# *Louis Dodge--A Forgotten Iowa Author*

PHILIP D. JORDAN

"I must confess that I was out of step with modern manners and thinking, and I could scarcely hope to compete with a new school of writers who, released from old restraints, achieved a kind of success by describing human conduct which was thought better unpublished in the old days."[1] In those words, Louis Dodge, a gentle, courtly man, admitted that the world of letters in which he once was prominent had passed him by. It was hard for him in 1934 to acknowledge defeat, to put some 34 years of writing behind him, to confess that his romantic verses, short stories, and novels, written through rose-tinted spectacles, no longer were enjoyed. In the old days editors of the nation's high-class, popular magazines had competed with one another for the privilege of publishing him. Then he was a major second-string author. When he wrote an old friend that he was "out of step

[1] Dodge, June 20, 1934, to William H. Pommer. Pommer was a Saint Louis teacher and composer and old friend. Dodge Papers, Missouri Historical Society, Saint Louis. Hereafter cited as MHS. Among the many who aided in the search for Dodge materials are Robert A. McCown, The University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, who brought together many helpful items. Had it not been for Michael Harrison, an astute historian and collector of Fair Oaks, California, the author would have missed significant sources. Catherine H. Thompson, Burlington, Iowa, graciously and helpfully shared her memories of Dodge and of Mrs. Charles F. Schramm and made available memorabilia. Marilyn Hurd, Redondo Beach Public Library, time and again searched newspapers. Kathleen S. Schoene, Missouri Historical Society, Saint Louis, furnished photostats of newspaper articles, Dodge letters, and clippings. If Lloyd Maffitt had not written of the need for Dodge materials in his widely read column in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, a productive source would have remained unknown. Once again, the author is indebted to Susie Guest and Martha Zackert of the Burlington Public Library. They, like Margaret Cannella, office clerk of the District Court, Des Moines County, never indicated they were too busy to be of assistance. Others to whom a debt of gratitude is due include David R. Hume, *Saint Louis Globe-Democrat;* Noel C. Holobeck, Saint Louis Public Library; Samuel A. Sizer, University of Arkansas Libraries; and John L. Ferguson, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock. The article could not have been written without the permission of Mardel Pacheco, Princeton University Library, to use its Dodge collection.



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with modern manners and thinking" and that his sentimental plots and old-fashioned characters were out of style, Dodge was 64 years old and living in lonely exile in California.

Dodge might not have surrendered had his last book, *The American*, been the success he anticipated. It was, he said, "A kind of glorified dime-novel . . . with savage Indians in it, and countless perils, and one good and brave man, and his splendid wife, to represent the eternal verities." Reviewers were less than enthusiastic. It was then that Dodge realized that his literary career had ended. Yet he continued to write because "I couldn't help myself," and dispiritedly he packed away in a trunk his unsalable manuscripts.[2]

The trail which led Dodge to retirement in Redondo Beach, only a few miles south of Los Angeles, began in Burlington, Iowa, where he was born on September 27, 1870. The son of Henry Lewis Dodge, an itinerant printer, and of Lila Haskell Dodge, daughter of a family from Maine who had settled in Burlington in 1837, Louis Dodge spent his early years in Burlington. His father was employed by Osborn, Snow and Company and later set type for the *Hawk-Eye*. His mother cared for a family of growing children.[3]

Little is known of Dodge's early years. When he was two or three years old, his father moved the family from Burlington to Mount Pleasant and, dissatisfied there, they went on to Brooklyn, a country village not far from Grinnell, Iowa. Dodge attended elementary schools in those communities. Unfortunately, when in later years he put down descriptions of his activities, he gave scant attention to his boyhood. However, when scattered and incomplete information is put together, it appears that his family lived in straitened circumstances, that the boy did his share of chores, and that he may have helped his father in the print shop.[4]

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2 *The American* (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1934). An English edition, *Wagon Roots*, was published in London in 1935 by Hutchinson & Co. *The North American Review* of November 1934 said the book was long and stirringly colorful, possessed solid merit and no literary pretensions. The *Saturday Review of Literature* of October 20 admitted that Dodge knew his material and that there was "good interesting stuff in his story," but said the book was "written in bald style and toils along like a prairie wagon." There were, wrote a reviewer, too many pages of plodding description.

3 Henry Lewis Dodge (1839-1896) and Lila Haskell Dodge (1842-1899) were buried in the Beebe, Arkansas cemetery. Jordan interview with Catherine H. Thompson, Burlington, June 17, 1979. Mrs. Thompson, in the *Hawk-Eye* of June 17, 1979, was quoted as saying that Louis Dodge's mother "founded the first WCTU paper in Iowa. It was a monthly, *The Iowa Index*, and she set the type by hand."

4 Jordan interview with Catherine H. Thompson, June 17, 1979.



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When time permitted, the youngster made and flew kites, a hobby which fascinated him and stimulated a lively imagination. But his most pleasant and satisfying experience was to be taken by his mother to Burlington to visit an aunt. Between him and Mrs. Ella Haskell Schramm, wife of a prominent businessman, grew a precious friendship which lasted for years. "Only women," he said quoting Kipling, "understand children thoroughly." Aunt Ella influenced him more than did his mother. She was to give him books, open her house to him, and remember him in her will. After her death, Dodge never returned to Burlington.[5]

Dodge's early days in Iowa came to an abrupt close when, in the late 1870s or early 1880s, because of his poor health his father moved the family from Brooklyn to Little Rock, Arkansas. Here he followed his printer's trade for a little while, but then, for reasons now unknown, left Little Rock to settle in Quitman. Situated near Heber Springs in the vicinity of Round and Sugar Loaf mountains in an area recognized for its healing spring waters, Quitman was best known in educational circles as the home of Quitman College. The town had been laid out in 1868, and the Quitman Male and Female College, operated by the Arkansas Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was established in 1871.[6]

For a few months in 1884, Dodge's father edited the *Quitman Monitor* and he may have sought to improve his health by taking the invigorating mineral baths.[7] Young Dodge, then age 14 or 15, always said that he was educated in Iowa and at Quitman College. In a short story published in *Scribner's Magazine* for February 1917, he wrote

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5 For a sketch of the Charles F. Schramm family (Mrs. Ella Haskell Schramm), see *Biographical Review of Des Moines County, Iowa* (Chicago: Hobart Publishing Company, 1905), pp. 148-50; obituaries in *Burlington Gazette*, February 22, 1927, and *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, February 23, 1927. The Kipling quotation is on an unsigned, undated paper, circa 1917, in the Charles Scribner's Sons Papers, Princeton University Library, hereafter cited as PUL. In the same collection is a letter from Dodge to Robert Bridges, December 17, 1917, in which Dodge writes: "Here's a coincidence for you. A few days ago an aunt of mine in Burlington, Iowa, sent me bound volumes of Harper's Magazine from the first number, in 1850, to 1875." Bridges was Dodge's editor. Clerk of the Court, Des Moines County, Last Will and Testament of Ella H. Schramm, July 8, 1926, bequeathing one hundred dollars to Dodge. When Ella Haskell married Schramm in 1885, Dodge was 15 years old.

6 For Quitman College, see Lorene Houston, "Oldest College at Quitman," *Cleburne County Historical Quarterly* (Fall 1974), p. [18]; Walter N. Vernon, *Methodism in Arkansas 1816-1976* (Little Rock: Joint Committee for the History of Arkansas Methodism 1977), p. 144.

7 Samuel A. Sizer, University of Arkansas Libraries, May 30, 1979, to Robert A. McCown.



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that he had spent a year in Quitman, which for literary purposes he called Cleburne. He described both the town and the college and he put the time of his residence there as 1887.

The town of Quitman, wrote Dodge, was 30 miles from a railroad, and "Its isolation was more complete than that of any other place I have ever known." Its mental seclusion was quite as marked as its physical remoteness. The college library was housed in a dusty room. "No one dusted it; few entered it." But it held books by Dickens, Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, Thackeray, Dumas, Hugo, and others. "If I realized that these were the names of the larger figures in the literature of that day it was because my mother designated them as such." Although he did not name him, Dodge described the principal of the school as "a forbidding man with a black beard and a mustache 'cropped' at a time when a cropped mustache indicated, clearly, a harsh and unbending personality." He made no mention of subjects taught or classes he attended. He did say that his father went to Quitman to take charge of the weekly newspaper and "to give his family the benefit of the town's moral influence." There is no evidence that Dodge was graduated from the college.

There is reason to believe that Dodge disliked the town of Quitman and that he left it and his family as soon as possible. The details of his career between 1887 and 1893 are vague, although he may have edited a small paper of which he was the entire staff. He always studiously avoided recording his experiences during those years. However, he willingly admitted that he began work as a newspaper reporter in 1893 in Eagle Pass, Texas, where he wrote for the *Eagle Pass Guide* descriptive articles about Texas and the Rio Grande country. Eagle Pass, situated on the Rio Grande near Carrizo Springs, fascinated the 23-year-old budding author. It was so different from Iowa's fields and Arkansas's Ozark Mountains. In 1849 Eagle Pass had been a favorite route to California; during the Mexican War it was the site of a military camp; and during the Civil War it was near a garrison of Confederate troops at Fort Duncan. Local color was plentiful. Dodge learned Spanish during the months he spent there.[8]

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[8] *Saint Louis Republic,* January 22, 1916. The *Burlington Gazette,* March 20, 1926, makes no mention of Dodge's newspapering in Eagle Pass, but Henry Clay Jordan, a Burlington resident, recalled that at a dinner party Dodge reminisced about his life on the Mexican border. The *Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* of July 25, 1920, in a feature article on Dodge, said that Dodge's Mexican experience furnished him with a background for his *Children of the Desert,* which Scribner's published in 1917. The *New York Times* of March 11, 1917, said the book, set in the crudity and the wilderness of Mexican border life, "is profoundly simple; and it is sheer tragedy."



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Dodge returned to Arkansas in time to involve himself and the small newspaper he edited in the free-silver campaign of 1896. He disagreed with William Jennings Bryan's endorsement of free silver coinage and published editorials opposing it. He considered himself a crusader whose duty it was to make the people of the territory see the light. But unfortunately his subscribers could see nothing but utter ruin for the nation unless Bryan and free silver triumphed, "and when I undertook to try to make my readers see otherwise, they refused to read, withdrew their patronage and left me without any source of income."[9]

Out of work and with little money in his pocket, Dodge, like many an adventuresome young man, enlisted in the regular army to see service during the Spanish-American War, that "splendid little war" which excited the American people. Returning to Camp Eagle Pass, Texas, he enlisted on September 21, 1897, at age 27. He gave his occupation as printer. He stood five feet, four inches tall. His eyes were brown, his hair dark brown, and his complexion dark. What he really wanted to do, in addition to help punish Spaniards who denied Cubans their independence, was to become a war correspondent. The *Saint Louis Globe-Democrat* agreed to pay for and print any special articles he might write. Dodge was not, as he was fond of stating in later life, a war correspondent. The *Globe-Democrat* relied for war news primarily upon its staff correspondents, but accepted special stories from numerous persons who were not regular members of its staff.[10]

Assigned to C Company, Eighteenth United States Infantry, Dodge sailed from San Francisco on June 23, 1898, on the transport *China* for Honolulu. Life aboard ship was busy but pleasant. When men were not drilling, they read books and magazines furnished by the Red Cross, dived overboard to swim in placid seas, gambled a lot, and, at chow time, ate excellent soup, beef stew, potatoes, prunes, and the inevitable hardtack. Group singing was popular, and a favorite ditty went like this:

> Soldier, why don't you work as other men do?
> Oh, how can we work when there's nothing to chew?
> Hallelujah, this is awful!
> Hallelujah, this is bum!
> Hallelujah, for the Lord's sake, let our full rations come!

At night when Dodge found sleeping difficult, he "looked up at the

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[9] Quotation from *Burlington Gazette*, March 20, 1926. Search for the name of Dodge's newspaper and the place where it was published proved unsuccessful.

[10] Dodge's military record is entered in the National Archives, Record Group No. 94, Register of Enlistments, p. 346.



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high, shadowy spars which were swinging back and forth across the starry skies, and then the murmur of waters lulled me to sleep again."[11]

When Dodge's regiment moved against Manila, he described the city wall as being similar to those of cities of medieval Europe, "being wide enough on the top for two wagons to pass each other" and "surrounded by a moat filled with muddy water and having upright spikes fixed in the bottom."[12]

Dodge penned a vivid account of the day he first faced enemy fire.

> The bullets hissed about us, snipping the leaves of the plants and trees; alighting in the mud, or piercing the bamboo trees. We were running through a swamp, and at every depression in the earth, even those that were filled with water, we crouched down, looking about us for the way to run and another place to stop. . . . The experience was terrifying.

He spoke of the utter confusion, of enemy blankets, straw hats, and ammunition strewn about, of a trench filled with mangled bodies. As troops took Manila, the Colorado band played "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." Entering the fallen city, "We caught the flutter of a milk-white flag. Manila had fallen!"[13]

After the surrender, Dodge, because of his knowledge of Spanish, became an interpreter in the office of the provost marshal and saw service in the islands of Luzon, Iloilo, Jolo, Siasi, and Bongao. He was transferred from the Eighteenth Infantry to the Twenty-third Infantry and was mustered out at Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming, on September 20, 1900.[14] Possibly he went to Little Rock to visit relatives and to look for a job.

Finally, Dodge wrote the editor of the *Saint Louis Globe-Democrat*, asking if there was a vacancy on its staff. To his surprise, he received a telegram notifying him to report for work at once. He began his reportorial work in 1901 and, during the following nine years, became that distinguished journal's literary editor and eventually assumed charge of both its musical and dramatic departments. The *Saint Louis City Directory* for 1910 listed Dodge as an editorial writer for the *Saint Louis Times*, although he spoke of himself as the chief editorial writer. After some five years, he left the *Times* to take a position as literary and dramatic critic of the *Saint Louis Republic*, a post

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11 *Saint Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 12, 1898.

12 Interview with Dodge in *Burlington Gazette*, March 20, 1926.

13 *Saint Louis Globe-Democrat*, October 2, 1898.

14 Military Record; *Saint Louis Republic* January 2, 1916. *Who's Who in California* for 1941 states that Dodge campaigned against the Tagalogs and Mohammedans on the islands. Dodge, August 14, 1916, to Briggs, in PUL.



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from which he shortly was fired because he was "too frank and independent in the way of criticism."

His discharge smarted, and Dodge spoke of it only if forced. Indeed, he attempted to exclude it from biographical sketches. When Robert Bridges, his editor at Scribner's, asked him for facts about his life Dodge furnished them in satisfactory fashion. But when it came to his Saint Louis newspaper career, Dodge said: "My term of service on *The Republic* was brief, and if you cared to make mention of my newspaper experiences I should prefer to have it said that I have been associated with the *Globe-Democrat,* since most of my work was done on that newspaper, or with the *Times.*"[15]

Dodge most certainly began writing *Bonnie May,* his first novel, while employed by the *Times* or the *Republic.* Probably he put the final touches to it early in 1915 and set about finding a publisher. With manuscript carefully packaged, he took himself to New York, where two publishers read and rejected it. Dodge always thought it never was read. Returning to Saint Louis, "desperate in the face of joblessness," he suddenly remembered that while in New York he had seen a sign reading Charles Scribner's Sons. He promptly sent the novel there and almost as promptly it was accepted to appear serially in *Scribner's Magazine.*

That experience, said Dodge, "convinced me that personal contact is not necessary to the marketing of a book, at least not in my case. It further has furnished me," continued Dodge, "with a direct answer to aspiring young writers who consult me on the system of placing a manuscript. It all depends, I say to them, on the chance of finding the right reader at the right time; that is, in the right mood, provided you have the right book."[16]

While "Bonnie May" was appearing serially during 1916, Scribner's hurried to publish it as a book. Dodge was greatly pleased with each installment and eagerly looked forward to its publication in book form on August 26. After the first installment appeared in the March

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15 *Post-Dispatch,* July 25, 1920; Dodge, August 14, 1916, to Bridges. In a letter to Bridges of January 25 (1916?), Dodge told a different story: "I finished my year's work with the *Republic* at the end of December and was not re-engaged, owing wholly to money considerations. But I may become connected with the *Post-Dispatch* or the *Globe-Democrat* before very long if there is any suitable work to be done. In the meantime I am taking advantage of the opportunity and am working on a number of manuscripts which have had to be neglected heretofore because of the demands of my newspaper desk." In PUL.

16 Many letters in PUL to Bridges were written on *Saint Louis Republic* stationery, but Dodge had the unfortunate habit of giving month and day, but omitting the year. For Dodge's trip to New York and advice to authors, see *Post-Dispatch,* July 25, 1920.



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issue of the magazine, numerous readers wrote very complimentary letters.[17]

*Bonnie May,* illustrated by Reginald Birch, was an immediate success and established Dodge's reputation as an author. Its theme was simple. Bonnie May, a child of the theater, sees through the clear eyes of a young person the hypocrisy of many conventions of respectable life which are taken for granted. To her the stage has always been a reality and the life of conventional people seems to be artificial. It is they who are acting a part. Reviewers were generous with their praise.[18]

The reception given *Bonnie May* was sufficient to stimulate Dodge to hurry to complete his second novel and to cause his publisher to encourage and praise him. He was over 50 years old when he started writing *Children of the Desert* in his residence at 5712 Mimika Street and of such striking appearance with his rimless glasses, carefully groomed mustache, and Van Dyke beard that those who knew him said he looked like an author should. He was impeccably dressed, when not tending his garden or romping with his dogs, and smoked cigars.

Soft-spoken and an individual of refinement, Dodge furnished his house with old furniture, old pictures, old silver, and both old and new books. A reporter who interviewed him wrote that a "studied agedness" pervaded the place. "In this musty atmosphere lives the author whose works are known to be anything but musty." For years

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17 Bridges, August 11, 1916, to Dodge; Dodge, August 14, 1916, to Bridges: "I want to tell you, finally, how much pleasure it has been to me to see 'Bonnie May' in the Magazine this summer. It has been the sort of thing I have dreamed of for fully twenty years." In PUL together with complimentary comments by readers. Dodge was paid $200 for each installment.

18 Birch was among the outstanding artists of his day and noted for his fascinating pictures of children. Although many reviews were generous enough, some damned with faint praise and others found serious flaws. The *Wisconsin Library Journal,* November 1916, said the book "Makes amusing reading, particularly to those to whom the shop-talk of the stage is always interesting." The *New Republic,* December 9, 1916, commented: "For the first few pages of this story, the reader unfamiliar with the stage child wonders if 'Bonnie May' can possibly be a truthful presentation of a singular phenomenon. Later inaccuracies in observing and rendering daily life arouse distrust of the author's ability to portray the subtle fascination of a child's nature; and finally the complete unreality of plot and character can no longer be ignored." Dodge dedicated the book to "The Little New England Girl Who (In Company with Her Mother) Made Friends with An American Soldier On A June Day In 1898 In The Market-Place in Honolulu and Promised 'I Shall Never Forget You.'" One wonders why an apparently brief, chance meeting should prompt Dodge to dedicate his first novel to that small girl and whether or not he kept in touch with her. For local comments on *Bonnie May,* see *Saint Louis Republic,* January 22, and August 26, 1916.



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Dodge employed Jack (Jacques) Rand, a retired camp cook who was his housekeeper, chef, and majordomo.[19]

In 1918, as the result of Dodge's "orgy of writing," Scribner's brought out *A Runaway Woman* and *The Sandman's Forest.* The former was for adults and the latter for children. *A Runaway Woman,* like *Bonnie May,* first was published in installments. Bridges told Dodge that he did not know whether it would be as popular as *Bonnie May,* but he was sure that it was a better piece of literary work and "this is said without in any way detracting from the delightful 'Bonnie May.'" To Bridges, the story was one of the Middle West centering about a remarkable character, the common-law wife of a burglar, who makes a break for liberty and starts on a vagabond pilgrimage in which she meets a man of refinement and learning. "The scenes are at times sordid and often idyllic. It is a novel of rare charm." After much correspondence author and editor agreed on the length of the manuscript and the number of installments.[20]

Dodge, although working hard and watching what reviewers wrote about his books, was no recluse. He spent considerable time in the late autumn of 1918 visiting Aunt Ella Schramm in Burlington and presenting her and members of the Henry Clay Jordan family with autographed copies of his books. They read and no doubt complimented him on his World War I poem "The Returning":

> They passed: the crowds dissolved, the music died;
> But one old man with hair like wind-swept foam
> Gazed into space with sombre eyes and cried,
> "God bring the dear lads, when their work is over, home!"
>
> God bring them home, those boys?--ah, they who bear
> The dreadful shock, they shall return some day
> With new-born souls, and they shall ever wear
> A loftier mien than when they went away.

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[19] Interview with Thompson; *Post-Dispatch,* July 25, 1920. Dodge mentions Rand in *Nancy Her Life and Death,* the sensitive story of his dog, first published in *Scribner's Magazine,* August 1921.

[20] Bridges to Dodge, September 18, 25, October 9, 1917; Dodge to Bridges, September 22, 26, 29, October 6, 24, 27, 1917. In PUL. *Publisher's Weekly,* September 21, 1918, said that *A Runaway Woman* showed inconsistencies in character development and that the god from the machine was not altogether invisible, but commented that the book was singularly free from the trite types that authors sometimes use in the minor characters. "It presents with truth and vividness scenes of both city and country life—word-pictures that stay with the reader after he has closed the covers of the book." The *Nation,* November 9, 1918, said the novel makes "somewhat clumsily romantic capital out of the 'open road' idea." The *Bellman,* January 18, 1919, saw the book as a peculiar story full of the oddest adventures, but said the action was "as lively and varied" as a cinema plot and about the whole there was the stimulation always belonging to fiction.



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But they who fall, knights of the living God,
Who meet the dawn upon a foreign shore,
They shall come back from France's poppied sod
To be our boys, unchanged, forevermore.[21]

Returning to Saint Louis, Dodge, happy to be with his dogs and homing pigeons, saw to final preparations concerning the publication of *Rosy* and another juvenile, *The Sandman's Mountain,* brought out by Scribner's in 1920.[22] He continued to pressure his publishers to sell *Bonnie May* to a moving picture company and he put finishing touches to *Whispers,* scheduled for publication in 1920.[23]

One of Dodge's major pleasures was his association with the Missouri Writers Guild, a group which met annually at the University of Missouri during Journalism Week. There he was recognized and felt at home. His natural reserve, even timidity, fell away. When he was president of the organization in 1923, he said he wished he could occupy his usual obscure position, "for responsibilities do not rest gracefully on my shoulders, and I can see that coming to Columbia

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21 The Henry Clay Jordans were distant cousins of Dodge. Mrs. Jordan's diary and that of Mrs. Edwin Clare Jordan are in possession of the author of this article. In the latter's entry for November 30, 1918, she writes: "Clare and I went out to pay bills and to Uncle Clay's (Henry Clay Jordan) for dinner to meet Louis Dodge, a cousin of Clare's from St. Louis, a writer and a poet." On December 1, she noted that "Clare and Philip and Uncle Clay took Mr. Dodge for a ride," and on December 16 she said Dodge left for Saint Louis. "The Returning" was published in *Scribner's Magazine* of September 1918.

22 *Rosy,* laid in the Ozark Mountains which Dodge knew so well, was the story of an orphan accused of harboring a boy who was a fugitive from justice. The *New York Times,* May 4, 1919, said that "The story crawls along at a pace compared with which that of the proverbial snail would seem lightning-swift." *Outlook,* June 11, 1919, thought the tale "distinctly well written and grasps the attention strongly."

23 Bridges, March 13, 26, 1918, to Dodge; Dodge, March 15, 1918, to Bridges. Sanger & Jordan, New York brokers, seemed interested in adapting *Bonnie May* for the stage as well as for a moving picture. After discussing the former, Dodge penned an interesting paragraph: "Perhaps you may be interested in knowing that a band of motion picture people—camera men, actors and all—descended upon Eagle Pass last fall and there manufactured a *movie* called 'The Heart of the Sunset.' The fact reached me from old friends in Eagle Pass. Knowing something of the history of the American theatrical producer, as I do, I thought it might be possible that the people in this case were borrowing a leaf or two from 'Children of the Desert,' though very likely I am wholly in error. Nevertheless, if 'The Heart of the Sunset' is ever presented in Saint Louis I shall see it." In PUL. *Booklist,* May 1920, noted that *Whispers* was a mystery with a newspaper background. "The long arm of coincidence is applied to its limit, but the story is entertaining." Dodge, November 21, 1920, to Pommer: " 'Whispers' had a very good success, somewhat surpassing the other books for the first six months. I have not yet, however, attained a place among the really commercially successful writers—I mean, those in the front rank. But I am winning a larger audience all the time and the publishers hope for a brighter future." In MHS.



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this time will be more of a task than a recreation. But I am going to get what pleasure I can out of it anyway."[24]

From the time the Saint Louis Writers' Guild was organized in 1920 until he moved to California, Dodge played an active role. With quiet determination, he helped shape its membership requirements and made it plain that those in the guild were not "disgruntled" persons. The creed of its members, he said, was this: "That editors are human beings, who sometimes make mistakes, but who are eagerly willing to welcome new writers who have something to say and know how to say it. Mere posers would find the meetings not to their liking at all." He was a moving spirit in the planning for a local authors' week held in Vandervoot Music Hall in April 1920.[25]

Dodge drove himself hard during 1920 and 1921. In July 1920, he announced that *Bonnie May* at long last was being made into a motion picture and soon would be released with Bessie Love, a minor actress, in the title role. When the film was shown in a Saint Louis theater, he was pleased.[26] He was laden down with details pertaining to reprint editions of *Whispers. Twai Twai* and *Nancy Her Life and Death,* the last novels written in Saint Louis, were published in 1921. The year also saw Scribner's publishing Dodge's final juvenile book, *Everychild: A Story Which the Old May Interpret to the Young and Which the Young May Interpret to the Old.*[27]

Sometime during the next five years Dodge moved from Saint Louis and apparently lingered for a time in New York City, spent a winter with relatives in Dardanelle, Arkansas, lived for a brief period in Saint Genevieve, Missouri, and visited a brother in Little Rock. He wrote Aunt Ella Schramm that he had a strong desire to go to Cali-

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[24] Dodge, April 16, 1923, to Pommer. In MHS. *Saint Louis Star-Times,* November 11, 1924.

[25] *Star-Times,* February 9, 1921. Program, Authors' Week, April 12-17, 1920. Activities included a series of talks on books, interviews, and displays of original manuscripts. Dodge was among the speakers and exhibited the original drawing used as the cover for *Whispers.*

[26] For *Bonnie May* as a moving picture, see *Post-Dispatch,* July 25, 1920, and *Star-Times,* February 9, 1921.

[27] In the *Post-Dispatch,* July 25, 1920, Dodge was quoted as saying that a firm in Melbourne, Australia, ordered an "entire edition" of *Whispers* and that the McClure Syndicate bought the newspaper rights. *Twai Twai,* with a background of the Rio Grande country and of the Philippine Islands during the Spanish-American War, received favorable reviews. The *New York Times,* April 17, 1921, said the book was "not only an absorbing romance of adventure, but is also what romantic tales of adventure so often are not, a story that is believable, convincing, impressive." *Everychild* tells of a small boy whose parents do not understand him. The lad fights and overcomes Fear and then goes in search of Truth. On the way he meets Aladdin, Hansel and Gretel, and, among others, Cinderella, the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe, and Prince Arthur, nephew of King John.



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fornia. When possible, he attended the annual meeting of the Missouri Writers Club in Columbia. Now and again he published an article in *Scribner's Magazine*.[28]

Finally, not knowing what else to do, Dodge returned to Burlington to live in Aunt Ella's comfortable residence from the autumn of 1925 for perhaps two or three years. He spent much of his time pitching horseshoes and playing pinochle. Each morning, said a reporter who interviewed him, "finds him at the artesian water bar in Lorenz Miller's meat market on Division street. As he and Mr. Miller quaff the life-giving fluid that is guaranteed to put iron in your system, they discuss the topics of the day."[29]

Dodge's removal from Saint Louis, his wanderings, and his sojourn in Burlington seem to be the result of a deep-rooted sense of insecurity as well as tension brought on by years of striving to be somebody and of decades of hard work. He was a bachelor with no wife or children to comfort him. "I have known so few perfect things in my life," he wrote an old friend. "I can only yearn to be taken within the circles which others enlarge for my sake." He thought he lacked elegance of manner, the artful skill in conduct, the easy polish "which qualifies one to come and go in the world and find that the light in every window is set there for him."[30]

He spoke of being dejected. He said the plants in his garden missed him when he was away from them. His flowers contained all the world in miniature. He spoke of the few blessings he had found "since I lost my own home so many years ago."[31]

Dodge's feeling of inadequacy again was expressed in a letter written during his last extended stay in Burlington. He said he belonged to a clan of dreamers and idealists "as far as I belong definitely to anything, and all my life long I have felt that men of affairs, of action, of business training and responsibilities were strangers to me, were perhaps too much engrossed with material matters to be able to grasp the finer issues of life."[32]

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28 After 1922, Dodge was not listed in Saint Louis city directories. Dodge, February 1925, to Mrs. (Aunt Ella) Charles F. Schramm, in possession of Catherine H. Thompson. He recounted his visit to Saint Genevieve in "Old Ste. Genevieve," *Scribner's Magazine*, May 1932.

29 Interview with Thompson; *Burlington Gazette*, March 20, 1926.

30 Dodge, May 22, 1919, to Pommer; Dodge, May 13, 1921, to Pommer. In MHS.

31 Dodge, January 5, 1918, to Pommer. In MHS.

32 Dodge, September 22, 1926, to Mrs. Henry Clay Jordan. At that time Mrs. Jordan was a patient in the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota. Letter held by the author of this article.



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After Aunt Ella Schramm's death in 1927, Dodge, as he once wrote he might, moved to California, living in Los Angeles "for a considerable time." But the hurry and noise and the seemingly hollow aspects of life in that "American Baghdad" depressed him. He set about finding a quieter community where, as he said, he could commune with nature. Quite by accident, he came upon an unpretentious town on the shore of the Pacific Ocean. He said he seemed to hear a voice call out, "So! You have come at last: well, we've been waiting for you long enough!"[33]

When Dodge, 60 years of age, settled in El Redondo, he found the place an answer to a dream. He bought a squat little cottage on the crown of a gentle hill overlooking the Pacific. There was abundance of flowers, and he planted oleander and fig trees and wisteria and grape vines. "Doesn't all that seem too good to be true?" He confessed that often he was lonely and wistfully wished his neighbors could discuss music, books, manners, and philosophy with him. He made frequent trips to the Los Angeles Public Library to gather materials used in *The American.* The director of the local library remembered him as an elderly gentleman who walked the six blocks to the park several times a week.[34]

In a way life was easy and in a way life was hard. Dodge puttered in his garden and pottered at the writing table, keeping busy enough with pruner and pen while he readied the manuscript of *The American* for publication, even though he admitted that his kind of writing no longer was popular. When he wrote his dear friend Pommer that he continued to write because he had to, Dodge was telling the truth. Writing, even if essays, poems, short stories were interred in a trunk, was a catharsis which, at least in some small fashion, purged him of the ever-present feeling that he was a failure and was unwanted. How could an author who not so long ago was one of Scribner's stars be shunted into obscurity? Wasn't he listed in *Who's Who on the Pacific Coast,* and didn't *Who's Who in California* tell all who could read that Louis Dodge had contributed to the nation's best magazines *—Ladies' Home Journal, Smart Set, Youth's Companion, Harper's?*

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33 Dodge, June 20, 1934, to Pommer. In MHS.

34 Ibid. Marilyn Hurd, May 30, 1979, to P. D. Jordan. Dodge was able to live comfortably during retirement because, during his years of publishing, he earned good money and saved it; because his investments were sound; and because he "earned enough from the movie rights of *Bonnie May* to enable him to live for the rest of his life." In Jordan's interview with Thompson, she said with conviction that Dodge told Aunt Ella Schramm he could depend upon movie royalties for a livelihood.



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Hadn't it been said of him that he was at his best as an analyst of character?[35]

During the decade between 1940 and 1950, Dodge's vigor and determination decreased. There was little to challenge him. At 80 years, the past was more important to him than the present. He was forgotten before he died. Libraries, even Burlington's public library, had long since discarded his novels.[36] Dodge died, at age 82, on June 12, 1952, in the Veterans Administration Hospital, Los Angeles, and was buried the next day in the Veterans Administration Cemetery.[37]

Long before his death, Dodge wrote what might well be a sort of epitaph:

I shall not mind—not when the sun rides high
And men too busy are to love or weep;
I think I shall not miss the unsinging sky
As in the silent grave I lie asleep.
But oh, the earth shall throb above my heart
In that soft hour, after the day is done,
When from one river nook, serene, apart,
The spars rise thick against the setting sun.[38]

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35 *Saint Louis Star-Times*, November 11, 1924.

36 Between 1926 and 1943, the Burlington Public Library discarded copies of *Bonnie May, Children of the Desert, A Runaway Woman, Rosy,* and *Whispers. The American* was thrown away in 1962. His books currently are collectors' items.

37 California Registrar of Vital Statistics, Department of Health Services, Sacramento, Death Certificate, No. 52-054183. The certificate lists the date of Dodge's birth incorrectly.

38 *Scribner's Magazine*, May 1920.



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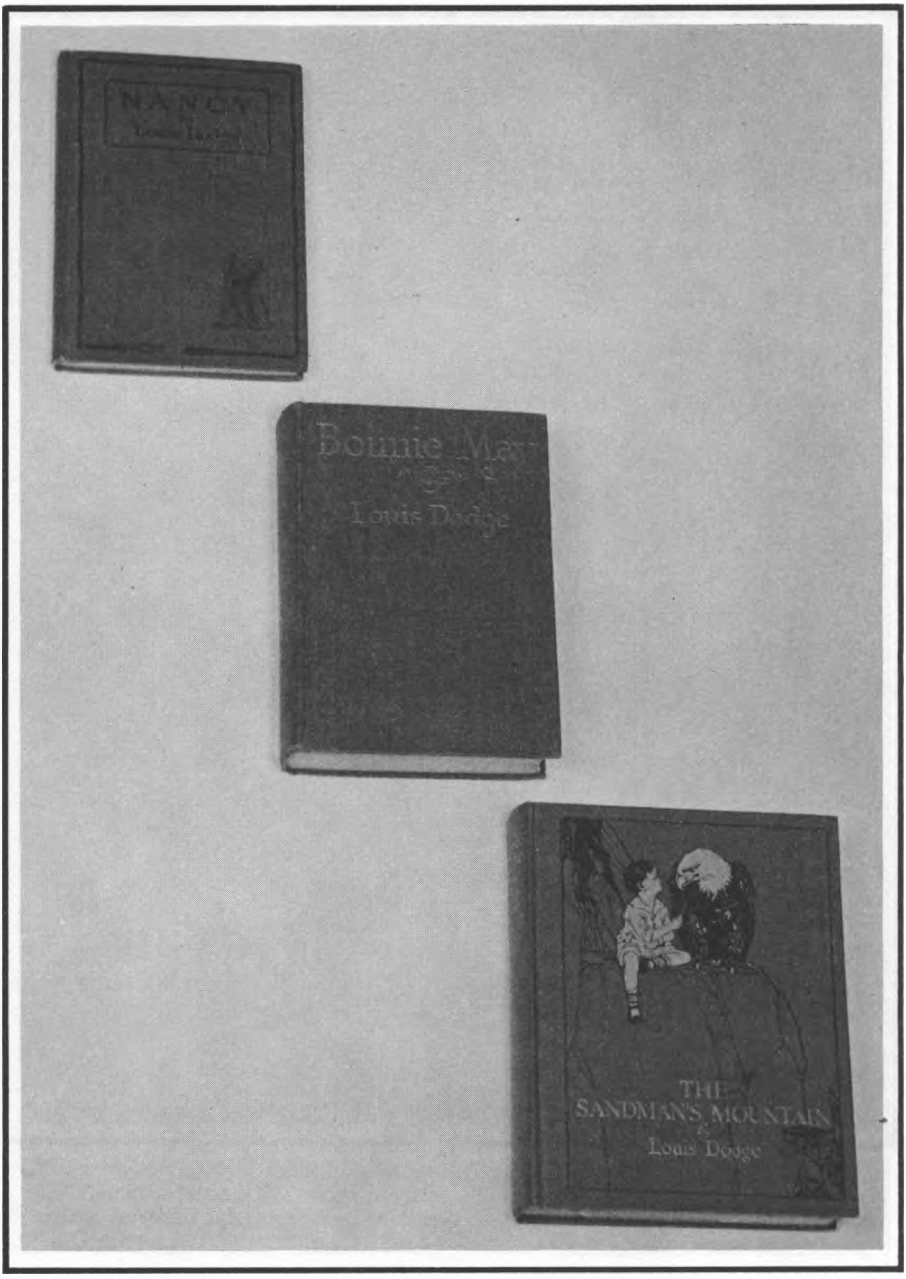


Three books published between 1916 and 1921 by Iowa author Louis Dodge (1870-1952), who was a native of Burlington.



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