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IN MEMORIAM:

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

The mortal span of Theodora Sarah Orne Jewett came full cycle fifty years ago. Born in South Berwick, Maine, on September 3, 1849, she died in South Berwick on June 24, 1909. But, in essence, her life ended some seven years previously—on the ineluctable afternoon that marked her fifty-third birthday. A precipitous sideways motion by the horse she was driving uphill propelled her headfirst to the ground. For the remainder of her days physical activity was severely curtailed and literary production came to an abrasive halt. Though she tried courageously, she wrote nothing of consequence after 1902.

Reams have been written in tribute to her depth of perception, her classic lucency, her temperate humor and unassuming humanity. As recently as last spring, her magnum opus was presented on a national television network, aptly prefaced by Willa Cather's passionate statement that the "three American books which have the possibility of a long, long life" are The Scarlet Letter, Huckleberry Finn, and The Country of the Pointed Firs.

That she was the finest transcriber of Maine scene and character is universally acknowledged. What tends to get lost in this omnibus appraisal, however, is that Miss Jewett was equally efficacious on matters beyond the borders of her beloved province. It was Whittier who shrewdly observed that in her literary depictions "Sarah is as much at home in Ireland and on the Caroline Sea Islands as in Maine or Massachusetts."

Maine has changed perceptibly since Miss Jewett's heyday. The commerce and industry which she abhorred have virtually supplanted the less hectic way of life she preferred. But occasionally in the inviolate hinterlands one catches fleeting

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glimpses of the farmscapes and homely prototypes she so artfully and viably transposed to paper. So with the First Citizeness of South Berwick: the evanescent flesh is remote now, but the inextinguishable spirit lives on.



THE LETTERS OF SARAH ORNE JEWETT

By JOHN ELDRIDGE FROST

THE ever-growing volume of Miss Jewett's letters in print has made desirable a survey both of those which have been printed and of those in manuscript form in libraries. It is neither possible nor desirable to list those owned by individuals for this would constitute an invasion of the collector's privacy or, worse still, a breach of manners toward Miss Jewett's friends and their heirs. It is interesting to note that plans have already been made for the eventual disposal to libraries of all letters privately owned that I have viewed.

Miss Jewett was a warm, vivid, stimulating person whose genius often flowed into her correspondence. An astonishingly large amount of it was saved by those who knew her. She was an avid correspondent who frequently devoted an entire morning to the writing of letters. When she was twenty-three she kept for a year a list of names and dates of all correspondents, both letters sent and received. The list of several hundred letters is now owned by the Houghton Library. It is important to recall that this list was compiled before Miss Jewett had become a well-known author or written a book. Her correspondence increased with her fame.

By the will of Sarah Orne Jewett, signed in 1897 and probated in the fall of 1909, her sister Mary Rice Jewett and her friend Annie Adams Fields were given full authority to determine what unprinted papers, unpublished manuscripts, and "more especially . . . any . . . letters in whosoever hands they may be" should be allowed publication. In accordance with these directions two years after Miss Jewett's death, Annie Fields selected from the letters written to Sarah's family and friends those which seemed to possess the most interest, and