

A PROPHET  
WITHOUT HONOR  
IN  
HIS OWN COUNTRY:

*Francis F. Browne and THE DIAL*

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*Francis F. Browne and THE DIAL*

The title of my paper needs a word of explanation. My subject, Francis F. Browne, was a man with a strong sense of mission and high principles, but the modest, unpretentious man that he seems to have been would doubtless have strenuously objected to being raised to the level of the prophets. Furthermore, insofar as being "a man without honor in his own country," the fact that we are meeting here this evening as members of a club which he founded some 110 years ago is evidence that his influence continues, but however all that may be, I am strongly of the opinion that the achievement of Francis F. Browne as founder of THE DIAL and its editor for thirty-five years, in the present state of the cultural life of Chicago needs to be better known and appreciated, if only as a source of inspiration and an example to be emulated—in this sense it is not altogether inappropriate to refer to him as a prophet.

Like so many others who played a creative part in the development of Chicago, beginning with Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard who arrived in Chicago in 1818 at the age of sixteen, Francis Browne came from New England. He was born in South Halifax, Vermont, on December 1, 1843 and taken by his family when he was seven to Chicopee, Massachusetts, where his father ran a newspaper and, to supplement its mea-

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

gre earnings, also taught school. He received what education was available in the local public schools, which, judging from his later achievement, must have been sound, and learned the printer's trade and something about the use of words in the shop of his father's paper. In the days before instant, mass communications such local newspapers, which were the chief source of information and reading matter for many of their patrons, served an important cultural function and were often of high quality. After serving in the Civil War as a volunteer in a Massachusetts regiment, from which he returned with health problems which plagued him for the rest of his life, he took up the study of law, first in a law office in Rochester, New York, then at the University of Michigan. From Ann Arbor he went back to Rochester, worked for a time in a printing shop, married Susan Seaman Brooks, and in 1867 arrived with his new wife in Chicago.

Browne came to Chicago, his son remarked in his obituary, with the hope of getting into periodical publishing in one form or another, and within two years after his arrival bought an interest in a new magazine, the *Western Monthly*, the name of which, after he gained control, he changed to the *Lakeside Monthly*. It was Browne's intention with this magazine to encourage and publish western writers; according to an article in the *Inland Printer* of October, 1892, it was soon recognized as one of the four or five best monthlies in the country. Browne managed to survive two fires, the second the conflagration of 1871, plus the financial panic of 1873, but a complete breakdown of his health in 1874, just at the time the magazine was beginning to pay its own way, forced him to discontinue, which must have been a crushing blow. He moved away from Chicago for a time in an effort to regain his health, and for the next six years supported himself and his growing family by writing editorials and articles for various magazines and newspapers and by acting as literary editor of *The Alliance* at that time a respected and influential weekly.

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

The magazine bug had obviously gotten into his system, and with better health and some six years to think about and plan his next venture, in 1880, with the help of Jansen, McClurg & Co., then the largest book wholesalers in Chicago, he founded THE DIAL, which was to become the leading literary magazine in the country.

THE DIAL began as a monthly. The first issue of 24 pages appeared in May, 1880. Jansen, McClurg & Co. is shown as publisher, but the name of the editor does not appear. A one year subscription was to be had for \$1.00 and a single copy for 10¢. The first issue opens with a rather long, scholarly review by W. F. Poole, librarian of the Newberry Library, of Hil-dreth's *History of the United States*. Among other books reviewed is Henry Adams' novel *Democracy*, which was published anonymously. It received good marks from THE DIAL, a tribute to the editorial judgement of its editor. The editor himself reviewed a book of poetry by Austin Dobson. Mr. Browne was a poet in his own right and a formidable reciter of poetry—he was reputed to have been able to recite from memory all the shorter works of Tennyson, whom he greatly admired, as well as those of Robert Burns and Wordsworth. There are other reviews and a list of books published the previous month, arranged by subject, which became a regular feature of THE DIAL; at the back of the magazine there are five pages of advertisements, mostly for books: it was the advertising, for which Browne had the influence of Jansen, McClurg to thank, that provided the financial support for the magazine. The typography, which remained virtually unchanged for the entire life of the magazine, is clear, straight-forward and unadorned, perfectly suited for the "intelligent guide and agreeable companion to the book-lover and book buyer" which the first issue announced its purpose to be.

The first issue also included a column, which was to become a regular feature, "Literary Notes and News" from which we learn that "A new edition of Macauley's complete

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

works in eight volumes at the remarkably low price of \$10, is announced by Houghton Osgood & Co." Then there is this bit of news: "Another idol shattered—or badly damaged: Mr. Aldrich, in his new *Atlantic* story, causes one of his characters—a sailor—to make the scandalous and depressing discovery that Robinson Crusoe's man Friday 'was not a man at all, but a light-minded young princess from one of the neighboring islands who had fallen in love with Robinson,' and that her real name was Saturday."

When that first issue appeared of Francis Browne's THE DIAL in May, 1880, it must have appeared to him that his life up to that time had been in preparation for this great opportunity. That he was well aware of the cultural, literary and religious ideals of the New England he came from is made clear by his choice of name for his new magazine and the fact that his first issue includes a rather long, detailed and most interesting article, *The Original "Dial"*, by Norman C. Perkins. The original *Dial*, this article tells us, appeared in Boston as a quarterly from 1840 to 1844 under the editorship of Margaret Fuller, aided by R. W. Emerson and George Ripley. Mr. Perkins quotes the following from a lecture given some years later by Emerson: "A modest quarterly journal called the 'Dial,' under the editorship of Margaret Fuller, enjoyed its obscurity for four years, when it ended. Its papers were the contributions and work of friendship among a narrow circle of writers. Perhaps its writers were its chief readers. But it had some noble papers; perhaps the best of Margaret Fuller's." Emerson himself was a regular contributor to the "Dial," both of essays and poetry, as were also, among others, Henry David Thoreau, A. Bronson Alcott and William Ellery Channing. Having been born in 1843, during the time of the "Dial" and the Brook Farm experiment in communal living, when the New England renaissance was at its height, it was fitting that this transplanted New Englander should have referred back to that tradition when he launched his literary journal in Chicago.

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

Having little or no financial resources of his own, it seems doubtful that Browne would have been able to get his magazine off the ground without the participation of Jansen, McClurg & Co., but it must still have been a difficult, discouraging task that required long hours of work and meticulous attention to detail, made all the more difficult by his poor health. According to the obituary written by his son in *THE DIAL* of June 1, 1913, during the first years of the magazine Browne himself looked after the business details and wrote most of the articles and reviews, in addition to which, to support a large and growing family, he acted as editorial advisor to his publisher, which involved, as his son said, "reading and revising book manuscripts, consulting with authors, and coming intimately in contact with those myriad details that go to make up the publishing business." *THE DIAL* paid its way from the beginning, and however meagre the living it provided for its editor, it soon won a place for itself as a much respected, useful literary journal. That such success did not come easily we can gather from the fact that according to a doctoral dissertation by Frederic John Mosher on Francis Browne and his associate William Morton Payne, no less than 67 other literary magazines were launched in Chicago during the first decade of *THE DIAL*. One of the reasons for the success of Browne's publication, besides the participation of Jansen, McClurg and its consistent high quality, was doubtless its usefulness. To the list of books published during the previous month, arranged by subject, Browne soon added a list of important magazine articles, services which must have been particularly useful to librarians and others involved with books at a time when neither service was otherwise available. Francis Browne was an idealist with a missionary zeal for literature and cultural standards, but as the success of his venture makes evident, he also had a firm grasp of reality.

*THE DIAL* of July, 1892, begins with the announcement, "Messrs. A. C. McClurg & Co. (the name of Jansen,

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

McClurg had been changed a few years before to A. C. McClurg) beg to announce to the friends and readers of THE DIAL that with the present issue their interest in the paper is transferred to Francis F. Browne, who has been its editor and part owner since its commencement." After giving the reason for this change—to assure the complete independence of the magazine—the announcement ends with the sentence, "Its successful publication for twelve years, and its already acknowledged position as 'the foremost American critical journal,' will remain a matter of pride to its original publishers, who now part from it with the most hearty good-will and best wishes for the future." The same issue also announced that henceforth THE DIAL would be published twice each month and the subscription price would be raised from \$1.50 to \$2.00 a year. With that issue the descriptive line at the top of the first page, beneath the title, which from the first issue had been "A Monthly Index of Current Literature" became "A Semi-Monthly Journal of Literary Criticism, Discussion, and Information," and so remained for the rest of its life in Chicago. In this same issue, of July, 1892, it is interesting to notice, the editor has a word about Chicago. While the place of publication of such a review, he says, "matters very little," he speaks with pride of "the rapid growth of Chicago in other than material directions," and particularly of "its public collection of books," which, he thought, "are in a fair way to rival those of any other city." His expectations for the future were no doubt influenced by the recent completion of the fine library building on Michigan Avenue between Randolph and Washington, expectations, unfortunately, as the present state of the Chicago Public Library glaringly demonstrates, subsequent generations have failed to fulfill.

Another displaced New Englander, William Morton Payne, became associated with THE DIAL in 1884, his first contribution a review of the collected poems of Matthew Arnold which he described as "one of the priceless possessions of



the English-speaking people." During his first years with THE DIAL Payne assumed responsibility for the features "Recent Fiction" and "Recent Poetry," and in 1892 when Browne became sole owner, Payne became literary editor, which he remained until THE DIAL went to New York in 1918. Payne was an exceptionally well educated man and seems to have been driven by the same missionary zeal for literature which possessed Browne. It is quite appropriate, I think, that the title of Mosher's doctoral dissertation on Browne, Payne and THE DIAL is "Chicago's Saving Remnant." Payne had been brought to Chicago as a boy by his parents from Massachusetts and received a good education—remarkably so, judging from the results—at Chicago's first high school, where courses were offered in Greek, Latin, French, Astronomy, Botany, Chemistry, Rhetoric, History, Geometry, Philosophy, among other subjects, and where he met, and became a lifelong friend of Paul Shorey, the first professor of Greek at the University of Chicago. Payne continued his education at the Chicago Public Library under the tutelage of William F. Poole, the librarian, and in 1876, at the age of 18 became a successful and much respected teacher in a Chicago high school. He gave up teaching when he became associated with THE DIAL. He wrote reviews also for other publications, including two of the Chicago newspapers, and soon established a reputation for himself, according to Mosher, as "one of the foremost literary critics in America." The New England that produced these two serious, principled men, devoted to learning and determined to bring culture to the prairies, was not, obviously, the New England that gave us the Kennedys and Tip O'Neill.

Francis Browne, as I have mentioned before, had a large family, eventually six sons and three daughters, and never had an easy time of it financially, whatever esteem and respect he may have won because of his magazine. One of his sons, Francis G. Browne, became business manager in 1894,

after Browne had become sole owner, and in 1905 another son, Waldo R. Browne became assistant editor and in 1913, upon the death of his father, editor. In 1892 Browne set up his own printing shop. I can well believe that this may have been done not only to take advantage of his own knowledge of printing—the appearance of his magazine makes it evident that he had been well trained—but also of the energies of his numerous family.

In the first issue of *THE DIAL* Browne clearly set forth the critical standards he intended to follow. "Though never hesitating to condemn what is spurious and vicious in literary art, deserved approval will be given with equal readiness and far greater pleasure . . . while sensible of the obligation to reject the bad and the false, it will be no less mindful of the obligation to conserve the good and true in literature." In the issue in which the separation from McClurg's is announced, there appears another statement of its critical standards: "*THE DIAL* stands preeminently for objective and scientific criticism; it believes in the existence of critical canons, and endeavors to discover and adhere to them." Mr. Browne, obviously, was no moral relativist; the difference between good and bad existed and was discoverable. As the magazine became better established, Browne was able to enlist people from all parts of the country to review books for him. Reviews were signed, but because he did not pay his reviewers, he had to rely on non-professionals—younger teachers in the universities and colleges, and businessmen and professional people with literary interests. He seems to have had a talent for recognizing promising young writers—among his earlier contributors, for example, were Frederic Jackson Turner, Woodrow Wilson (while still a young professor at Princeton), Norman Foerster, Henry Seidel Canby, Albert Shaw. The following, taken more or less at random, will give some idea of the flavor of *THE DIAL*:

On Hamlin Garland's *The Eagle's Heart* from the issue of February 16, 1901:

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

. . . he is the same blunt man that he was in *Main Travelled Roads*, and has acquired little more of art than he had at the outset of his career. The sense of humor was left out of his composition, and of the finer graces of style his work has remained imperturbably innocent. But he has other qualities, qualities of earnestness and rugged force that are impressive.

On Henry B. Fuller's *Reminiscences*, also from the issue of February 16, 1901:

It must suffice us here to emphasize the charm of Mr. Fuller's manner and the fact that he has again (as in his first book) produced something that almost deserves the name of a new literary composition.

On Max Beerbohm's *Yet Again* from the issue of March 16, 1910:

Mr. Beerbohm is a bystander, an observer, endowed with the keenest possible sense of the art of life, but amiably detached from all its practical issues. He poses a little; he deliberately cultivates interesting prejudices and significant predispositions. And whatever he chooses to talk about, in a style intimate, elaborate, quite sincere beneath its polish, takes on a new meaning and keeps it.

Besides signed reviews, news of literary matters and essays on recent fiction and poetry, there were editorials. THE DIAL eschewed politics, but took a strong stand against the Spanish-American War and the annexation of the Philippines, on the grounds that these were not so much political as moral issues. In their general positions, it seems fair to say, Browne and Payne were old-fashioned, conservative Americans.

## A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

The control Browne exercised over his magazine was not autocratic, but rather indirect, by his choice of reviewers. He issued no instructions to reviewers except to "tell us exactly what you think of the book in question." He tried to publish authoritative criticism, but, as was inevitable, it was he, as editor, who decided what was authoritative. In seeking reviewers for fiction, plays or poetry, all he demanded was "sound taste based on established standards." There were many reviews of historical works, and in the early years of the magazine many of these were contributed by William F. Poole, who acted as unofficial historical editor. The Civil War, not surprisingly, was the subject of many books during those years, and here Browne exercised strict control: he considered the Civil War to have been a holy war, fought to free the slave and save the Union, and anyone who thought differently had no place in his magazine. Poole seems to have felt equally strongly about the New England Puritan tradition, and would tolerate no criticism.

By the early 1900's Francis Browne's health had deteriorated to the point where he could no longer face the Chicago winter, and with two sons on the staff of the magazine and William Morton Payne as literary editor he was able to spend the winters in California, where, as time went on, he spent more and more of the year. He died in California in 1913, at the age of 70, survived by his wife and all his nine children. Only five years later THE DIAL left Chicago for New York, the issue of June 20, 1918 the last to be published in Chicago. No reason is given for the move; the next issue, that of July 18, 1918 contains only the notice, "THE DIAL is now established in its New York office, at 152 West Thirteenth Street, to which all communications should hereafter be sent. . . . Beginning October 3 publication will be weekly." The death of Francis Browne, his son remarked, ". . . occasioned little comment outside the circle of those who in one way or another came in direct contact with his personality," and I doubt that

the transfer to New York of the magazine that was his life work and had made a great contribution to the cultural life of the city was much occasion for comment either—Chicago, then as now, was far more concerned with other things. I have read somewhere, but do not now remember where, that while people from Chicago were inclined to boast about the fact that the most distinguished literary magazine in the country was published in their city, it had far more subscribers in New York than in Chicago. In any case, by the time THE DIAL went to New York, New York had become the center of publishing and literary life. I can well believe also that Waldo Browne possessed neither the determination of his father nor the single-minded dedication that drove his father to overcome whatever obstacle lay in his path.

Perhaps the most important reason for the change of ownership and editorial direction was the fact that the literary and critical standards represented by the old DIAL were changing. In this connection it is significant that Waldo Browne was outraged by T. S. Eliot's amusing little poem *Cousin Nancy*, which was published in 1917 in a collection *Prufrock and Other Observations*—*Prufrock* itself having first been published, at the instigation of Ezra Pound, in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*. *Cousin Nancy* contains only thirteen lines; these are the last seven:

Miss Nancy Ellicott smoked  
And danced all the modern dances;  
And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it,  
But they knew that it was modern.

Upon the glazen shelves kept watch  
Matthew and Waldo, guardians of the faith,  
The army of unalterable law.

One can see why Waldo Browne might have been incensed.

After its move to New York, however, THE DIAL, in 1921 and 1922 published Eliot's *London Letters*, and in November,

1922, one month after its publication in London, the first American edition of *The Waste Land*. The seemingly stable world represented by Francis Browne, William Morton Payne and THE DIAL, the world of Emerson, Brook Farm, Matthew Arnold and Tennyson, had ended with the bloody, senseless battles of the first World War. "The antagonist world," as Russell Kirk puts it in his book *Eliot and His Age*, "was at hand; but so was the Age of Eliot, with its resignation, its penitence, its defense of permanent things, and its stubborn hope." If Waldo Browne was outraged by Eliot's whimsical *Cousin Nancy*, it seems doubtful that he would have known what to do with *The Waste Land*. THE DIAL of Francis Browne had been a constructive influence and served an important purpose, but the time, it seems, had passed it by.

It is worth mentioning that Eliot was not overly impressed with the new DIAL: in a letter to John Quinn, in 1920, he remarked that it was an exact copy of the dull *Atlantic Monthly* and went on to say, "There is far too much in it, and it is all second-rate and exceedingly solemn." He may have thought differently, of course, after THE DIAL published *The Waste Land*. In any case, THE DIAL survived in New York only until 1925.

In writing of his father, Waldo Browne describes "the predominant notes in his character" as "simplicity, sincerity, courage, persistency." He was a quiet, unassuming man, much beloved by his friends and associates, demanded much of himself, was unswerving in pursuing the goals he believed in, and had a strong sense of justice. When the American press was hounding Governor Altgeld for having pardoned the "anarchists" who had been accused, and wrongfully so, as it was later proved, of throwing the bomb at the time of the Haymarket Riot, Francis Browne prepared a detailed vindication for an English publication, and in the emotional orgy that led to the disgraceful war with Spain, Browne kept his head and didn't hesitate to express his views, as he did again

at the time of the annexation of the Philippines. He was never given much recognition by Chicago for his contribution to its cultural life, or, for that matter, support. He always had to labor, not only against ill-health and poverty, but as his son put it, "More powerfully deterrent than all these combined was the spirit of the time and the place of his labors—the all-pervading materialism to which intellectual concerns were chiefly clap-trap and high purposes moonshine." An uncle of Francis Browne, like him of solidly Puritan inheritance, went to Japan as a missionary where he made the first translation of the New Testament into Japanese, which he himself set into type and printed on his own press. When Francis Browne came in 1867 to bring culture to the muddy, brawling city on the shore of Lake Michigan he was doubtless impelled by the same spirit that sent his uncle to bring Christianity to the heathen.

As I said at the beginning, Francis Browne was the founder of the Chicago Literary Club. This was at the time he was struggling to keep his *Lakeside Monthly* alive; after having recovered from two disastrous fires and the panic of 1873, he was shortly after laid low by illness. He was forced to leave the city, not to return until 1880, and not being able to attend a meeting of the club he had founded, was expelled for non-payment of dues, which hurt him deeply. It was not until 1899 that the club realized its error and made him an honorary member, but it was too late for him to take an active part. It would seem, therefore, that our club was not much more appreciative of Browne's efforts to bring literary culture to the prairies than was the rest of Chicago. In connection with all this and our present surroundings, it is worth mentioning also that Browne refused to join the Cliff Dwellers when it was founded by Hamlin Garland—he thought it lacking in moral dignity and high seriousness, and he may have been right.

It was a great achievement to found a literary magazine in Chicago in 1880 and to keep it going for thirty-five years without compromising its standards. Its founder and editor for all

those years not only made a significant contribution to Chicago and the Middle West by encouraging authors and creating an atmosphere favorable to literary production, by its high standards of criticism it must also have had a constructive influence on literature in general. The quality of writing at any time is influenced, for better or for worse, by the level of criticism; whether they like it or not, writers are influenced by what critics have to say as are publishers also. As a publisher, I would wish that we now had such a literary magazine as THE DIAL was in its great days, which would review books on the basis of what they said and how well they said it rather than in accordance with the ideological whims of the reviewer. We may well be at such a turning point in matters of the spirit as that which Eliot's *The Waste Land* marked so sharply, it also seems evident that New York is losing its dominance of literary life — of publishing, of criticism and all that goes with it — in which case the time may have come for Chicago to reassert itself, for a magazine with the aspirations and high standards of the old DIAL to appear again in Chicago.

Preparing this paper gave me the opportunity to learn more about a distinguished man who did much for the cultural life of his time and our city, for which I am grateful; I am also grateful to the Literary Club for this opportunity to revive the memory of our founder.