party* (Boston, 1886). Curiously enough, he makes no mention whatever of Eggleston. Scudder's pictures of the party's experiences en route to Fort Garry harmonize perfectly with the accounts sent by Eggleston to the *Daily Minnesotian* of St. Paul, but are considerably less vivid.

Eggleston's second letter, dated June 18, was written from Kandota, in Todd County. He reported first his departure, against his will, on Sunday, but, he added philosophically, "it is a stern fact that eclipses wait for no one. There was no alternative but that of traveling or of being too late." So he solaced himself by reading the Episcopal service out of doors. His attention was almost immediately attracted by the terrain he was traversing.

I have never seen a more handsome or more fertile valley than that of the Sauk. We have not seen a foot of poor ground in the last sixty miles. The prairie is rolling, but not broken, and popple and tamarack are almost the only kinds of timber. I saw a house built of tamarack with the bark peeled off, so as to leave it spotted by the pieces of underbark. At a short distance it appeared almost as beautiful as rosewood.

Kandota, a townsite platted in 1856, he found consisting of one house and five people. And yet he approved. "The town is like Eden before the creation of Eve."¹³

In his next letter, written from Breckenridge on June 20, Eggleston devoted much of his space to objurgations on the roads and the impediments confronting the traveler.

We have sometimes sunk into the hubs where there were no fence rails and then we would fall to work unloading and afterwards reloading our thousand pounds of baggage. We have waded, on an average, one slough per hour, in order to lighten the stage. Sometimes we have had to wade the worst sloughs with boxes or trunks on our shoulders. We reached here at 11½ o'clock last night in lumber wagons, having abandoned the coach on account of the roads. Our boots were full of water and our nether garments completely saturated.

In addition to the roads, the insect pests drew Eggleston's attention, and he professed himself unable to find words to depict the voracity of Red River mosquitoes. "We threw our netting over our faces but they worked their way through every opening. For hour after hour they found their way to face, hands, eyes and nose but with stoical fortitude we 'grinned and bore it.'" Despite these drawbacks,

¹³ *Minnesotian*, June 22, 1860.

however, Eggleston still viewed the country with enthusiasm.

The finest country I have ever seen is on the ridges that separate the waters of the Mississippi from those of Red River. The country is beautifully undulating, and completely dotted over with the most beautiful poplar groves. Among these little hills and groves, are lakes of the most enchanting beauty. . . . The left hand of the Sauk is tolerably well timbered, but the right has hardly a tree on it. I am satisfied from the inquiries I have made, that the soil both on the Sauk river and on the "divide" is not surpassed by any in the world. And yet not one claim in ten is yet taken in all this magnificent section of our State.

The correspondent ended his letter with the remark that, although Alexandria and Evansville were listed as towns, the former had only two families resident and the latter one. At Breckenridge, where a new two-story hotel was building, the party stopped at a sod tavern. Eggleston also commented on the fare which obtained at the various houses en route: salt pork, raw bread, and potatoes, and coffee which invariably grew weaker the farther west they advanced.¹⁴

At the next stage of the journey, Georgetown on the Red River, the traveler noticed especially the conformation of the valley, its flatness and wetness, and the marked topographical change away from the water.

The whole country there is beautifully undulating and very fertile. The soil in the Valley of the Red River is, as far as I can learn, very much like that of Indiana and Ohio,—not so quick as that of Minnesota generally, but very fertile. It is on this account that it is not profitable to raise Indian corn here, though it is a fine wheat and potatoe country. The water has not that transparent appearance here that it has through other parts of the State.

He observed also that the greatest obstacle to settlement of the Red River Valley was the absence of timber and yet, predicting on the basis of what had happened in the treeless prairies of Illinois, he foresaw a future population for the area.

¹⁴ *Minnesotian*, July 6, 1860.

At Georgetown the party was welcomed by the howls of dogs and the shouts of the *bois brulés*. More formally the travelers were received by Alexander Murray, the manager of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post, and by Isaac Atwater, the United States government surveyor. Eggleston was unquestionably glad to be met so hospitably and to be once more in reputable lodgings, but he did not speak well of the dish with which the group was regaled the first night—"rub-a-boo" or pemmican cooked with potatoes!

Chief among the sights at Georgetown was the "Anson Northup," the tiny river steamer which was to convey the scientific party to Fort Garry. Eggleston described vividly how the entire population of the hamlet, twenty-five in all, awaited eagerly the whistle and smoke puff of "the little forerunner of civilization." Nor has anyone better depicted the vessel itself as it rounded the bend:

One chimney—rough looking hull—and a steering oar fixed on in front to aid the pilot in making the sudden turns necessary in order to navigate the bends. I could not imagine that this non-descript, but neat looking little affair, had any features of resemblance—any traits in common with the steamboats below—until I saw the colored chambermaid looking out one of the port holes intended to represent windows. Diminutive as is the Anson Northrup [*sic*], she is a model of neatness within.

It was not always, however, that the traveler superseded the clergyman in Eggleston, and he proudly recorded for the gratification of the readers of his letter that, to the best of his knowledge, he had preached the first Protestant sermon ever heard in the upper Red River country.¹⁵

Eggleston's last letter was written when he was still

¹⁵ *Minnesotian*, July 11, 1860. Another description of the "Anson Northup" on the Red River is included in an article entitled "The-Man-That-Draws-the-Handcart," which Eggleston wrote for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* of February, 1894. "Nothing could have been more awkward than that tub of a boat," according to Eggleston, "plunging every now and again headlong into the banks despite the frantic exertions of the pilot, aided by the long steering-oar on the bow. We steamed some three hundred miles, according to the estimate of the boatmen, without seeing on the banks a human being or a house."

aboard the "Anson Northup" and ready to land at Fort Garry, with the vessel carrying the Stars and Stripes at the bow and the Union Jack at the stern. He had much to say of the obstacles of river navigation.

The river above the mouth of Red Lake River is very narrow and is so exceedingly crooked that it is not unusual for the boat to run toward every point of the compass in the distance of two miles. Two men stand constantly by the steering oar, that is on the bow, to which I alluded before. If there is a very short bend to the right the pilot sings out "right," which is repeated by the captain to the hands at the oar, when the blade of the oar is immediately turned to the right of the bow and dipped. When the boat is turned sufficiently the pilot calls out "that'll do!"—when the oar is lifted. In some parts of the river the oar is kept constantly at work and even then it is impossible to turn the boat quick enough.

Indeed, the mate Hutchinson felt so strongly about the constant twisting of the channel that he ordered the stoker to use crooked sticks to assist the vessel around the bends! Eggelston had warm praise for all the officers of the little craft, the captain, the pilot, the clerk, and the mate. But the most interesting character he encountered on the trip was young George Northrup, already widely renowned as scout, frontiersman, and Indian fighter. Northrup, about whom Eggelston later wrote a long magazine article, was the "Kit Carson of the Northwest," amiable, soft-spoken, and unusually cultivated for one in his environment. The traveler described Northrup as an authority on Indian life and linguistics and altogether one of the most remarkable men he had ever met.¹⁶

Eggelston closed his letters to the *Minnesotian* with several comments on the people and the topography of the region.

I have seen Pembina. Five houses and a Cree wigwam compose the metropolis.—As your readers nearly all know the principal part of the settlers live at St. Josephs 31 miles up the Pembina river. There are some settlements above Pembina on the Red river and some on the Pembina river, containing in all about 40 families.

¹⁶ "The-Man-That-Draws-the-Handcart" is essentially a biographical sketch of Northrup, who was watchman on the "Anson Northup."

The Red River, he observed, abounded in fish, notably sturgeon and catfish of enormous size, buffalo still came within thirty miles of the water, while elk and deer frequented its tributaries. The Red Lake River he described as larger than its neighbor with its banks better timbered. The land of its watershed was almost all tillable too, but navigation on the stream was difficult because of the frequent rapids.¹⁷

At Fort Garry Eggleston left the party of scientists, presumably returning by the same route as that already described. Why he did not continue the whole distance to the Saskatchewan River is a matter of conjecture. Possibly he feared the hazards and the exposure of the remainder of the trip; more likely he was too conscientious to remain away from his congregation for an extended period. At any rate the latter part of July found him once more in St. Paul, and on July 21 the *Minnesotian* remarked: "Rev. Edward Egglestone, pastor of the Market street Methodist Church, who has been absent during the past few weeks, has returned, and will preach as usual tomorrow [*Sunday*]."

Shortly after the young minister resumed his parochial duties he was transferred, this time to Stillwater, where he served during the remainder of 1860 and for most of 1861. The *Stillwater Messenger* for September 4, 1860, announced that Eggleston had been appointed Methodist minister, and subsequent issues of the paper refer to his performance of various routine duties: conducting prayer meetings, officiating at funerals and weddings, preaching on certain occasions. Moreover, because the young clergyman's term of service in Stillwater coincided roughly with the opening of the Civil War, his name was linked with various efforts to exhort and provide for the comfort of recruits for the army. One highly interesting memory of Eggleston's sojourn in the St. Croix Valley town is a sermon which he delivered shortly after the firing on Fort Sumter. His congregation liked it so well that they prevailed upon the editor

¹⁷ *Minnesotian*, July 18, 1860.

of the *Messenger* to reprint it in the issue of May 28, 1861. In this sermon Eggleston spoke on "Christian Patriotism" and declared that although he disliked flinging the weight of the pulpit into political strife, he felt that government was ordained by God and that a revolt against government was a crime against God. He professed a hatred for war but he asserted that even Christians were allowed to protect themselves, and that anarchy, despotism, and slavery were worse evils than war. Finally, he affirmed that it was the duty of good Americans to defend their country, and he expressed himself wholeheartedly in favor of the North.

Although few other details of his life in Stillwater survive, there are several allusions to his intense love of literature while he was quartered on the shores of the St. Croix and to the extensive reading (and the somewhat abortive writing) which he did at the time. "I remember particularly," he wrote in after years, "a paper on Beranger and his songs, which I published while trying to evangelize the red-shirted lumbermen on the St. Croix." His first meeting with Milton's poetry is also, curiously enough, inextricably linked with the primitive background of the lumbering country. For one night as he stopped for a lodging at a hut near the river he found a copy of "L'Allegro," and he records how he looked out of the window at the "deep trap-rock dalles through which the dark, pine-stained waters of the St. Croix River run swift," and how he saw a raft with several red-shirted lumbermen aboard emerge from the gorge into the open reaches below, at the same time that he was allowing his fancy to dwell on the lines of the great Puritan poet.¹⁸

During this time Eggleston was also becoming more prominent in the administration of his church. At the annual conference held at Red Wing in the autumn following his return from the Red River Valley he was chosen an

¹⁸ Eggleston, in *The Forum*, 10:290; Meredith Nicholson, *The Provincial American and Other Papers*, 41 (Boston and New York, 1912).

elder; he had already been named to two standing committees, those on Sunday schools and on periodical literature. The *Minutes* of the session contain two reports signed by Eggleston in his capacity of committeeman, one recommending the establishment of a church paper in "one, and, if possible, in both the Scandinavian dialects," and the other suggesting that Methodist ministers be dissuaded from establishing independent periodicals in opposition to those edited by the church boards. In particular Eggleston recognized the increasing utility of newspapers and magazines in proselytism and urged that even greater use be made of such organs.¹⁹ At this same Red Wing conference he was appointed a deacon and was selected as a member of the visiting committee to Hamline University for 1861.

After his service of a year as resident minister in Stillwater, Eggleston requested that he be granted a superannuated relationship for 1861-62; consequently he was not assigned a station and was listed instead among fifteen superannuated preachers. It may seem odd that a man of twenty-five should be included in a group composed of the old and infirm, but Eggleston's health was never robust and he expended it so recklessly that he was obliged to take periodic rests in order to continue at all.

The years 1862 and 1863 found him in St. Paul again, this time as pastor of the Jackson Street Methodist Church. Eggleston returned to the capital with considerable eagerness. He had just recovered from a long illness, his family was well, and his congregation welcomed him sincerely. In a letter to Thomas Simpson, dated November 10, 1862, he remarked optimistically about his position and recounted how his parishioners had recently presented Mrs. Eggleston with "an elegant cloak and bonnet" and himself with "a splendid overcoat, cap, gloves & overshoes." Moreover, "All these articles are in about as costly a style as they could

¹⁹ Minnesota Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes*, 1860, p. 25, 26.

be. You can imagine that such a manifestation of kindly feeling at the beginning of my year is very grateful." In the same letter Eggleston referred to a recent visit in Winona during the annual conference of the Methodist church and commended the hospitality of the Simpsons. "As it was I lacked only you in order to [have] the highest possible enjoyment of the session. I never felt so much how pleasant a place Winona was until then. I think a year there would cure me."²⁰

The Jackson Street church in St. Paul was perhaps the most important Methodist church in the state, what with a hundred and twenty members and five probationers and property valued in excess of five thousand dollars. Eggleston's own salary, his "estimated claim," was six hundred dollars. During his incumbency there was a marked increase in Sunday school activity, "Mr. Eggleston being known as a Sunday School man." He was also given the credit for having first devised the Sunday school railroad excursion. One other detail of his second St. Paul pastorate is worth recording, since it connects Eggleston as a minister with the Sioux Outbreak of 1862. On November 4 of that year he and the Reverend J. D. Pope conducted funeral services for seven members of Eggleston's congregation who had been killed in Indian campaigns.²¹

At the annual meeting of the Methodist church which was held in St. Paul in the fall of 1863, Eggleston submitted a report on the spread of Methodism among the Scandinavian populace and pointed out the fruitful field which awaited missionary activity. But he counseled great expedition lest "the ascendancy of the pure doctrines of Wesleyanism" be successfully challenged by "the effete

²⁰ The letter is in the Larson-Town collection, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. Thomas Simpson was a prominent lawyer and banker in Winona.

²¹ Hobart, *Methodism in Minnesota*, 168; Earnest C. Parish, *A Brief History of the Church Known as Market Street, Jackson Street, Central Park* (St. Paul, 1933).

superstitions of pseudo-Lutheranism." Among his recommendations to gain the desired objective were field work, added financial support, and foreign-language periodicals.²²

At the end of his pastorate in St. Paul Eggleston again pleaded to be excused from parochial bonds because of ill health, and he was not assigned to another pastorate until the end of 1864. But meanwhile he played rather an important role in the municipal life of St. Paul. Temporarily freed from his ministerial duties he found it necessary to cast about for some other form of employment which would be remunerative without exacting so much of his vitality. Throughout 1864 he was agent for the Home Life Insurance Company; in addition he became a kind of expert showman, giving illustrated stereopticon lectures on travel or about celebrated men at various halls and churches in the Twin Cities; finally, he was instrumental in organizing a municipal free library and he served as the first public librarian in St. Paul.²³

Various newspaper notices testify to public interest in Eggleston's stereopticon ventures. The *Saint Paul Press* of January 3, 1864, announced that Eggleston would give a display at Ingersoll's Hall, using a large canvas of 225 square feet and presenting views of Windsor Castle, Melrose Abbey, and other famous scenes. Two days later the *Press* reported that the exhibition was disappointing because the supply of gas, which Eggleston apparently manufactured himself, had leaked away and that as a consequence the projection was blurred and dim. Later in the month, however, these technical difficulties had apparently been overcome, for the *Press* of January 27 pronounced the en-

²² Minnesota Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes*, 1863, p. 29.

²³ The following notice was inserted in the *Saint Paul Daily Press* and the *Saint Paul Pioneer* at intervals throughout 1863 and 1864: "Home Life Insurance Company, New York, offers the most liberal advantages to parties desiring to effect insurance." It was signed by the "Rev. Edward Eggleston, State Agent for Minnesota."

tertainment an unqualified success: "He has got his instrument in complete working order now, and it threw up the views on the canvass last night with wonderful effect, to which the spectators testified by their frequent applause." Throughout January and February Eggleston used his stereopticon to great advantage, educating and delighting his audiences at the same time. His first displays were apparently free, but with the perfecting of the instrument he began to charge admission, twenty-five cents for adults, fifteen cents for children. The money was presumably used to defray necessary expenses, since Eggleston showed some local views which had been specially prepared for stereopticon projection. He even went so far as to take photographs of living celebrities, some of them local personages, and to present them to his enraptured audiences.²⁴

More important than Eggleston's lecture work, however, was his effort to establish a public library. Up to the fall of 1863 St. Paul had had no institution of the sort, although both the Mercantile Library Association and the Y.M.C.A. maintained libraries for their own members. On October 30, however, the directors of both organizations convened in the rooms of the Ingersoll Block and formed the St. Paul Library Association. The officers for the remainder of 1863 included D. W. Ingersoll as president, D. A. Robertson as vice president, C. E. Mayo as recording secretary, William Dawson as treasurer, and Edward Eggleston as corresponding secretary and librarian. Shares in the new library association were valued at five dollars and businessmen were urged to contribute. By a fusion of the resources of the older institutions, the infant library began with about a thousand volumes, and it was agreed that a lease should be taken on the Y.M.C.A. rooms on the third floor of the Ingersoll Block at Bridge Square.²⁵

²⁴ *Press*, January 28, 31, February 4, 6, 23, 1864.

²⁵ E. D. Neill, *History of Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul*, 400 (Minneapolis, 1881); *Press*, October 31, 1863.

Naturally the work of organizing and unifying took some little time, but on November 11, 1863, the local papers carried the following notice anent the library:

The St. Paul library will be opened to-day. The Library and Reading Room will be kept open every day except Sunday, from 2 o'clock P. M., till 9 o'clock P. M. There are now about 2,000 volumes, and as many more will be added in the spring. After the first of January the Reading Room will be supplied with the best European and American periodicals. The payment of \$2.00 per annum entitles the person paying to take books from the library under the restrictions of the By-laws, and to all the privileges of the Reading Room.

EDWARD EGGLESTON, Librarian.

Eggleston's work in directing the library and in making its facilities generally available was not unappreciated. The *Press* for December 11, 1863, remarked that the institution was progressing admirably and praised its head. "Mr. Eggleston, who has charge of the arrangement and classification of the volumes, has peculiar talents as a librarian. We wish his services may be secured permanently in that capacity." But the first librarian did not remain long at his work. Late in January another meeting of the board was held at which Eggleston was named a director, but no mention of a librarian was made in the press; and by June of 1864 E. E. Edwards had become the librarian.²⁶

At the annual conference of the Methodist church in 1864 Eggleston was again assigned to a pastorate, this time in Winona, and late in the same year he began his service in his last Minnesota station. The Winona church was also an important one; its congregation numbered a hundred and sixty-five members and twenty-two probationers, and the church property was valued at four thousand dollars. The minister was paid an annual salary of eight hundred and fifty dollars and was allowed a hundred dollars for rental of the parsonage. During his residence in southern Minnesota, Eggleston figured rather prominently in community

²⁶ *Pioneer*, November 11, 1863; *Press*, November 11, 1863, January 21, June 8, 1864.

life. In the winter of 1866, for example, he was one of the speakers chosen to give a series of lectures at Court House Hall under the auspices of the Young Men's Library Association; among the other lecturers were Judge Arthur Mac Arthur of Milwaukee and Bishop Henry B. Whipple. Even in his strictly ecclesiastical duties, it is of interest to note, Eggleston mingled the secular with the religious, for the subject of one of his Sunday evening sermons was "The Popular Literature of the Day." At the annual church conference for 1865 he served on several committees, continuing his work on Scandinavian proselytism and helping in the commemorative services in honor of the centenary of American Methodism.²⁷

Further evidence of Eggleston's energy during his Minnesota residence is his active participation in the Sanitary Fair held at Chicago in May and June of 1865. The proceeds of this exhibition were devoted to the hospitalization of Union soldiers. Early in the winter of 1865 Eggleston, who later was appointed special agent for the Northwest, urged that Minnesota citizens contribute either in money or in goods so as to make the exposition a success. On February 18 he wrote to Governor Stephen Miller from Winona, urging him to institute legislation similar to that recently enacted in Illinois so that the Minnesota exhibit would have legislative endorsement and funds. "I trust your Excellency will pardon me for burdening one so busy as yourself with so voluminous a correspondence," Eggleston remarked to the governor. "If I had one whit less confidence in your interest in the soldier's welfare I would hesitate to do it." In a second letter to Governor Miller, written from Winona on April 1, 1865, Eggleston spoke optimistically about the Sanitary Fair and noted that agricultural products were already arriving for exhibition.²⁸ Thus the final Minnesota

²⁷ *Winona Daily Republican*, January 27, 30, 1866; Minnesota Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes*, 1865.

²⁸ The letters are in the Governors' Archives, in the custody of the Minnesota Historical Society.

display in Chicago probably was to a large extent Eggleston's achievement.

Until the late spring of 1866 Eggleston remained in Winona, but then ill health compelled him to resign his pastorate. At this time, too, he severed his connections with the church militant, for he never again occupied a denominational pulpit. His later Brooklyn pastorate, from 1874 to 1879, was strictly nonsectarian. His name remained on the rolls of the Minnesota conference until 1876, first as supernumerary and later as superannuated preacher. But when he left Minnesota for Evanston, Illinois, in April of 1866 to become associate editor of the *Little Corporal*, a widely circulated juvenile paper, he definitely abandoned the ministry in favor of journalism. He did not leave Winona unheralded. According to the *Republican*, "Ill health compelled him to relinquish his ministerial profession some time ago, and seek an avocation better adapted to his feeble constitution." After noting Eggleston's new location, the paper remarked:

This is a position to which Mr. Eggleston, by virtue of his admirable talents as a writer for the young, is peculiarly adapted, and we do not doubt that he will achieve success in the path thus chosen. His many friends in this city will regret that he has determined to leave them, yet they will find frequent occasion, doubtless, to rejoice at the opportunity afforded by his new position to listen to his pleasant and entertaining contributions to the periodical literature of the day. Success attend him.²⁰

²⁰ *Republican*, April 24, August 11, 1866. Eggleston was still nominally pastor of the Winona Methodist Episcopal Church as late as August 11 and probably until the annual meeting convened. On January 16, 1875, he returned to Winona to present a lecture on "The Paradise of Childhood." The following comment on his appearance is from the *Republican* of January 18: "Dr. Eggleston is a rapid and entertaining talker, thoroughly imbued with the sentiment of his lecture, which he impresses upon the minds of his auditors. It was a thoroughly satisfactory and enjoyable lecture and left much food for thought. At the close a number of his old friends pressed forward to shake him cordially by the hand and congratulate him upon his fine address." Eggleston later presented the same lecture at Mankato as one of a series given during the winter of 1874-75. It is reported in the *Mankato Weekly Record* for January 30, 1875.

In all his work Eggleston was notable for his sincerity and his enthusiasm. Yet it was only natural that the young minister's departure from religious circles was not accepted with equanimity by his co-workers. While according him full credit for his fervent labors and while loath to impute his resignation to mercenary motives, they nevertheless found it difficult to reconcile the writing of fiction with ministerial dignity. Novels, even in the decade of the Civil War, were not wholly respectable, especially in a community settled at least in part by New England stock. Thus the Reverend Cyrus Brooks, long Eggleston's colleague in the field, could praise him warmly for his brilliance and persistence but could not excise a word of blame from his tribute:

He had grand capabilities for Sunday School work, and in this field won his greenest and most enduring laurels. It must have been for his success here, that he was made a Doctor of Divinity. His present occupation, novel writing, seems out of harmony with the ministerial calling, and has brought upon him severe, and perhaps not wholly unmerited, censure. But those who know him best, will be slow to believe him mercenary, or false to his convictions of right.

McKinley, more magnanimous, failed to mention Eggleston's later pursuits, but implied that it was infirmity of health only that drove him out of the ministry.³⁰ It is quite obvious to any student of Eggleston, however, that he always nursed secretly the desire to write. As a boy he experimented with type and essayed to learn the printer's trade. His early letters show distinct literary talent, and his official reports to the hierarchy of the church are couched in a style far superior to that of the average circuit rider. No doubt circumstances drove him to literature the more quickly, but one infers that such was his destination regardless of other temporary interests. Such a supposition is strengthened, moreover, by the apathy which Eggleston in later life experienced toward Methodism and indeed toward any regular church. In the final result it was neither ill health nor finan-

³⁰ Hobart, *Methodism in Minnesota*, 232; McKinley, *Minnesota Methodism*, 65.

cial return which impelled him to letters as a profession; Eggleston would have been happy nowhere else.

Seven years after Eggleston left Minnesota he published the *Mystery of Metropolisville*, his one novel with a Minnesota setting.³¹ His purpose in this book was to sketch the land mania that had seized the people of the Northwest in 1856 and especially to portray the shyster lawyers and the land sharks who battered on the gullibility and cupidity of the immigrants. At his town of Red Owl in the spring of that year money was worth five and six per cent per month, corner lots doubled in value overnight, and town property was estimated at a hundred dollars a front foot. Speculation was ubiquitous. The mushroom growth of villages and their equally sudden obsolescence—as witness Ignatius Donnelly's Nininger—Eggleston portrayed well. His character Plausaby, moreover, had many counterparts in real life. Plausaby later became a director of the St. Paul and Big Gun River Valley Land Grant Railroad and, thus launched on a business career, entered into inflated schemes which were eventually too much even for him. His policy was like the fashion of 1856, “to invest everything you had in first payments, and then to sell out at an advance before the second became due.” In sketching such a character Eggleston was only representing what he himself had seen on his earliest visit to Minnesota. Thus the incident in the novel in which the citizens of Metropolisville remove the county seat from Perritaut is a fictional reworking of the events of 1855, when the county seat of Rice County, originally established at Cannon City, was removed to Faribault.³² The historical rivalry of the two towns is well depicted in the novel.

Even as an experienced novelist, Eggleston did not shine

³¹ The *Mystery of Metropolisville* (New York, 1873) was published originally as a serial in *Hearth and Home* from December 7, 1872, through April 26, 1873.

³² *Mystery of Metropolisville*, 153; Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, *History of Rice and Steele Counties*, 1: 332 (Chicago, 1910).

in the construction of plots, and there is no point in recounting the episodic structure of the *Mystery of Metropolisville*. The romance which lends a specious unity to the book and the characters of the lovers are alike sentimental and conventional. His forte lay not in such matters. But as a realist Eggleston was meticulous and consistent. If his hero and his villain are stereotyped, he took great care to make the stage driver Whiskey Jim, the frontiersman from Indiana, and the speculator Plausaby good genre portraits. Scenes and incidents are likewise full of verisimilitude: the sod tavern at which the Red Owl-Metropolisville stage paused; the occasional homestead where the owner provided the traveler a breakfast of coffee, fried salt pork, and biscuits of various degrees of hardness; the midwinter sleigh ride from the Fuller House in St. Paul to the penitentiary in Stillwater with the manacled prisoner buried in furs. Vivid too is the description of early newspapers, symbolized by the *Wheat County Weakly Windmill*.

As a novel the *Mystery of Metropolisville* has the faults which Eggleston never completely eliminated from his writing—didacticism, rambling structure, characters which lack passion and blood. But as a reflection of frontier conditions it is as truthful an account of early Minnesota as the *Hoosier Schoolmaster* is of early Indiana. Eggleston was a careful observer and a skilled artist, even if an innovator, in the use of dialect. His books furnish an unsurpassed record of a way of life and of a race of people now completely departed.

Nevertheless, one novel seems a small result of nine years of strenuous life in a pioneer community. At the time of Eggleston's death the *St. Paul Dispatch* in its issue of September 5, 1902, remarked succinctly: "He stayed throughout the period of the Indian outbreak, but the event did not burn into his literary soul." The great Sioux revolt of 1862 he allowed to go unchronicled, together with other stirring events in the youth of Minnesota. Indeed, save for

a few desultory references to Indians and pioneer customs, the only other fictional use Eggleston made of his residence in the upper Mississippi Valley was in a short story entitled "The Gunpowder Plot."³³ Obviously the scenes of his boyhood, the charming village of Vevay and the forests of the Ohio, had more artistic appeal for him than the surroundings of his adopted home. Yet it is not hard to believe that his Minnesota sojourn left an indelible imprint upon Edward Eggleston. Restored to health by an active life in a more salubrious climate, he won wide recognition; and when he left Minnesota, mature and experienced, he was prominent throughout the state in religious, educational, and philanthropic work.³⁴ Indeed it might be said that Eggleston and Minnesota grew up together.

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³³ *Scribner's Magazine*, 2: 252-259 (July, 1871). This story concerns a practical joke and a stereotyped romance, but the setting is the country near the Pomme de Terre River and the valley of the Sauk and the characters include half-breeds, Indians, and settlers.

³⁴ One anecdote about Eggleston as a Sunday school teacher even got into the "Editor's Drawer" of *Harper's Magazine*, 30: 400 (February, 1865). "Rev. Mr. E—, of St. Paul, Minnesota, was inimitable as a child's orator," it reads, "and was never as we know of disconcerted in addressing the little folks but once. He was addressing some Sunday-school scholars, and was in his usual popular and effective way enforcing the duty of gratitude to God for His blessing. 'What,' said he, 'would you say to me if I were to give each one of you a fine new suit of clothes?' From every part of his youthful audience bright eyes twinkled with delight, and a chorus of boyish voices answered, 'Bully for you!'"



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