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MISS JEWETT AND MADAME BLANC

By RICHARD CARY

I
“I owe one of the dearest affections of my life to an article entitled *Le Roman de la Femme-Médecin*, which appeared in the *Revue* of February 1, 1885, inspired by Sarah Orne Jewett's *Country Doctor*.” So wrote Madame Marie Thérèse Blanc to a young American who published this statement among others from her series of letters to him.¹ That Miss Jewett reciprocated Madame Blanc's tender feelings has been known only indirectly through comments made by Miss Jewett to mutual friends and to editors.² However, with the discovery of five letters by Miss Jewett to Madame Blanc (now in Colby College Library) their relationship comes into finer focus. Obviously a narrow sampling from a substantial correspondence—Miss Jewett speaks of Madame Blanc's “constant letters”—these letters nevertheless enlarge our knowledge of the interplay of their sensibilities, and prompt a deeper scrutiny into the background and personality of the gifted Frenchwoman.

She was born in 1840 at Seine-Port, “a delicious village” in the Department of Seine et Marne.³ The chateau which was her first home belonged to her grandmother, the lively, witty Marquise de Vitry, whose first husband, Major-General Adrien

¹ Theodore Stanton, “Autobiographical Notes by Madame Blanc,” *North American Review*, CLXVI (May 1898), 600.

² See indexes to Annie Fields, *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett* (Boston, 1911); and Richard Cary, *Sarah Orne Jewett Letters* (Waterville, Maine, 1956).

³ Much of the biographical data which follow are derived from the Stanton article (see note 1, above); from Mrs. [Annie] Fields, “Notable Women: Mme. Blanc (‘Th. Bentzon’),” *Century*, LXVI (May 1903), 134-139; and from Grace King, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (New York, 1932), *passim*.

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Benjamin de Bentzon, had been a governor of the Danish Antilles. Their only daughter married the Count de Solms, a Parisian of Teutonic origin, and of this union Marie Thérèse was the principal issue. To this mixture of French, German, and Danish blood in her pedigree Marie de Solms attributed the "moral and intellectual cosmopolitanism which is found in my nature," the German idealism, and sentimentality "held in check by certain other French" qualities.

She grew up, comfortably if not lavishly, "in the charge of one of those legendary nurses," served by faithful old domestics, and guided in piety by a rustic priest. Most endurable of her early influences was Miss Robertson, "an admirable English governess" who assigned the child readings beyond her years, the Waverley novels and Washington Irving, Madame Blanc's first acquaintance with America. At school she ranked best in composition and rhetoric, a source of pride to her father who showed off her copybooks to his friends. For the rest, her education was "by fits and starts without diplomas at the end, with much reading and dreaming, with meditation in the country and with some travel, especially a never-to-be-forgotten sojourn in Germany" (Stanton, 596-597). Surely, she mused, this was more advantageous to "the awakening and development of the imagination" than a formal curriculum.

Marie's father had always appealed to her as a figure surpassing the princes of fiction, a man "most adventuresome, most romantic, being dominated by the passions." Thus, when he presented her at sixteen to his choice for a husband, she made no demur. Count de Solms had forsaken his career in diplomacy in order to address himself to the ingenious financial speculations that bloomed so profusely in this era. As a fit partner for his child he settled upon one of his own stripe, Alexandre Blanc, a twenty-two-year-old financier who had demonstrated some brilliance in manipulation. They were duly married, and went to live on his estate in the south of France. But Blanc's involvements in Paris necessitated numerous absences, with consequent interludes of loneliness for his wife in an alien area. Within the year they moved from Vienne back to the capital, and there a son, Edouard, was born shortly after her seventeenth birthday. By the time she was nineteen Monsieur Blanc had dissipated his own resources and hers, incom-

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patibility had ripened, and they were divorced. She did not see him again for thirty years.

Madame Blanc's father had died a few months after her marriage (during a voyage to Martinique on some pecuniary scheme), she had an infant to support, and she had no practical training by which to gain a livelihood. Living with her mother in genteel destitution, her mind reverted to her childish triumphs in the use of words. She had never completely relinquished writing for her own amusement; now she fixed upon this verbal inclination as an attainable vocation and set about to consolidate her skills. (Long after, she said, "I have always looked upon poverty as an obliging friend, for it placed the pen firmly in my hand" (Stanton, 597). Oddly, her debut in print was made not in her native tongue but in English, a translation of Viscount de Noé's book, *Les Bachibozouks*, a set of Crimean War episodes. She was not overly impressed with her achievement, and always suspected that the Viscount—English on his mother's side—had furbished the manuscript before publication.

As Madame Blanc entered her twenties, her mother married again—auspiciously, the Count d'Aure, first equerry to the Emperor Napoleon III and the most expert cavalrymaster in France. Through her stepfather, whom she looked upon as "superior in every respect," she came to know the intricacies of life at court during the Empire although she did not mingle in the *beau monde* herself. Among his prominent friends was "that woman of genius," George Sand. Count d'Aure introduced his stepdaughter to the novelist, who took particular pains counseling and encouraging the incipient author. In turn, George Sand introduced Madame Blanc to François Buloz, the formidable founder of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and recommended that he consider some of her work. He read and returned several contributions, but consolation lay in Madame Sand's generous exclamation that, "At twenty-two I could not have done what you are doing" (Stanton, 597). In the meantime, book reviews, essays, and fiction by Madame Blanc began to infiltrate newspapers and periodicals of lesser stature. To avoid editorial prejudice and public aspersion in an age when female writers were still a disputable phenomenon, Madame Blanc adopted her mother's maiden name—Th. Bent-

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zon—as *nom de plume*, abbreviating the prenomen Thérèse to mask its femininity. This remained her by-line through the four and a half decades of her career.

A man to whom Madame Blanc ascribed immense influence upon her emergence as a writer is M. Caro, professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne and an estimable *littérateur*. He put her through an arduous course of reading and assessed her work “with kindly severity.” He was also partially responsible for her first admittance to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, her longest step toward recognition. She had written on invitation for the *Journal des Débats* a novel entitled *Un Divorce*. While it was coming out serially, Professor Caro induced Buloz to read it, despite his consistent rejection of Madame Blanc’s offerings. The spark he had apparently missed in earlier effusions, he espied here. He thereupon solicited a story from her, and she obliged with the novelette “La Vocation de Louise,” which he published in January 1872. Its success, she said, “opened to me definitely the pages of the *Revue*.” Buloz, aroused, took her in hand, coached her to his own methods, and disposed his magazine to a procession of her finest fiction, social studies, biographical sketches, literary criticism, and translations. They comprise a majority of the more than forty volumes under her name.

It was Madame Blanc’s devotion to the last two categories that brought Sarah Jewett into her ken. Although she wrote a lengthy evaluation of Rudyard Kipling and translated novels by Ouida and Dickens, she could not shake the fascination with America that Washington Irving had inspired in her childhood days. She began by translating some of Bret Harte’s tales of gold-rush California, moved on to Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s “Marjorie Daw,” and in September 1885 to Miss Jewett’s portrait of an orphaned moppet, “A Little Traveler.” Madame Blanc’s list of critiques on American writers is more extensive, and dominated by local colorists: Edward Bellamy, Charles Warren Stoddard, Sidney Lanier, Octave Thanet (Alice French), Hamlin Garland, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Thomas Nelson Page, Grace King, George Washington Cable, William Allen White, and Miss Jewett.

The essay-review cited by Madame Blanc (at the head of this article)—“Le Roman de la Femme-Médecin,” *Revue des Deux*

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Mondes, LXVII (February 1, 1885), 598-632—is signed in the usual way, Th. Bentzon. Ostensibly an examination of *A Country Doctor* (1884), it embraces in its progress consideration of four of Miss Jewett's preceding five books. Madame Blanc's obsessive concern over the emancipation of women usurps the first section of five pages, which is in effect a short brochure on recent advances in that crusade. Thereafter, in a style favoring the parenthetical, she reveals herself as a well-informed, allusive critic who elicits comparisons with George Eliot, Mary Russell Mitford, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mme. Gasparin, Van Ostade, and Gerard Dow; an able metaphorist; a pundit on the nature and function of the novel and essay genres; a perceptive psychologist; a romantic; a shrewd assayer of qualities and values; and a forthright articulator of opinions. She comes quickly to the cope of Miss Jewett's excellence; her authentic ruralism, grounded in unprecedented knowledge of provincial Maine speech and habits, and in delineation of humble details, marvelously distinct as in the canvas of a Dutch realist and touched by the light of a Claude Lorrain. She praises Miss Jewett for "discernment full of benevolence," for precision, for caprices of fantasy, and for tact in arriving at moral conclusions without preachment. Yet, not all is complimentary. Madame Blanc delivers strictures on Miss Jewett's lack of inventive power, her evasion of violence, her philosophic naivete, her ignorance of passion, her tendency to digression and overly minute observation, the paucity of movement and variety in her novel, the baleful stress on thesis rather than emotion in its evolvment, the awkwardness of form, and the crushing dictum that—although they have some points in common—George Eliot possesses "all the gifts of genius," Miss Jewett only "the gentle seduction of talent." Madame Blanc views her future as a novelist dourly but compensates by granting her high place among pastoral essayists and making some astonishingly valid assumptions about the rapport between Miss Jewett and her doctor father.

Miss Jewett, hardly unaware of her vulnerability in the zone of dynamic storytelling, must have been impressed by Madame Blanc's altogether balanced appraisal, certainly flattered by this prestigious exposure in the leading critical journal of France. Annie Fields, her closest companion for thirty years, describes

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the far-reaching effect of this review on both author and reviewer. "My first acquaintance with Mme. Blanc began in 1885. In February of that year she printed a long critical paper, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, upon the New England stories of my friend Miss Jewett, which showed such keen understanding and extraordinary literary gift, such a sympathetic appreciation of a land outside any practical knowledge of the writer, that Miss Jewett wrote a note of acknowledgment to the unknown 'M. Th. Bentzon' to express her pleasure in his work. When Mme. Blanc wrote a delightful womanly reply, and the case was made clear, a correspondence was begun between the two ladies which laid the foundation of a long-continued friendship."⁴

II

It is regrettable that these initial missives have not been recovered and that the first intimation of this exquisite friendship, as yet published, occurs in an undated letter ineptly edited by Mrs. Fields. While not precisely determinable, it would seem that sometime in the spring of 1890 Miss Jewett lauded the delightful fragrance of Madame Blanc's latest letter, "so refined, so personal, and of the past" (Fields, *Letters*, 66). This reverence of tradition was one of the strongest elements in the concretion of their intimacy; both women often proclaimed the incandescence of "the old days" and the debt they owed to the sturdiness of their parents' standards. Miss Jewett's second allusion to Madame Blanc is more exactly certifiable. On July 23, 1890, she wrote to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Bailey Aldrich about receiving "a volume of S.O.J. all in French" (Fields, *Letters*, 70). This is *Le Roman de la Femme-Médecin*, suivi de *Récits de la Nouvelle-Angleterre*, par Sarah Orne Jewett. Préface de Th. Bentzon. Traduction autorisée par l'auteur (Paris: J. Hetzel & Cie, n.d.).⁵ The volume car-

⁴ "Notable Women," 137-138. Mrs. Fields, evidently working from memory, erroneously gave the year as 1883.

⁵ In Clara C. & Carl J. Weber, *A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Sarah Orne Jewett* (Waterville, Maine, 1949), 57, the date of the first edition is conjectured as [1893?]. On other evidence within this letter—Aldrich left the editorship of the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1890—the 1893 date seems out of line. Since, by that year, Miss Jewett had published three more collections of her short stories and Madame Blanc chose no item published later than March 1888, the 1890 publication date appears more tenable.

The nine stories included in translation are: "A Lost Lover," "The King of Folly Island," "A White Heron," "Miss Tempy's Watchers," "Farmer Finch," "A Sorrowful Guest," "A Little Traveler," "Lady Ferry," and "The Confession of a House-Breaker."

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ries as introduction Madame Blanc's review of *A Country Doctor*, the text of the novel and of nine short stories culled from *Old Friends and New* (1879), *The Mate of the Daylight* (1884), *A White Heron* (1886), and *The King of Folly Island* (1888). It caused Miss Jewett "such pride of heart that no further remarks are ventured upon the subject!"

Mrs. Fields records one other reference by Miss Jewett before they met Madame Blanc. On a surmise, for this letter is also undated, it was written in the autumn of 1890 and describes a prize engraving by Amaury Duval of Madame Blanc which she has sent to South Berwick (Fields, *Letters*, 76-77). On their second trip together to Europe, in the summer of 1892, Sarah Jewett and Annie Fields finally came face to face with Madame Blanc in Paris. More than seven years had elapsed since they had first written one another, a matter of probably small moment to Madame Blanc who had corresponded with Victor Cherbuliez for over twenty years before encountering him personally. But the confrontation posed an emotional dilemma for Miss Jewett. Mrs. Fields pictures her trepidation: "[We] found ourselves on the staircase of an old mansion in the ancient part of the city. 'Perhaps we shall do better to turn back,' Miss Jewett said; 'it is really taking a great risk to see so old a friend for the first time. This dear and intimate friendship of ours may be in danger.'" Mrs. Fields resolutely rang the bell, they were ushered in to Madame Blanc, and Miss Jewett's crisis was soon "most happily" resolved.⁶ In a letter to Mrs. George D. Howe from Chailly on July 9, 1892, Miss Jewett confirms these observations: "I can tell you that I went up her stairs with my heart much a-feared,—it is an awful experiment to see so old a friend for the first time,—but I found her even more dear and kind and delightful than she has been in her letters for these eight long years. There has been no end to her friendliness" (Fields, *Letters*, 91).

Since the death of her mother Madame Blanc had been living alone in "a bright, small apartment" on the Rue de Grenelle. She entertained them in her salon which Grace King, who visited her shortly after, depicted as "a moderately sized square room, whose dainty white and gold Louis Seize furniture, and

⁶ "Notable Women," 138.

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few fine portraits and photographs, gave one a pleasant impression of friendliness."⁷ Madame Blanc presented the two Americans to her literary friends (Ferdinand Brunetière) and to her aristocratic friends (Countess de Beaulaincourt); she took them to her country place, where they admired the pastel French landscape and took long, ecstatic walks through the woods and meadows.

The following year (1893) Madame Blanc made her first sojourn to America. She put up at Mrs. Fields's house on Charles Street in Boston and was there regaled by the stream of authors, publishers, artists, and intellectuals of every vein who constituted her hostess' coterie. In company with her two friends she fared eagerly through the city and its environs, soaking in impressions of New England scenes and mores; alone, she entrained three times for Chicago to glean what she could of the American character at the Columbian Exposition there. The goal she set for herself was to analyze and interpret "the aspirations of our country, especially in introducing the labors and achievements of our women to their sisters in France."⁸ The upshot of her busy visit was *Les Américaines Chez Elles* (Paris, 1896), a volume of reflections on the enlightened sense of individual freedom and social benevolence extant in Chicago and Boston, the latter's riverscape having dazzled her at first sight "*comme un rêve de beauté*." In addition, having witnessed the "touching custom" of a Memorial Day parade by veterans, she translated Miss Jewett's "Decoration Day" for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (August 1, 1894); later, "A Native of Winby" for the *Revue pour les Jeunes Filles* (September 20, 1895).

On her part, Miss Jewett energetically canvassed American editors in behalf of Madame Blanc's products. Miss Jewett arranged for the translation, worked over the style, then scolded editor Alfred E. Keet for condensing "Family Life in America,"

⁷ King, 120. This concurrence on the term *friendliness* is not accidental. All available accounts stress Madame Blanc's cordiality and her greater heed to the personal rather than professional aspects of people, newly met or of long acquaintance. She was, as Miss King said, "*au fait* in the art of pleasing."

⁸ Fields, "Notable Women," 134. A third purpose not enumerated by Mrs. Fields is strongly reformative. Madame Blanc exulted in the fact that her book "has done not a little to advance in France the moderate and rational side of the woman cause" (Stanton, 600).

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Forum, XXI (March 1896), 1-20, beyond the thirty or forty pages Madame Blanc was accustomed to in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Cary, *SOJ Letters*, 76-77). A second article, "A French Friend of Browning—Joseph Milsand," effloresced in the pages of *Scribner's*, XX (July 1896), 108-120. Still another came out that year—"About French Children," *Century*, LII (October 1896), 803-822—under the aegis of Robert Underwood Johnson, who had crossed the ocean on the same steamer as Miss Jewett in 1892 and, with Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Fields, had toured much of Italy and France together (Cary, *SOJ Letters*, 78, 60-61).

The curiosity stirred by *Les Américaines Chez Elles* among French readers prodded Madame Blanc to steep herself more deeply in the subjects of American manners and the status of American females. Accordingly, she set sail in March 1897 with Madame and Ferdinand Brunetière, editor of the *Revue*, who was to deliver a series of lectures at Johns Hopkins, Bryn Mawr, Harvard, Yale, and Columbia. After a season in Canada, Madame Blanc stopped briefly at *Gambrel Cottage*, Mrs. Fields's summer home on Thunderbolt Hill in Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts. Thence she proceeded with Miss Jewett to South Berwick. "Just now," wrote Miss Jewett to Harriet Prescott Spofford on June 9, "we are here keeping the old house together and looking at the green fields with the eager delight of children. I have given her some sweet fern and some bayberry and some young checkerberry leaves, and so now she knows New England" (Cary, *SOJ Letters*, 84). On the previous day Miss Jewett had inquired of Elder Henry Green, leader of the Shaker colony at Alfred, Maine, whether it would be convenient for him to accommodate her and a French lady for a day and night. She pleaded Madame Blanc's desire to study one of these communal societies, and assured the Elder that she was sincerely reverent, that they would all enjoy her, and that she spoke English fluently. Elder Henry invited them. They planned to drive by carriage, but a ferocious storm lasting several days prevented them. On June 15 they managed to get to Alfred by railroad after some precarious detours through New Hampshire.⁹ Madame Blanc

⁹ For a detailed account of this experience see Carl J. Weber, "New England Through French Eyes Fifty Years Ago," *New England Quarterly*, XX (September 1947), 385-396; also Miss Jewett's letters to Elder Henry Green in Cary, *SOJ Letters*, 82-83, 84-85, 87, 88.

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narrated her experience at Alfred in "Le Communisme en Amérique," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, CXLIV (November 15, 1897), 300-335, one section of which is captioned, "Une Visite chez les Shakers"; and her views of New England place and people in "Dans la Nouvelle-Angleterre," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, CL (December 1, 1898), 542-582. These essays were incorporated with others in, respectively, *Choses et Gens d'Amérique* (Paris, 1898) and *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle-Angleterre* (Paris, 1899).

For the next segment of her stay in the United States Madame Blanc sought out Grace King, the Louisiana local colorist, because—as she phrased it—"the Americans in the North are so rich and spend so much money." Setting aside her fondness for Maine's pine woods and pastures, its deep bays, promontories, islands, and salt marshes, she repaired to the King home in New Orleans, with intent to explore the culture of the South. She wrote assiduously during the mornings and spent the afternoons in reconnaissance. Miss King accompanied her to the Carnival, to a masked ball, gave a musicale in her honor, and placed her in touch with her eminent friends in the arts and in government. From here Madame Blanc's itinerary led westward to Arkansas. Miss King took the riverboat with her up the Mississippi as far as Memphis, Madame Blanc continuing by train to the plantation of Octave Thanet (Alice French) along the Black River. She returned East by way of Kansas and the Middle Border, the special literary provinces of William Allen White and Hamlin Garland. Her insights and reactions to the new society developing in these exciting States were duly recorded by Madame Blanc for her client magazines, as were her pen-paintings of Virginia, the Delta, the prairie country, and her appreciations of Miss French, Miss King, White, and Garland. These and other accretions from this journey are collected in *Choses et Gens d'Amérique* and *Questions Américaines* (Paris, 1901).

III

The FIRST of the five recovered letters from Miss Jewett to Madame Blanc was written almost six months after their eventful expedition to the Shaker colony, and it is pure tribute, *con amore*, from one able writer to another. The "paper"

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Miss Jewett cites is "Le Communisme en Amérique" in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

148 Charles Street
Boston
December 1, [1897]

Dearest Thérèse:

I have come to town for a few days and I find the *Revue* with your beautiful paper. I cannot tell you with what joy and delight I have read it—all those hours live again for me and shine more than ever with a lovely light from the sun of our friendship. But oh how I wish to see you! You have done this piece of work in quite a wonderful way, 'mon cher maitre.' I suppose that I appreciate your great gift better for knowing so well the material upon which it now spends itself.

I have only time to say this and to send my note flying to the post to catch this steamer. Annie is very well and town very busy. At home our friends have come to the lonely house. It begins to seem long since I heard from you.

With dearest pride in your work and love for you,
S. O. J.

In the spring of 1898 Miss Jewett and Mrs. Fields once more embarked for Europe, toured England and France, and by the first week of June were ensconced in Madame Blanc's country house at La Ferté sous Jouarre, where they stayed approximately a month, "with occasional flights to Paris and to Rheims and so on." Miss Jewett was entranced by the big-walled garden with its great fountain, numerous singing birds, dwarf trees, and pleached walks; with the vista of gently sloped hill rising to the horizon, muffled in green trees; with the brown old town, its curious crypts and convent towers as old as the time of Charlemagne; and with the far-off sound of ringing, "like a dream of bells" (Fields, *Letters*, 143-151).

Back in New England in August of the following year Miss Jewett received the sheets of a book Madame Blanc had partly written and wholly edited, with a request about the possibilities of an American edition. Miss Jewett read the text—*Causeries de Morale Pratique* (Paris, 1899), devised as a "*cours de morale à l'usage des jeunes filles*"—with growing skepticism of its appeal to American girls, for it seemed to her "very French indeed." Dutifully, however, she referred it to a feminist educator who rendered a more hopeful verdict. On the strength of this she "made bold" to importune the advice of

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Horace E. Scudder, recently retired editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and her friend since he had published her story, "The Shipwrecked Buttons," in the *Riverside Magazine* of January 1870. Within two days Scudder confirmed Miss Jewett's opinion that the book would be impractical for American schools and could, in any case, have no vogue here (Cary, *SOJ Letters*, 90-91). The project was abandoned.

The SECOND letter to Madame Blanc was written by Miss Jewett from Italy during her fourth and last outing to Europe in the spring of 1900. She took in Greece and Turkey before stopping, shortly this time, at La Ferté.

Naples
March 18, [1900]

Dear friend:

It was *such* a joy to know that you are again in La Ferté and that Marie and Louise are looking after you there! I have been so sadly worried about you all these weeks. I am sure that you will be better now, but I know too well how long one must be in shaking off the fetters of weakness and depression after the influenza. I have hardly even yet got free from my attack of last year. You must not try to push yourself to write, or to go much where people are talking. I long to see you now, and I hope that the weeks will fly fast away until I can get to Paris. I wonder if you will not be at La Ferté? Cannot I come for a night there? Only a few days before your letter came I was wishing that I could go there some day of our short stay, and take again that lovely drive to Jouarre. I cannot think of anything so delightful as to do just that. But first you will go to Parays, and I hope that the change will be of great benefit.

We had a very hard voyage. I was quite used up by it but I begin now to feel like myself again. We had very cold weather here but Annie and Miss Garrett¹⁰ and I are getting on well on the whole. We have just spent one day at Pompeii and another at Paestum and today we are taking a quiet Sunday. We leave here for Athens on Wednesday, where you might be good enough to write us at the Hôtel Grande Bretagne.

It is late and I must not write any more, but send this letter half-written and only filled with love. Pray give my kindest remembrance to Monsieur et Madame Delzant if you are already with them. I am so glad to hear that Madame Delzant is better.

Yours most affectionately,
Sarah

Pray give my best messages to Monsieur Blanc.

¹⁰ Mary Elizabeth Garrett (1854-1915) was the daughter of a president of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. One of the five founders of the Bryn Mawr School, an early supporter of Bryn Mawr College, and a generous contributor toward the establishment of the Johns Hopkins Medical School, she kept a summer cottage at Dark Harbor, Maine. Miss Jewett dedicated *Betty Leicester's Christmas* "To M. E. G."

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Parays, some four hundred miles southwest of Paris in the Department of Lot et Garonne, was the home town of Alidor and Gabrielle Delzant, a couple Miss Jewett had come to know through Madame Blanc. Alidor (1848-1905) was a bibliophile of note, an editor, and author among other works of a biography of the Goncourt brothers. Gabrielle (1854-1903), delicate in health and exquisite in breeding, aspired to write. She compiled extensive memoranda and rough drafts of books on Port Royal and the Princesse de Liancourt but died before completing either. Her husband edited *Gabrielle Delzant: Letters, Souvenirs* (1904).

Miss Jewett's THIRD letter to Madame Blanc is the most representative in tone and content, moving through a gamut of motifs from *la vie mondaine* close to the hearts of both women—Annie Fields, Madame's family, a book by Madame, one by Sarah, their notes to each other, a mutual friend, Sarah's family, nature—and closing on a note of ardent regard. The unidentified novels are Madame Blanc's *Tchelovek*, which was being issued in four installments in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* from June 1 through July 15, 1900; and Miss Jewett's *The Tory Lover*, later serialized in the *Atlantic Monthly* from November 1900 through August 1901.

June 17, [1900]

Dearest friend:

I am so sorry that two weeks have passed since I came ashore and yet I have not sent you a single word. But my eye was still strained and I have had to be careful with it, and I have been as busy as I could be going once to Boston and to Manchester the day Annie moved down, and hurrying with some proofs and writing affairs that kept me from using my eyes for other things. So this is the first foreign letter to get itself begun, when I have others to write, you may be sure! And I have had your card from La Ferté and been so sorry for your anxiety about your son. It seems such a pity after his good journey.

I am thinking so often about your work and hoping it is already finished and quite to your mind. I cannot say how eager I am to see it. Annie's copy of the *Revue* is not yet in hand. She thinks that the subscription ran out while we were away but we shall soon get hold of it.

They are urging me almost irresistibly just now to give a long story to the *Atlantic* for next year, and I cannot yet dare to promise. I am so fixed in the habit of making short stories that I am not sure of being able to do the sort of thing I wish to do, of another sort—you must say what you think!

I cannot help being glad that you got my note from Cherbourg though I often thought with shame of that much fumbled envelope which I discovered in a corner of my bag, in some useful capacity!

It was such a joy to have that beautiful glimpse of Acosta. I feel so disappointed at having seen dear Madame de Beaulaincourt so very little, but after all I *have* seen her again. And I have seen you, dear, thank Heaven! Oh, do keep it always in mind that you are coming again next year.

Theodore came home from college last night—a great event in the family—for his long vacation. He was heard loudly demanding “where this beautiful new silver dish came from?” Mary¹¹ thanks you many times for her share, and I thank you all over again. It is lovely, with green oak leaves and green leaves and white flowers. I love it very much.

Good night, do write as often as you can to your most loving

S. O. J.

Miss King’s cameo of Madame Blanc’s son Edouard captures the salient lines of his occupation and disposition: “. . . noted as a traveler and lecturer, and a distinguished member of the Geographical Society. He was known for his new discoveries in the country of the Pamirs. He was a tall man, a giant in frame, but not at all handsome. He talked well, with much of his mother’s charm of manner. His apartment was in the story above his mother’s. His large salon was filled with bookcases. In a particular case were books bound especially according to his own design, in white parchment, with his monogram on the back. They were all rare and on scientific subjects. He led, we were told, the life of a recluse; he seemed perfectly indifferent to every subject except literature” (139-140).

Ruth Charlotte de Beaulaincourt (1818-1904) was the daughter of the Maréchal de Castellane, a soldier who served with distinction under both Napoleons, and whose *Journals* she published in five volumes. An intimate of princesses and prime ministers, she counted Prosper Mérimée and the Empress Eugénie among her friends. After an uninhibited youth, she settled down to a staid existence in which the making of artificial flowers was now her chief distraction. Her salon was one of the most scintillating in Paris. Marcel Proust, a protégé and regular attendant, used her as the model for Madame de

¹¹ Theodore J. Eastman (1879-1931), son of Miss Jewett’s younger sister Caroline, matriculated at Harvard College, 1897-1901, then went on to Harvard Medical School, from which he received his degree in 1905.

Mary is Miss Jewett’s elder sister.

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Villeparisis in *Remembrance of Things Past*. In 1898 Miss Jewett had been received by the Countess in her Chateau d'Acosta, about ten miles north of Paris.

Miss Jewett's FOURTH letter opens with a gush of sentimentality over the state of Madame Blanc's health and concludes with a felicitous sentiment on the value of her letters—"a gift of diamonds!" In an access of reticence the day before this letter, Miss Jewett had written to Robert Underwood Johnson, editor of the *Century*: "I am afraid that I cannot write about Madame Blanc! Mrs. Fields does such things better than I ever could, should you care to ask her, and I would lend a hand if my hand were needed" (Cary, *SOJ Letters*, 97). Mrs. Fields did take on the assignment, which eventuated in her essay "Notable Women: Mme. Blanc." There is no indication in the printed version that she consulted or was aided by Miss Jewett in its composition.

South Berwick, Maine
December 6, 1901

What a dear and delightful letter, my dear friend! It gives me the greatest joy as I read it and feel that your journey has done you good—I feel so distinctly all that refreshment of mind and body which you have gained. Oh, do not get cold now! Be very careful of yourself and take the *best* care, *as you would of somebody else*. You will write as fast as a steam engine, and miss the free air which you have had in all those weeks. And you must *take care of you* for my sake. Now we shall be looking for your chapters in the *Revue* which will make us share in your great Russian experience. This letter and the one that came before have given me much already, but I am eager for more—and more!

I am sorry that I was so unmindful about the *Tory Lover* affairs. I remember that you asked about a *traducteur*, but I have known and heard nothing. You said a most kind word in the *Revue*. I did indeed see that, and I believe that I must have thanked you. I wonder if you really think that it would interest enough French people? After all, there is much of France in it. I should think that France might find it more interesting than England. The notices of the press here have been excellent and it is having a good sale. I wish that it might have a new impulse because people liked it across the sea. I am at a loss about terms. I never can get anything very satisfactory from my publishers. Could not there be some proper sharing of the profits? In London I get twenty-five per cent of these. If you had not so much to do that is more immediate and important, I should have *loved* your doing with the book as you did long ago to my endless profit (a blessing in a friendship!) with the *Country Doctor*.

I see that Col. Higginson is having your paper about him put into

an English edition; someone has translated it. You can hardly think what a pleasure it has been to him in every way.

I wish that you would fly to Berwick this very night! Mrs. Howe is coming for a visit of two or three days this evening; tomorrow she has promised to speak to a woman's club here in which Mary and I are much interested. Laura Richards, her daughter, comes too, and it will be very gay for you. Oh what joy if I could see you here again. I am already wondering when it can be: but tonight I promise you very good company which might not always happen, as you know, in Berwick!

Annie has been very well. She was here last week again to spend Thanksgiving with us, and I was to go to town on Monday and then to Hartford for two nights to Mrs. Warner, but two things broke up my plans: first we had news of the sudden death of my uncle in Exeter, and I must go to the funeral, and at the same time I felt so ill with an attack of *la grippe* that I could hardly manage to get there and get home again—and to my bed! But I am getting on much better today and Mrs. Howe will prove a good medicine for such a case.

I have not yet turned to my work again. I cannot muster much energy yet, and all my magazine affairs are sadly behindhand. I must get hold of things before long. Next month I hope to be much in town, and to have some quiet weeks with Annie. After I make my annual visit to Mrs. Cabot in the early part of January I shall go to Charles Street to stay. In this busy, almost *hunted* year, I have been able to take very few quiet days, but it has happened that Annie has been alone very seldom—with Miss Cochrane's long visit and others which would keep her from being unaccompanied.

Theodore is working very hard in the Medical school. He is always much pleased by your kind messages, and Mary too, who is very busy as usual, and very cheerful in all her kindnesses. We are going to Charles Street next week.

Dear friend, write to me as often as you can, it is a great pleasure to hear from you, and to have such a letter as this is a gift of diamonds! I cannot tell you how it delights me to read it, and to read it again.

Yours most affectionately,
S. O. J.

In her tireless quest into the physiology of foreign societies, Madame Blanc turned to the enigma of Tzarist Russia. She published exhaustive papers on her findings in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* for April 1 and May 15, 1902, and February 15, 1903.

Miss Jewett was not so helpless about fiscal matters as she pretends here. Independently wealthy, she eschewed the indelicate topic of money; yet, when the question came up, could insist very firmly on her price for specific works. *The Tory Lover* was translated as *Le Roman d'Un Loyaliste* by Mlle Douesnel and published by Hachette et Cie in 1905. Madame

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Blanc had done a protracted review of *A Country Doctor* in 1885 and had translated the novel in 1890, but for reasons stemming from illness or occupational commitment did not rise to Miss Jewett's oblique persuasion. Her "kind word" occurs in "Dans la Nouvelle-Angleterre" (see above):

South Berwick eut la bonne fortune de produire un romancier qui sait intéresser l'ancien monde comme le nouveau à une population si différente de ce que les étrangers ignorans croient être, en bloc, le peuple américain: un ramassis de gens très vulgaires, très durs et de provenances mêlées. Lisez les esquisses de Sarah Jewett; vous verrez que le caractère des citoyens de la Nouvelle-Angleterre est avant tout la dignité: dignified, cette épithète revient souvent, et en effet elle exprime mieux qu'aucune autre les aspirations, la tenue, la conduite de chacun (544).

Madame Blanc's article on Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911), Massachusetts clergyman, soldier, author, and discoverer of Emily Dickinson, appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, n.s. III (June 1, 1901), 616-655, and was collected in her *Questions Américaines*. The English edition, a small volume translated by Emily Mary Waller, is entitled *A Typical American: Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (London, 1902).

The spate of persons evoked in this letter are: Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910), who wrote the words of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," lectured on literature, abolition, and women's rights; Laura E. Richards (1850-1943), author of *Captain January* and more than a hundred other popular juveniles, was a frequent guest with her mother at the Jewett home; Mrs. Charles Dudley Warner, wife of the writer and editor, was a concert pianist and leader of cultural life in Hartford, Connecticut; John Taylor Perry, Miss Jewett's maternal uncle, editor of the *Cincinnati Gazette* for a quarter-century, died on November 29, 1901; Mrs. Susan Burley Cabot (1822-1907), to whom Miss Jewett dedicated *The Queen's Twin*, provided stimulating vacations in the winter at her home on Beacon Street and in the summer at her cottage in Pride's Crossing; Jessie Cochrane of Kentucky, a protégée of Mrs. Fields was a talented amateur musician and aspiring writer.

Miss Jewett's FIFTH letter to Madame Blanc survives in fragmentary form, the first portion conceivably destroyed be-

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cause of an embarrassing personal reference or its excessively peevish tenor. The dating is predicated on her allusion to John Tucker, a Civil War veteran who came to work for Dr. Jewett as a "temporary" hostler in 1875 and remained until he died, December 4, 1902.

[February-March 1903]

. . . . complain no more, this letter is dull enough without that!

I wonder if it is too late to make a change or two in the French edition of my *Tory Lover*? On the 23rd page, for example, where (3rd line from foot) I say *Prince of Conti*, I should like to say *Duke of Berwick*, and on page 154 is a gap in the edition I sent Mlle Douessel, and in your first edition a great mistake on the middle of the page! I said *Duke de Sully* at a venture and never corrected it until the second edition where the whole phrase was cut out. *That* should be *Duke of Berwick* too or read thus: "added the old Irish rebel, who had been like a son to his father's friend the great Duke of Berwick, Marshal of France." If there is a second edition I should like to have the first of these corrected in the plates (*Prince of Conti* erased for *Duke of Berwick*). I had a note of sympathy for my illness from the translator, but I fear that you have had a very trying and tiresome work in supplementing hers.

Please give my affectionate homage to Madame de Beaulaincourt. It is delightful—the success of Monsieur 'Ski.' I should like to send a new message of thanks for the postcards, which renew the delight of my day's visit—I do not forget a moment that I spent at Acosta. Under your French skies the violets will soon be blooming again there, with the new Spring.

My sister sends you her love. She has had a busy winter, as you will know, and Theodore has been working hard at his professional school. Timmy looks old, but his heart is ever young and a little affair of honour with dogs of the village sends him home wounded but victorious from time to time.

I wish that you were here, my dear friend, in this bright winter weather. I do not know if I have told you that our good John has died—it was in December, and from the effects of his army wound. You will know how much we miss that good friend and servant of nearly thirty years.

There is everything to say, and I have said nothing! I remember in this moment to ask you if you are really translating *Lady Rose's Daughter* for the *Revue* as our newspapers say? I have been looking over the letters of Mlle de Lespinasse—the story has curious likenesses of character with likeness of plot. Whatever one may say, it seems, so far as I have read, a great story and far beyond her others.

Yours with
unfailing love,
S. O. J.

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Notwithstanding Miss Jewett's meticulousness, the text of *The Tory Lover* was never adjusted to her specifications. The *Prince of Conti* error was perpetuated in the French edition, and a compression in the translation eliminated the *Duke de Sully* passage. Madame Blanc seems willy-nilly to have been drawn into the preparation of this volume.

Frédéric de Madrazo, a dabbler in singing, composing, and painting, was a favorite in salons like that of Madame de Beauhaincourt. Marcel Proust is said to have used him as the prototype for Viradobetski (of which Monsieur 'Ski' is the diminutive), the Polish dilettante of "*tous les arts*" in *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Julie de Lespinasse (1732-1776) presided over one of the more famous Parisian salons of her day. Her death is reputed to have been hastened by the marriage of Count de Guibert to another woman. The *Lettres écrites de 1773 à 1776* by Mlle de Lespinasse contains a record of this unrequited love. Miss Jewett rightfully notes a resemblance between the English novel and the French letters. In the Introduction to *Lady Rose's Daughter*—volume XI, the Autograph Edition of *The Writings of Mrs. Humphry Ward* (Boston, 1910)—Mrs. Ward reveals that she "saw the germ of a story" in "Sainte-Beuve's study of Julie de Lespinasse." Madame Blanc's translation, "La fille de Lady Rose," appeared in seven installments in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* from September 15 through December 15, 1903.

IV

On her fifty-third birthday, September 3, 1902, Miss Jewett was flung from her carriage by a stumbling horse. The injuries sustained in this misadventure brought her professional writing to an abrupt halt but did not arrest her epistolary output. It is reasonable to expect that she wrote more letters to Madame Blanc, who lived four more years, and that they will emerge one day to illumine other facets of their manifold relationship. We learn through Grace King's memoirs (Chapter Sixteen) that the Frenchwoman, though debilitated, retained her capacities and could well have kept up her end of the correspondence.

Toward the close of 1906 Miss King rented a room in the same house as Madame Blanc, where she had retired on orders of her physician. Although slowed by depredations of age and sickness, she persevered in a zealous round of works and displayed invincible gaiety of spirit. In her second-story suite, surrounded by religious and nostalgic tokens, Madame wrote constantly for the *Revue*, and, as in the past, without pause for correction or erasure. She made charming conversation with a flow of visitors: her son, her former husband, members of her family, and old Paris friends; authors whose reputations she had helped to establish; and young protégés of both sexes whose careers she was helping to launch. As president of La Vie Heureuse she led discussions concerning the society's yearly award for literature. The government bestowed upon her the Croix d'Honneur, a rare distinction for a woman of that time. And she contrived one final tilt at matchmaking. As the year waned, Madame Blanc weakened. When her friend and associate Brunetière died, she was not permitted to attend his funeral, nor could she go to the annual matinee reception given by La Vie Heureuse. She began dictating her letters to Miss King, who reports that the only American correspondent at the last was Mrs. Richard Watson Gilder. One night when it seemed that only moments remained to her, a priest was summoned, but Madame indomitably opened her eyes and said, smiling, "Not this time, *mon père*." Shortly thereafter, on February 5, 1907, she succumbed.

When Miss Jewett learned of her death she transmitted her feelings in two letters to Violet Paget (Vernon Lee), who knew both authors intimately. Of all the published letters written by Miss Jewett, these are without peer the most lyrical. Of all the late friends Miss Jewett had need to mourn, none was so emotively enshrined. These are the relevant excerpts.

And now Madame Blanc has gone too, and every way I turn I find one of her letters, in a book, in a desk, as if she still put them into my hand and still tried to speak in that way, as if summers of old spoke in their withered leaves and pressed flowers, hid in some safe corner. We were very near to each other. I remember the wonder of it filling my heart as we were walking along a favorite bit of road of mine in the country between two pastures and beside the scattered pines. "What is this?" she would ask, and I would say 'juniper' or 'bayberry.' "I have read of it," and she would smile soberly, as if she met an old

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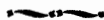
friend for the first time; and at last I got over the wall and picked a handful of scarlet columbines and on we went again—the horse now gone far ahead—but I stopped short and faced her and there we stood in the narrow road together. “*How did we come to be walking here together?*” I cried. “I am made of this spot, but you! How came this afternoon to be *ours*?” She smiled at me just as if she knew, but we both understood that only Those who are wiser than we give gifts like that: there we were close enough, though Berwick and the Quartier and Saint Cloud might be far enough apart . . . I shall always be missing her as new things and new days come and go without her, but the old days . . . are mine, with all she was and all the friendship gave me. (Cary, *SOJ Letters*, 101-102)

There were so many Thérèses if one had her for a day or two at a time! The great French lady of—one, almost, say *some* centuries earlier, returned to earth and gracefully adapting herself to modern conditions, was what everyone could not see. Oddly enough, one of my dearest friends on this side of the sea was great-granddaughter of a young French officer who came over at the time of the Revolution, and one never understood her until (and many New Englanders never could!) one returned to the 1760s and matched her traits to that day and date and to the habits of people who had to do with courts and camps. But to say how I miss Madame Blanc and see new reasons for having loved her so much is quite impossible. (Cary, *SOJ Letters*, 103-104)

Miss Jewett conveys her mystic sense of communion in nature with Madame Blanc, and invokes an omnipotent Presence who disarms the power of time and distance and death over the wraith of transcendental love. This was perhaps the subtlest psychic link they recognized (the Fields and Stanton essays verify similar romantic propensities in Madame Blanc). The other attractions between them were less tenuous. In the second passage, above, Miss Jewett calls out one of the most potent—their common idolatry of the olden, golden days, in fact as in fiction. Preservation of *langsyne* was a staple theme for Miss Jewett, who never ceased to deplore “the destroying left hand of progress”; while Madame Blanc sedately exalted “the traditions at the home of my grandparents, who kept me a century behind in many things” (Stanton, 597). Miss Jewett points to another of Madame Blanc’s alluring traits—her protean ability to complement her companion’s mood, her instinctual art of pleasing. (Grace King exclaimed with some surprise that “she seemed to enjoy listening to me.”) There was

also, of course, "the revealed happiness which comes from scribbling," a wine both ladies had savored the greater part of their lives.

Of the two, Madame Blanc was more the woman of the world, Miss Jewett more the provincial; Madame Blanc the social analyst, Miss Jewett the social empathizer; Madame Blanc outspoken, Miss Jewett benign. There inhered, however, enough of each quality within the other to bring about a near-perfect fusion. The historiography of letters is richer for this happy conjunction.



MADAME BLANC'S "LE ROMAN DE LA FEMME-MÉDECIN"

Translated by ARCHILLE H. BIRON

[*Note:* In the preceding article Richard Cary has traced the progress and quality of the friendship between Sarah Orne Jewett and Marie Thérèse Blanc, who wrote under the pen name of Th. Bentzon. It is notable that their relationship sprang from the appearance of a review of Miss Jewett's *A Country Doctor* (1884) written by Madame Blanc for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, LXVII (February 1, 1885), 598-632. For students of Sarah Orne Jewett to whom the *Revue* is not available or to whom French is a language as yet unriddled, this translation is helpfully offered. This essay-review deals, in fact, not only with Miss Jewett's first orthodox novel but also with *Deephaven* and three collections of her short stories and sketches. Madame Blanc's introductory survey of the status of women is eliminated as not immediately relevant to consideration of Miss Jewett's accomplishment as a novelist. Also eliminated are numerous superfluous plot summaries and long quotations from text. What remain are Madame Blanc's insights and judgments.]

Before giving here the analysis of *A Country Doctor*, we shall make known its author. The preceding works of Sarah Orne Jewett, and what they reveal of this singularly sympathetic personality, lend a good deal of weight to the crusade begun by her with as much frankness as prudence in favor of the free woman. Her patronage is among those that oblige the most recalcitrant to take up a doubtful cause. No author can be less suspected than Miss Jewett of firing bold pistol shots to assemble and amuse the crowd. She had limited herself up to now to exquisite pictures of nature. Her premier