

Character of Levi B. Vilas

By Arthur B. Braley

It was a bright February morning, and the risen sun, unobscured by a cloud, shed a flood of glory down upon the snow-covered landscape. Sitting by my library window, I gazed northward in search of an idea, or a topic, for my pen, and my eye lighted upon a spacious stone mansion, standing near the summit of the hill commanding a full view of the broad Mendota, once so sparkling and lively, now pulseless beneath the icy clasp of winter's death-like embrace. This handsome edifice was the residence of my lamented friend, Judge L. B. Vilas, and thus I was reminded of a grateful theme, and an obligation I owe to the dead, at the same time. It is some years since Judge Vilas left

"This bank and shoal of time,"

and took up his abode in the mysterious and boundless hereafter; but he was a man not easily forgotten, and still many more years will roll over his grave before his memory will be obscured by the clouds of oblivion. I do not think that full justice was ever yet done the character of my deceased friend. I have often thought so, and have cherished the design of adding at least my feeble tribute of admiration to the merits of departed worth. Why should I not? It may be tardy justice, but there is no moral reason why an honest debt should not be paid, even though the statute of limitations may have cancelled the legal obligation.

When I first knew Judge Vilas, he could have been but a few years older than his distinguished son is, at present. His tall form was erect as a cedar, and his dark locks were scarcely tinged with gray. He impressed me as one marked "extraordinary," and "not in the roll of common men." As time passed on, and the intercourse of casual acquaintance ripened into the intimacies of the closer ties of friendship, my impressions were deepened and confirmed. Intellectually he had few superiors. His mental