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NO. 3

The
LYRIC WEST

A Magazine of American Verse



IN THIS ISSUE

Mary Brent Whiteside | Mary Louise Rankin

Ada Hastings Hedges | Virginia Stait

R. T. T. and others

BOOK NOTES

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The Lyric West

Vol. IV, No. 3

A Magazine Of Verse

December, 1924

Edited by Roy Towner Thompson

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CONTENTS

<u>The Child in Galilee</u>	<i>Mary Brent Whiteside</i>	67
<u>Flowers of the Dust</u>	<i>Virginia Lyne Tunstall</i>	70
<u>The Birth of a Fool</u>	<i>Alice Forté</i>	71
<u>Autumn, New Mexico</u>	<i>Ruth Lechlitner</i>	72
<u>Rain Is a Child</u>	<i>Mary Louise Rankin</i>	74
<u>A Small-Town Portrait</u>	<i>Ted Olson</i>	75
<u>Three Western Poems</u>	<i>Gwendolen Haste</i>	76
<u>Cessation</u>	<i>Harold Vinal</i>	78
<u>Solus</u>	<i>Ada Hastings Hedges</i>	79
<u>Two Poems</u>	<i>Joan Dareth Prosper</i>	80
<u>Sonnets Plucked from the Heart of a</u>		
<u>Woman</u>	<i>Sigrid Sittig</i>	82
<u>In a Volume of Tschaikowsky</u>	<i>John Northern Hilliard</i>	85
<u>Five Lyrics</u>	<i>Beatrice Fenner</i>	86
<u>Condemned</u>	<i>Virginia Stait</i>	88
<u>Nightfall</u>	<i>Samuel M. Sargent, Jr.</i>	89
<u>L'Inevitable</u>	<i>Power Dalton</i>	90
<u>Christmas Eve</u>	<i>Rosamond Eddy</i>	91
<u>Book Notes</u>	<i>R. T. T.</i>	92

The Lyric West for December, 1924

Editors: Roy Towner Thompson, Grace Atherton Dennen

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Mary Brent Whiteside

The Child in Galilee

INVOCATION

From dreams, from love, we may create anew,
Things that were lost and beautiful and true;
Trace in the shadow of an unseen wing,
The long forgotten gesture of a King.
We may go back the starry way
A young child wandered at his play,
Touch the coarse linen of his simple dress,
And all but dumb with so much loveliness,
Find Life anew, down all the ways of death,
In modern Nazareth.

These hills, that dream beneath an Eastern sky,
What glory touched them when a child went by!
Life — it is life that flings away
The wornout robe of yesterday;
Then, new and marvelous weaving on these looms,
In God's wide rooms!

Dark little faces in a darker street,
Deep eyes that gaze on stars, and lives that meet
Clean miracles of leaf and sod,
In these wide rooms of God, —
How shall they live and move and breathe, in less
Than high eternities of loveliness?

Through dreams, through love, we build the scene
afresh,
Of days He walked here in the flesh,
And through the measure of our love, we yield to death
No shining hour of Nazareth.

THE MATING

From Nazareth went Joseph, and his rod
Harbored the silver dove of God.
So he, gray with his years, and marvelling
At this strange thing,
And at a virgin's dreamlit face,
Led her meek footsteps to the place,
That he called home, and where there were
Tall lads that would be foster sons to her.
Here Mary, like a star within a wood,
Ended her maidenhood.

Dawn came in beauty, like a visible breath
Of God, to ancient Nazareth.
And in its light, our legends tell,
She rose to fill her pitcher at a well,
Then lifted eyes of prayer to heaven's blue floor, —
We know these tender things of her, and little more.
Only that it was here, so it befell,
Came Gabriel,
Bearing a sheaf of lilies in his hand.
But how could Joseph, listening, understand
Why Mary, when that wondrous day was done,
Went murmuring: "My son, my little son!"

MARY AND THE BABE

Here I am face to face with wonderment,
Clasping this perfect hour,
As if it were a living flower,
A petal for each moment, and content
If I might hold it so forevermore.
The sunlight traces patterns on the floor,
Like feet of angels, come to bring
The child, an offering.
And Joseph one time bent above him, tired and gray,
In the cool twilight of the day;
He touched the flower-soft hair upon this head,
And in a hush of wondering, he said:
“Is it my eyes are old and growing dim,
Or Mary — is there something strange in him?”

Dear Lord, his smile is starlight, and his feet
And little hands are honey sweet.
And yet I never hear his golden laughter start,
Without a dagger turning in my heart.
And when the night is long, and all the world asleep,
I wake and lie in darkness, and I weep!
Upon my cheek, I feel the fragrance of his breath, —
Must these soft lips of roses, taste of death?

Ah, Lord, I know one miracle — a baby’s kiss,
And at the last I shall be strong, remembering this!

THE SONG OF JOSEPH

None shall make a yoke or plow
 Better than my own,
But this child, whose sunlit brow,
Holds the kiss of angels now, —
 He will build a throne.

Mine to teach his little hands;
 He shall learn the whole
Craft the workman understands,
But in this and wider lands,
 He will guide the soul.

I shall show him tricks of birds,
 Where the sparrows built their nests,
Teach him lore of fleecy herds,
But his heart will hold the words
 Hid in sages' breasts.

Mine to teach the lower ways,
 Little secrets of the sod;
His to guide in later days,
Where celestial torches blaze,
 In the light of God.

Virginia Lyne Tunstall

Flowers of the Dust

Chicory flowers as blue as his eyes
Grow on the field where my soldier lies.
I had a lover, his pledge he gave,
But chicory weed grows on his grave.

Chicory weed on the field of France
Where he fought with a laugh, and broke his lance.
He was gay, he was young, but still he lies, —
Chicory flowers as blue as his eyes.

Chicory flowers grow on his grave,
Smiling, smiling, above the brave.
O cruel flowers of a cruel hue,
To smile in the dust of his eyes of blue!

Alice Forté

The Birth of a Fool

“You carry Life
In a feather sack.
Where is your spear
To thrust at Fear?”
Quoth the Archer of Kings.

“I am armed with the lack
Of warrior-things.
This pack on my back
Is folded wings.”

“The city has need
Of a beggar who sings.
Enter, thou Fool!”
Quoth the Archer of Kings.

Ruth Lechlitner

Autumn, New Mexico

COTTONWOODS

Their leaves catch shadows with a dusty breath —
Gnarled shadows twisted in the light
Of slow red sun; they hold the quiet death
Of desert wind, and purple, unstarred night.

They are the sleepy giants of the land,
Who drowse with age; and like grim prophets, spread
Their dusky robes upon the thick white sand,
And whisper of the living . . . and the dead.

DESERT NOON, SEPTEMBER

The warm sands yield, and then dissolve
These little paths of little men.
I shall lie still while the desert walks
With ghostly golden footsteps. Then,
Silence so great that sounds unheard
Are multitudinous as the sea:
No thing is small in the broad, still world
And all small thoughts go out from me,

Out to the long blue dancing mist
Of endless sky and endless sun —
O Life, dream not of lesser things:
I can remember none!

THE PENITENTE

I shall walk out by the river
Under the thin blue light,
Under the warmth that the trees hold in
From the cold of early night.

(They would salt the wounds of my body —
When beauty cuts my heart.)

Clouds rise like white water,
Foaming and sweet
As the wet shaken fragrance
When cherry boughs meet.

(They would draw blood from whiteness —
The earth is too kind!)

Gold breaks upon the darkness
Where the great moon lies low;
What greater scourge
Could the purified know?

(Yet I can never tell them
That I, loving beauty, suffer.)

Mary Louise Rankin

Rain Is a Child

When her cloud mother wept,
I saw her dancing upon the river
Like a sprite.

She ran away from the wind,
But a spider web caught her.
Tremulous and bright,
With tears in her eyes
She watched a filament of silk
Bind her feet,
Gossamer bind her hands.
At noon
The sun crept up and set her free
Without breaking one frail thread.

She came stepping across my floor
In her silver slippers.
Her cloak was dripping,
Her face was wet.
I made her go out in the dark.
And all night
I heard her crying on my doorstep.

Ted Olson

A Small-Town Portrait

An old man like a gnarled and rusty spike,
A fog of ill-kempt beard around his throat,
Lean shoulders humped beneath a fusty coat,
Malignant eyes, head poised as if to strike
With shrewd, reptilian swiftness, and a tongue
That could be suave and buttery at will,
But in a moment's passion woke to shrill,
Fluoric spite, venomous, foul as dung.

"They hate me — don't I know!" he used to say.
"Hate and be damned, the whole self-righteous pack!
I know the law — I make the jackals pay
For every sneer and slur behind my back!"
We cursed him; aye — and had we dared confess,
Admired the courage of his wickedness.

Three Western Poems

RIVERS

This is a noisy river, swift and brown,
Scolding and twisting through strange arid lands,
A river fed by tumbling mountain streams
With chuckling rapids and smooth treacherous sands.

She has enslaved the lives of men,
Lovers of danger, passionate and strong;
But there's another river far away,
A river that has stirred men's lips to song —

Wide steady breast of water sheathed in fields,
Forests of shadow where the swallows sing,
Tall crumbled castles lifted high above,
Small hamlets where sad ancient stories cling —

Why do I dream beside this angry stream
Snarling through yellow cliffs and prairies grey?
Here are no ghosts to soothe my loneliness.
Here is no land grown lovely in decay.

BIRDS

Once she was happy with the birds
And loved their arguing
Around the house and in the cottonwoods
Down by the spring.

But later crows in dusky journey
Across the silver sage,
And magpies plunging, dipping, flashing white
Filled her with rage.

And at the meadowlark's clear voice
She cried and stopped her ears
Because it made her think of old tunes sung
In kinder years.

PRAIRIE WOLF

North of the house there was a graveled range of hills,
Stubborn and bare with clinging grey dry grass,
Where, resting sometimes through her vacant days, she
watched
The far swift shadows of the coyotes pass.

She told herself her life was like those stony hills,
Unfertile, bitter in the blaze of noon,
Where fearful yellow shapes slipped by uncertainly
And wailed for sorrow underneath the moon.

Harold Vinal

Cessation

The wharf was black under the piles,
A tide was eating at the weeds,
He paced the slippery boards for miles
Above the slushing of the reeds.

The mackerel barrels cast their round
Shadows over the wet floor,
His walking made a terrible sound
Between the sea and the wharf door.

Was it a lantern on a mast,
That stopped his trudging for a bit,
Or when a shrouded dory passed . . .
Did he lean out to peer at it?

Ada Hastings Hedges

Solus

His dog's sharp, sudden bark upon the stillness
Will send me to the door with flying feet,
In that unguarded moment quite forgetting —
So wonted was this habit, and so sweet —
The empty vista through the swaying lilacs,
And out beyond, the quiet village street.

Returning slowly to some threadbare duty,
Grown duller since the need for it has fled,
I ask how many journeys will betray me
Before I shall have learned to pause instead,
And make my foolish, dreaming heart remember
That he is dead — that he is dead!

Joan Dareth Prosper

Two Poems

MY FRIEND, DA VINCI

Da Vinci spoke to me the other day
Concerning Mona Lisa; how he chanced
To paint his friend Francesco's wife, her way
Of moving those two lovely hands, her smile,
And how she and the artist talked the while.

Often when Leonardo stops to rest
From touching up the canvases of Heaven,
He comes to chat with me. He is the best
Of all my friends, and oh, I love to hear
The deep, kind voice that tells me he is near.

I asked if he and Michaelangelo
Were holding any contests nowadays
Like that affair at Florence. He said no,
And smiled. — It seems they do not care to vie
For honor, with grave angels standing by.

But once, — this of all secrets is most sweet —
High on a cloud-bank, he saw God Himself,
Busily managing a golden fleet
Of shy, young stars! Since then, Da Vinci cared
For nothing but to paint Him, — if he dared.

I cannot feel that Death is all unkind,
Who gave so great a comrade to be mine;
One all too high, in life, for me to find,
Yet now it does not seem as though he bends
To one beneath him, — simply, we are friends.

LETHE

I never knew that death
Could come like this, — a swift and wordless thing
Of silence — silence — with no last, hurt breath,
No sign or change, no moment's burning fear,
Only this peace too deep for questioning
Or tear.

And we who watched in vain,
Toil-spent and weary, marvel at your face,
To learn how slight your loss, how vast your gain,
Half shy, half jealous of the tryst you keep,
Wearing with such tender, lyric grace
Your sleep.

Sigrid Sittig

Sonnets Plucked from the Heart of a Woman

I

Oh, that I might be allowed to give you
All that I am! Life only means to me
The chance of serving you. Must life then be
For me forever meaningless? So true
I'd be, so gay, so strong, so full of virtue,
A second self. To give, yet leave you free!
Your mistress, mother, comrade, slave to be,
Giving you all of me both old and new.
Asking no gift in kind, but only that
You use me, take what I do gladly give
And use it for the enhancement of your soul,
To sweeten your own draught of life, thereat
To drink more deeply. So should I then live,
In serving you attain my highest goal.

II

Could you have loved me, you would have found
Such love in me as story does not tell.
A leaping singing flame that could as well
Glow softly, and with tender warmth surround
Your swiftest mood. Yet instant would rebound
With light and color, burning longing swell
Of passion, before you could yourself foretell
You craved the change. And if upon the ground
You set a wayfaring foot in search of beauty,
In search of freedom, in search of anything,
I'd bank my fire and seem no longer flame
To any eye, my glad and willing duty
Being to await your coming in some Spring,
Or else to die, should it be you never came.

III

You are my friend! You find I stimulate
Your mental reaches. You find you really need
The expression of my brain. Oh come and feed,
And know the memory of this day and date
Through all my life shall glow, and animate
The hour I sink to death, and shall proceed
With me beyond my death, and give me speed
Unto the life hereafter, or what state
Of sleep or being lies in store. Yet know
That it will take the strength of gods to keep
From giving more than you do ask, so full
Am I. Yet does to such a greatness grow
My joy, that though the way be hard and steep
Yet will I sing that life is merciful.

IV

It is a joy that we at the same time
Do breathe the air of earth. It might have been
That I had come to life when you your days did spin
Unto their close. Or that in eastern clime
I did pursue my way, while you sublime
Did radiant glow in western skies, within
My world, my sight without. Oh, to the thin
Cruel face of Fate who keeps from chime
Our mutual tones, this much of thanks I give —
That she allows that I may know your face.
And though the attendant sorrow reach a star,
That while you walk the earth I, too, may live
Shall be, for me, enough of joy and grace.
I sing; my joy is wild because you are!

V

Though I have sorrows, great enough, God wot!
I have a host of little sorrows too,
That stick with pain in moments not a few,
From little longings and desires begot.
I would so like to cool your brow when hot
With my white fingers dipped in cooling dew,
To touch your hair and ruffle it askew
And wind a curl into a lovers' knot.
I would that I might once greet you and dawn
Together, that once we might lie down to sleep
As children do. I would walk field and hill
With you, swim, dance upon the lawn
With you, and these small joyful memories keep
To ease the sorrows great, which would fret me still.

VI

Since bride I cannot be to you, a maid
Will I remain, and wife and mother be
To all who reach or cry in need of me.
My curling hair I'll flatten in a braid,
And all the weak and hungry will I aid
With all my soul. I'll give my youth with free
Glad gestures to the old. My former glee
I'll swift transmute into a strong and staid
Resource of happiness to give to all
Who sorrow. I will turn my steadfast mind
To seek an answer to another's fate
Who cannot read my own. And should it befall
I wed, I'll wed with searching Truth to find
A little happiness to celebrate.

John Northern Hilliard

In a Volume of Tschaikowsky

If you would know the threnody
The wind weaves in a leafless tree;
If you would know the saddest note
That ever fell from a bird's throat;
If you would know the sob of pain
That's in the liquid splash of rain;
If you would know the muted grief
In withered grass and falling leaf;
If you would have your own heart-strings
Throb to the memory of things
Long dead, and know the pathos of
A hopeless and abiding love —
Then turn the page. Here wrote one who
Knew dolour and despair, and knew
Life's sorrows and its mysteries. . . .
Turn back the page and touch the keys.

Beatrice Fenner

Five Lyrics

I

Leaning over the sky, I saw a river of blue light.
The moon had not yet risen,
But out on the lake where she sleeps through the day
She had laughed to see her face in the water;
And her laughter, floating on ahead of her
Was the river of blue light.

II

There is a dream I know
That will never cloud my sleep;
There is a wind I hear
That will never whisper me the reason of laughter;
And there is a moon I see
That will never hang in my garden.

There is a great love I feel too
That can never lift its arms;
For there is a tree out in a garden
Waiting for the wind to sing songs through its leaves.

III

Over my outstretched arms fell a blue veil.
It trembled as the wind caught it,
Yet clung to my fingers like light.
Oh, I wanted to bend and kiss it
As the wind kisses a moon-filled flower;
But as I leaned gently toward it
It fell away into the night;
For it was only a veil of blue laughter.

IV

I love cloudy days:
They bring me thoughts of a shore
With white sand like snow
And a sea bluer than the other side of the sky.
They bring me thoughts of a green hill
Where I stand like a tree swaying in the wind.
I love cloudy days,
For they bring me strange thoughts.

V

My arms are filled with dreams
Like the softness out of a cloud.
I should love to sink away into this strange softness,
But Dusk left me to hold them
Until Night could come
And hide them behind a star.
So I can only wonder at their loveliness.

Virginia Stait

Condemned

At last I have reached my black cross,
I have reached — *what never could be* —
I have gathered the whole of a loss,
My blood drains from a Upas tree!

At last I have reached, where invade
Arch traitors — the self crucified —
I know now why Brutus betrayed!
I know now why Peter denied!

Samuel M. Sargent, Jr.

Nightfall

Twilight falls
Like a muted melody.

Slowly the stars come.
Over inverted meadows
They wander
Like silver sheep.

From a drab tree
A mockingbird
Pours out his heart
In rainbow music.

L'Inevitable

I lift my face to the sky,
 My eyes reflect the blue . . .
I spread my hair in the sun
 To catch its hue.

Sweet melody in my throat
 Thrills with the lyric lark;
My song flames through the night,
 To rout the dark.

Yet I cannot quench one sound —
 No ecstasy can save —
Always I hear rain falling
 Upon my grave.

Rosamond Eddy

Christmas Eve

This is the night of dreams over the world.
Slow dreams that lived and died again are drawn
Through all the awe-filled time before the dawn
Out of their silence, like new leaves unfurled.

This night is the night that gathers all our days
Of pain and waiting, unfulfilled desire,
Burning them slowly in a sharp sweet fire;
Hour by hour ascends the smoke of praise.

This silent night is measured in candle flame,
And beating of human hearts that sing and sing.
Now in His holy hour remembering
Most tenderly we speak the young Child's name.

Book Notes

IN EARTHEN BOWLS, by NELLIE BURGET MILLER. D. Appleton & Co.
(In the Appleton Library of Verse)

VOICES OF THE WIND, by VIRGINIA MCCORMICK. J. T. White & Co.

ROSY THORN, by ELLEN COIT ELLIOTT. Stanford University Press.

OUR DEAD SELVES, by PAUL ELDRIDGE. Boullion-Biggs, Inc.

IN THE SOUTHLAND AND OTHER POEMS, by LENORE C. SCHUTZE.
Harr Wagner Publishing Co.

It is vastly more important to enjoy literature than to classify it. Since the available supply of literature is so great, however, it frequently becomes necessary to classify before we can enjoy. Hence the well known academic device of presenting all literature in three general categories — usually represented by three overlapping circles — namely, Truth (or Verisimilitude), Meaning, and Beauty. If writing aims to depict things as they are merely, it falls in the first class; if it aims to interpret things, it falls in the second; if it aims at the representation of beauty, it falls in the third. Naturally, it would be almost impossible to find any piece of literature which could be classified unreservedly and wholly under a single one of these heads. One says, merely, that a given piece of literature tends to fall in this or that class. The greatest literature is represented as the fruit of all three aims and in the academic diagram is placed within the area of overlapping of all three circles. Perhaps this device will be useful in helping readers to appreciate one or another of the above books.

In Mrs. Miller's volume, for example, beauty is predominant. Although her poems presuppose a definite philosophy, they do not present philosophical problems; although they manifest a keen observation of the facts of life,

they do not present these facts in the manner of the realists. Here is a poet, simple, wholesome, and real, singing her joys and griefs in genuine lyrical poetry. Hers is lyric poetry in the true sense if we mean by lyric both musical and personal. Ease, fluency, and melodiousness mark her verses; there is an utter absence of anything learned or sophisticated. There is at once a certain elevation and a certain simplicity.

Mrs. McCormick's verse, on the other hand, swings over toward the interpretative; she is concerned very frequently with the meaning of things. A small part of her work demands too close attention for the fullest enjoyment. Such words as adumbrated, electron, atavism, creep in, bringing with them an atmosphere of science. In her best work, however, she is won away by beauty, and her poetry yields, like the surprising and unexpected loveliness of a flower, occasional moments of delight. Perhaps beauty, after all, affords her the most satisfying approach to the explanation which all philosophers are seeking. Most of the poems seem to spring, somehow, from an April garden — a windless garden of daffodils and flags in which one listens reflectively to the hum of bees. A variety is given the volume by a human interest group, best of which is the portrait of Hepzibah Pyncheon.

Ellen Coit Elliott's poems tend still more toward the intellectual. In some of the poems there is a sprightly intellectual playfulness and touch of irony which betoken a keen relish for the more subtle types of humor. Like Mrs. McCormick, she too owes much of her poetic impulse to her garden and reflection. Certain of these poems have an arresting piquancy arising out of suggested symbolism — but the symbolism is only suggested and never obtrusive. Such indirect art is sometimes by far the most forceful.

The poems of Paul Eldridge fall almost completely in the circles of Verisimilitude and Meaning. He presents the bare, unlovely facts of life as the basis for philosophical pessimism.

There is an occasional gleam of beauty. Like a series of oriental wisdom sayings, these poems present, from the viewpoint of various animals, a conception of the littleness, futility, and irony of existence. The animals, or rather their "dead selves," talk about themselves and their neighbors, their desires, aims, failures, and death. One petty creature will direct at his betters a stream of futile bombast, exhibiting an immense and grotesque egotism. Taken as a whole, the poems furnish a unique object lesson in relativity, reminding one of the old story of the blind men and the elephant. Like the blind men, each animal has only a limited point of view, and judges the whole world thereby. Mr. Eldridge, as the exponent of pessimism, presents as his thesis the universality of failure; unkind fate awaits all alike. Yet, how charming is his language, how beguiling his irony! His lines are full of striking imagery, striking most frequently because it is grotesque and unlovely, but not infrequently reflecting a gleam of beauty.

Of rather more local interest, the graceful poems of Lenore C. Schutze reflect a keen delight in the more sensuous aspects of Southern California. Among them are three sonnets to Alfred Tennyson which are true poetry and well deserve the high praise which has been bestowed upon them.

R. T. T.

Between Editor and Reader

Various notes and bits of news

Of the poems printed last month “Five Poems” by Sigrid Sittig, “Wasted Years” by Jessie Call, and “Breath of the Honeysuckle” by Power Dalton have received most comment. Ted Olson’s “We Shall Go Laughing” in the October number continues to receive high praise.

A prize of fifty dollars will be given for the best lyric published in the fourth volume of the LYRIC WEST, namely, from October, 1924 to September, 1925, inclusive.

Contributors

Among the newcomers this month are Alice Forté of Oakland, California, Ruth Lechlitner of Farmington, New Mexico, Joan Dareth Prosper of Seattle, and Beatrice Fenner of Los Angeles. The latter is well known locally as a poet-composer. Although her years are few, she has achieved a signal honor in having her songs used in concert work by Galli-Curci. We are glad to welcome back this month, Mary Brent Whiteside, who has long been a contributor. Mrs. Whiteside treats the Biblical legend freely, and with singular grace and beauty.

**Statement of the Ownership,
Management, Circulation, Etc., Required
by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912**

Of THE LYRIC WEST published monthly at Los Angeles,
California for October 1st, 1924.

State of California

County of Los Angeles ss.

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Roy Towner Thompson, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the editor and publisher of the LYRIC WEST and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse side of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, Roy Towner Thompson, 3551 University Ave.,
Los Angeles, Cal.

Editor, Roy Towner Thompson, 3551 University Ave., Los
Angeles, Cal.

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