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William Dean Howells to Thomas Sergeant Perry

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12 East 58th Stree,
April 2, 1912.

My dear Perry:

Pilau goes to Boston on Sunday, and the train will leave at 3 P.M., if you will come to New York on that day. You will be more absolved here than if you came on Sunday.

I am planning a coming-out dinner for you on Sunday, and if we could get our friends to be off our minds the day before we should have better stomachs for it.

You might telegraph your answer.

Yours ever,

M.T. Norths.

*So that I can begin copying the other guests in some.
As diverse in background as in temperament, William Dean Howells (1837-1920), autodidact from the farmlands of Ohio, and Thomas Sergeant Perry (1845-1928), cosmopolitan Back Bay Brahmin, discovered common ground in the emergent realistic literature of their day and built upon it a friendship that endured over half a century. The correspondence which naturally ensued between them during periods of separation — and these were many — was imperfectly preserved; less than a dozen of Perry’s letters to Howells are known to survive, while 123 from Howells to Perry now repose in the manuscript division of Colby College Library,* a gift of Perry’s daughter Margaret. These are manifestly a small fraction of the total that passed between them, the remainder no doubt victims of the multiple changes of residence and chronic intercontinental movements of both writers.

The Howells letters at Colby College range from November 17, 1870, to January 22, 1920, each the single letter in its particular year. The bulk exists in the years 1912 through 1919, and there are conspicuous lacunae between 1870 and 1910. Almost all are holographs; a scant half dozen typed. The stationery is surprisingly congruent for so long a span of time, most of it grey-green or light blue paper, measuring about 7 x 9½ inches. Except for a few printed letterheads — one-line W. D. HOWELLS, 130 West 57th Street, and two-line W. D. HOWELLS / KITTERY POINT—the location is filled in by hand. Miscellaneous white sheets with printed heads

* Quotation from these letters is by express permission of Mr. W. W. Howells. No publication or quotation from this essay is allowed without further permission from Mr. Howells.
run the gamut from gravity (the *Atlantic Monthly* editorial office) to gayety (the colorful insigné of the Hamburg-Amerika Line). Hotels from which Howells also appropriated stationery include The Blackstone and the St. Hubert (New York City), Grand Hotel de Roma (Madrid), Hotel Bellevue (Boston), The Bellevue (Intervale, N. H.), De Soto Hotel (Savannah, Ga.), Coleman House (Asbury Park, N. J.), and The Valencia (St. Augustine, Fla.). Other letters originated from Lake Luzerne, Tours, San Remo, London, St. Andrews, Lakewood, N. J., Tryon, N. C., Augusta, Ga., Miami, Fla., and from York Harbor, Kennebunkport, and Kittery Point in Maine.

Howells' salutations are curiously sedate in comparison with the frequent ebullience of the content: not once did he address Perry by his first name. The 1870 letter accosts "Dear Mr. Perry," and, oddly, this tepid approach recurs only one other time approximately five decades later. Preponderantly, Howells started with "My dear Perry," occasionally ringing in such variants as "Dear Perry" and "My dearest Perry." In two instances he effused, "My dear, my only Perry" and "My dear, very dear Perry." One whimsical "Dear Perries" incorporated Mrs. Perry, and a final mutation "Gentleman!" came about inadvertently when Howells embarked on a note to a business man "now forgotten" and continued thereon in order "to save me a sheet of this beautiful paper." As to signature, "W. D. Howells" was displaced only three times by "W. D. H." and once by "W. D." Twice he failed to sign at all. On his part, Perry invariably greeted "Dear Howells" and closed with "T. S. Perry" or "Thos. S. Perry." At least in their appellative forms of address, neither made any concession to intimacy by relaxing into abbreviated first-name terms.

Howells did not write these letters with one eye cocked at posterity. For the most, these are the hurried messages of a harried man to a friend too fond to neglect, with little concern for the flashing phrase or the oracular statement. The tissue is that of small talk: discomforts of travel, routine family civilities, quick pecks at current events, comic dithyrambs on fine wines and viands, invitations accepted or reluctantly declined, hospitalities glowingly acknowledged, favors requested, meetings arranged, bulletins on the weather, on personal health, on investments, on mutual friends, vignettes of places and people
seen. But, as befits the preference of two dedicated litterateurs, Howells’ paramount topics are books and authors. He indulges in no lengthy cogitations or analyses; he writes as he runs, dropping here an aperçu, netting there an opinion or datum.

It is truistic that Howells’ personality and the nature of his association with Perry would best be represented by publishing without excision all the letters containing significant reflections of these elements. However, space now at our disposal will not permit such full panoply. The alternative is to extract Howells’ most arresting remarks on the subjects most relevant to an understanding of him as a literary figure; further, to demonstrate the character of each of these remarks as an extension, intensification, or reversal of his public utterances. Adducing Perry’s public or private sentiments on the same subjects will round out the lineaments of their intellectual affinity. Except for a preliminary segment in which Howells divulges his feelings about Perry, and another in which Howells provides glimpses of himself, this essay will confine itself to hitherto unpublished excerpts of literary import from Howells’ letters to Perry.

It is to be noted that two scholars have had previous access to this collection: Howells’ daughter Mildred, who printed five of the letters in her *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells* (Garden City, N. Y., 1928), and Virginia Harlow, who quoted from about a dozen in her *Thomas Sergeant Perry: A Biography* (Durham, N. C., 1950) and her article. “William Dean Howells and Thomas Sergeant Perry,” *Boston Public Library Quarterly*, I (October 1949), 135-150. Only three sentences of the material they adopted are repeated here.

II

HOWELLS-PERRY RELATIONSHIP

Howells has been so exhaustively biographed that any addition here would smack of supererogation. Perry, known to less wide a circle of readers, was born in Newport, Rhode Island, a direct descendant of Benjamin Franklin and of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry. He inherited and never lost the
aristocratic bearing of his birth nor the cosmopolitan culture of his environment, yet never displayed any trace of the powerful public thrust of his famous forebears. Self-effacing to a fault, he nurtured his talents in the twilit silences of his study and among the academic groves. After graduation from Harvard College and an interval at the University of Berlin, he returned to alma mater as tutor in French and German. He joined the editorial staff of the North American Review, began turning out translations (principally of Turgenev and Imbert de Saint-Amand), became a regular contributor of book reviews and literary criticism to the Atlantic Monthly, the Nation, and the London Academy, taught for five years in the English department at Harvard, traveled extensively to the Continent, filled the position of professor of English at the University of Keioji­juku in Japan for three years, and in the interim produced seven volumes of biography and English, German, and Greek literary history. From 1903 on, he spent increasingly longer intervals at Flagstones, his summer home in Hancock, New Hampshire, among his books and bookish companions, many from nearby MacDowell Colony in Peterborough. Although wholly immune to the virus of ambition, he continued to publish up to his seventy-seventh year. An “indomitable” hiker, golfer, tennis player, and bicyclist, he retained his ardor for participation until age eighty-three, when he succumbed to an attack of pneumonia. But it remained for Edwin Arlington Robinson, an especial friend, to indite the appropriate epitaph: “He was born a man of books, and a man of books he lived and died.”

The density of Perry’s knowledge and intellection in literary matters was a source of amazement to many a savant not un­noted for expertise in the same field. Oliver Wendell Holmes called him “the best-read man whom I have ever met”; classics professor Louis Dyer of Harvard exclaimed, “Perry has read everything”; and once more Robinson touched the essential man when he defined him as “one of the great appreciators, without whom there would be no great writers, or artists of any sort.” In this respect Howells “held that Perry knew more about literature than any man living” (LinL, I, 170). He wrote to Henry James in December 1886, “I see Perry every other day, and we talk literature perpetually” (LinL, I, 388), and generously admitted to Perry that “I had learned from you the
new and true way of looking at literature" (LinL, I. 379). Whenever feasible, he obtained Perry's appraisal of his manuscripts and moderated the final version in accordance.

In the New York Sun (February 25, 1917) Perry revealed that “It was fifty years ago this coming spring that I tried to make my first call on Mr. Howells. I was in Venice with a friend of mine, and we thought it would be a pleasant thing to call on a writer of a series of charming letters that we had read in the Boston Advertiser, letters that were afterward collected in a volume entitled Venetian Life.” The desired tête-à-tête did not materialize; Howells had already vacated his consulship and returned to America. About a year later Henry James took Perry to Howells' Cottage Quiet in Sacramento Street, Cambridge. “Of what we talked about I have not the faintest recollection. Possibly we began about the weather, but soon I suppose we were discussing literature . . . . At all events after the auspicious opening I saw Mr. Howells frequently.” Thereafter they esteemed each other in superlatives. Howells, said Perry, is “the tenderest and most amiable of men” (TSP, 204), and Howells told Twain, “There is just one other man — Perry — whom I can reason with besides yourself” (Henry Nash Smith & William M. Gibson, editors, Mark Twain-Howells Letters [Cambridge, Mass., 1960], II, 491).

Vacationing in Quebec during the summer of 1869, Howells encountered Perry in a state of bored petulance, more impressed by the barbarities of tourism than by the vaunted grandeur of the scenery. When it was claimed that Howells had modeled Miles Arbuton, the priggish socialite of A Chance Acquaintance, on this manifestation of Perry, he took the trouble to deny it. However, his presentation copy of this novel (now in Colby College Library) seems to corroborate the contention. The inscription on the flyleaf reads: “To T. S. Perry, / The book's first friend, / from / W D Howells, / Cambridge May 16, 1873.”

In these last years of the sixties and first of the seventies their friendship developed through proximity in the Cambridge-Boston orbit. Harvard was one point of conjunction, for Howells was lecturing there on the new Italian literature at the same time Perry was tutoring. The Atlantic Monthly was another. Although Howells, as assistant editor, was constrained to send
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Perry this rejection—"These pieces have an individual grace and freshness, but they don't seem quite good enough to publish. I should think, however, the author might do something acceptable; and at any rate I am sorry to make you the present answer" (November 17, 1870) — upon assuming the editor's chair in 1871 he immediately drafted Perry as regular reviewer for French and German books. Together in these pages, and in other magazines, they labored to establish the legitimacy of realism in literature and the greatness of certain contemporary European writers in that mode. "We were very eager, indeed impassioned upholders of realism in those days," said Perry somewhat jejunely later. "We made much of everything French, German, Italian or Spanish that came in our way" (N. Y. Sun). Over the decade of Howells' tenure as editor, Perry contributed some 440 reviews and articles to the Atlantic, and Howells was later to reckon his critical acumen as far beyond "the crude conceptions of earlier criticism . . . as antiseptic surgery is beyond the old methods" (Harper's, LXXX [March 1890], 647).

With a nicety of ethics not always observed by close friends in the matter of reviewing each other's books, Howells paid passing attention to Perry's English Literature in the Eighteenth Century and From Opitz to Lessing in his "Editor's Study," Harper's, LXXIII (July 1886), longer consideration to The Evolution of the Snob and Perry's essay in Gately's World's Progress in December of the same year (wherein he certified Perry as "an apostle" of the comparative, historical, and evolutionary schools of literary criticism), and a thorough scrutiny of A History of Greek Literature in April 1891. He declared as prime virtues of the latter the almost total absence of the author's "personal quality," and his manner, "to the last degree plain and simple." He summed up his approbation with "His book is perhaps the most unliterary history of any literature ever written." Perry restricted himself to a single notice. In the North American Review, CXVIII (January 1874), 190 - 191, he saw in Howells' Poems (1873) "very much" the same attractions that distinguished his prose — "his delicate humor, his subtle drawing of character, and the charms of his style." When Howells wrote to Perry on September 25, 1881, that "They are going to print my picture in Scribner, and they give
me the privilege of choosing my own biographer and critic. I turn to you as a Jap gentleman does in requesting the kind services of his friend at harikari” (LinL, I, 301), Perry obliged with a six-page essay in the March 1882 Century (the title assumed by Scribner's Monthly at this time). Benign but not reverential, Perry describes Howells’ realism as “unceasingly good-natured,” and applauds him for having “made over the American novel, taught it gracefulness and compactness, and . . . given it a place in literature along with the best of modern work.”

“Some years later,” recalled Perry, “Mr. Howells let me work in harness with him . . . . a tempter [with pliant tongue] . . . told us how much we should make if we would put together a volume of stories of adventure that should be sold by subscription” (N. Y. Sun). The upshot was a volume of 1023 pages, Library of Universal Adventure by Sea and Land, subtitled Including Original Narratives and Authentic Stories of Personal Prowess and Peril in All the Waters and Regions of the Globe from the Year 79 A. D. to the Year 1888 A. D. (New York, 1888). From the first, the editors recognized this book for what it was, a potboiler, but they were dazzled by possible royalties of $100,000 dangled before them by Harper’s subscription agent. “I almost bought a yacht and a house on the cliffs at Newport,” Perry confessed (TSP, 137). “The book was put together with feverish haste . . . . After getting together a collection of horrors that would have frozen the blood in, say, Von Hindenberg’s veins . . . this Pactolian stream . . . failed to flow. Perhaps we did our ghastly work too thoroughly” (N. Y. Sun). For a while Howells was beguiled by the agent’s “hope and energy,” but in 1890 he notified Perry that the princely sum of $95.45 in royalties awaited him. “What damnable luck!” was all Perry could say about his wasted “scissors and paste work.”

Howells did not formally dedicate any of his books to Perry, but there are in Colby College Library sixteen inscribed presentation volumes of his fiction and nonfiction to Perry or his wife. Perry austerely dedicated From Opitz to Lessing (Boston, 1885) “To W. D. Howells,” who is said to have guaranteed it against loss to publisher James R. Osgood. In his presentation copy of A History of Greek Literature (New York, 1890), a
III

THE TIES THAT BOUND

Steeped in books to be read, books to be written, the ascend­ant struggle for realism, and promulgation of European litera­tures, the friendship of Howells and Perry ripened over the years into a supple interdependence. Urbane men, their attitudi­nal differences were exchanged firmly and without heat. Their closest approach to a disjunction occurred, in fact, over a point of political morality rather than literary taste. In the unusually spirited campaign for the presidency in 1884, James G. Blaine of Maine, the Republican nominee, was repudiated by a splinter group of Mugwumps who bolted the party to support Democrat Grover Cleveland. The issue at stake: which is more repre­hensible, public or private depravity? Perry openly avowed his position in the Boston Transcript and, on August 12, 1884, underscored it emphatically in this letter to Howells:

What shocks me in yr. letter is yr. assertion that you mean to vote for Blaine. It seems to me hard to find any reason for that act, wh. is equivalent not merely to pardoning but to rewarding the most serious crimes that can stain a public officer. If you have read, or will read, Schurz’s speech you will see a presentation of the facts that yet awaits an answer, & will long await one. He proves irresistibly Blaine’s prostitution of his office. If you can put yr. hands on the speech, will you please point out a single place where his logic is weak! If you cannot do this will you seriously ask yourself this question: how am I justified in electing such a man President? Can you tell John that official turpi­tude makes a man’s claims stronger to one of the highest offices in the world? I take this point alone, for it is a vital one. I might ask what Blaine has ever done to induce the easy-going to overlook official corruption, but I think that you will agree with me that official purity is a desirable quality in an official.

As to the Cleveland scandal; it is shown to be exaggerated, & is at the best unessential. The prominence that is given to it shows the im­possibility of meeting the things proved against Blaine by his own words. Moreover, we are not to vote on giving the Pope’s rose in reward for virtue (& Pio IX gave it to Isabella of Spain) but to elect a public
servant. C.'s misdeeds in no way affect what alone concerns us, his public duties, & Blaine's do. More than this, dishonesty is a worse thing than private licentiousness: the denunciation of one is a high duty, that of the other begets hypocrisy. The argument against C. may prevent some from voting for him, but those against B. make me vote against him.

When B. attracts to himself all the corruption of the country, Democratic as well as Republican, & C. attracts men of both parties who want no offices but are eager for the honour of the country, what stronger proof is there of the path of the just citizen? (By permission of the Harvard College Library)

[Carl Schurz (1829-1906), a native of Prussia, fled to the United States to escape retaliation for revolutionary activities, distinguished himself as a brigadier general in the Civil War. An effective orator, and editor of the New York Post, his backing of Cleveland is said to have caused Blaine the loss of New York State and the presidency.

John is Howells' teen-age son (1868-1959), later to achieve eminence in the field of architecture by applying the Gothic vertical line to the skyscraper. He designed the New York Daily News and Chicago Tribune buildings, the Music Hall at Harvard and St. Paul's Chapel at Columbia.]

Unconvinced, Howells responded three days later from Kennebunkport, Maine:

The charges against Blaine are denied by men in whose candor and judgment I have much greater faith than I have in Schurz's: for example, Judge Hoar and Hon. Wm. Phelps, not to name others; and Blaine himself denies them. I do not believe them; and it is not true that Blaine is supported by the worst of both parties. He is supported by many of the best men I know.

The charges against Cleveland I must believe, because with even so much sophistry and shuffling his friends admit that he has a son by a woman not his wife. This may not be the worst thing in the world for him; but neither is it the worst for her, there. Yet you propose to place one paramour at the head of the nation, while you would not admit the other paramour to your house even as a servant.

This injustice insults my sense of right and wrong more than his but all the more because this is the attitude of society generally in regard to the paramour.

I will tell John that I voted for a man accused of bribery, and that I would not vote for a man guilty of what society sends a woman to hell for.

Politician for politician, self-seeker for self-seeker, I prefer a Republican to a Democrat, and I will not vote a party into power which is composed of all that is retrograde and savage in our politics, and which has betrayed every trust honest men have reposed in it. (Colby College Library)
[On August 19, Howells wrote in a postscript to Twain: “What I want to do is to vote for Cleveland’s widow. She’s the one who ought to be elected” (MT-HL, II, 499).

As to Schurz, in 1903 Howells said to Charles Eliot Norton: “I am amused when I meet Carl Schurz. We agree entirely, and he comes forward with both hands up and a glad ‘Ah!’ Then we have nothing to say” (LinL, II, 171). But his obituary in Harper’s Weekly, L (May 26, 1906), 728, extolled Schurz’s “openness of honesty” and the “genuine phases . . . no mere masks” of his various careers.

George Frisbie Hoar (1826-1904), Massachusetts lawyer, member of the legislature and state senate, U. S. Representative and Senator, was a delegate to the Republican national conventions of 1880, 1884, and 1888.

William W. Phelps (1839-1894), Judge in the New Jersey State Court of Appeals, U. S. Representative, minister to Germany, supported Blaine “with great ardor” as delegate-at-large from New Jersey at the national convention.]

No serious lesion resulted from this divergence. Indeed, as Howells grew older his fondness for Perry came more readily to penpoint. He constantly invited Perry to visit him in Maine, tempting him with euphonious gastronomical delights, then reported glowingly on the immense uplift of his presence. “Your visit was as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land of nothings and nobodies. Mrs. Howells and I are still disputing which had the greater pleasure in it . . . . I went on to see Mrs. Fields, and when I bragged of my joy in your visit she thought it was Perry of the Atlantic! Dio mio! Corpo di Diana! Cospetto del Diavolo! Misericordia! Sangue!” (Kittery Point, Maine, September 27, 1903). A note of pathos creeps into his letter of June 9, 1911, from Kittery Point: “I want to ask if you will come here and stay with a lonely man from any time Wednesday till any time Saturday next week? Pilla is to be away in Boston and New York for those days. Do make Mrs. Perry let you come. Think what a good time I will have! I will lay in meats, drinks, and smokes.” Four months later his spirits seemed no lighter. “Next year I shall be 75, and I ask only to sit under my ash trees at Kittery Point, and have you talk to me” (Madrid, October 15, 1911). In the spring of next year Howells had returned to a chipper mood. Anticipating a visit from Perry at Kittery Point, he exulted: “I have laid in wine and cigars, and am having beeves, lambs and chickens killed on every side. There are no melons yet, but the strawberries are reddening to the shortcake, and there is coffee everywhere. It is very sweet of you to come so cordially” (May 5, 1912). And immediately on conclusion of the visit, he ban-
tered like a mischievous boy: “Just think of my getting notice, just now, three days after your going, that a half barrel of sweet-orange marmalade and orange-flower honey has come from Florida! Tears for you will bedew thenl (May 13, 1912).

[Annie Adams Fields (1834-1915) was the wife of publisher James T. Fields, editor of the Atlantic Monthly preceding Howells, and partner in Ticknor & Fields. She maintained a literary salon through which passed most of the English and American authors of that house, and she wrote a moderate amount of poetry and biography herself. “It was to Mrs. Fields liking me, Lowell insisted, that I owed my place on the Atlantic,” Howells told his daughter (LinL, II, 349).

Bliss Perry (1860-1954), professor of English at Princeton and Harvard, and biographer of Whitman and Whittier, was editor of the Atlantic Monthly from 1899 to 1909.

Pilla is Howells' daughter Mildred (1872-1966). She devoted her life to his work, particularly after Mrs. Howells' death, keeping house for him and accompanying him on all his travels. She was a poet in her own right, publishing in numerous periodicals, and an illustrator of books, some of them her father’s. At ten years of age she produced fifty-four watercolors for A Little Girl Among the Old Masters (with introduction and comment by W. D. Howells); she wrote the introduction to his edition of Don Quixote (1923); and in 1929 she edited the two-volume Life in Letters of William Dean Howells.

Mrs. Lilla Cabot Perry (1848-1933), a niece of Lowell, was also a poet and painter. Besides publishing three books of verse, she kept pace with her husband’s proclivity by translating volumes from the Russian and Greek. As an artist she had frequent exhibits of her landscapes and portraits, two of the latter (Edwin Arlington Robinson and William Dean Howells) now in Colby College Library.]

Perry’s letters are less spontaneous and more substantial than those of Howells. Perry had more leisure for letter-writing and he used the time to excellent effect. He indubitably enjoyed writing diurnal notes far better than writing books. His letters to Robinson, John T. Morse, Hercules W. Fay, Leonard Opdycke, Moorfield Storey, John LaFarge, William Lyon Phelps, and the brothers James — to name some of the more notable — attest his breadth of interests and provocative turns of mind. He dwelt primarily on literature, the arts, and the personalities who produced them, but he could also write brightly of peccadilloes among the elite, of Westphalian hams and Russian steppe cheeses, of the weather, of flowers, of politics and perambulations. He could, and did, compose twenty-page messages without slack in tone or tempo. Henry James despared of matching his epistolary brilliance (Harlow, TSP,
and Phelps asserted in his *Autobiography With Letters* (New York, 1939), 351, “When letterwriting had become almost a lost art, Mr. Perry was a master; his letters, of which I received at least one every week for fifteen years... were full of charm.”

Howells was fully as appreciative. When he could not coax Perry to visit him, or when distance intervened, he pressed him to write. “If you could realize — for you must know — how very much I like to get your letters, you would write oftener and longer” (San Remo, Italy, January 9, 1905). Insatiable in his “latter sad years,” Howells allowed himself the fantasy of total gratification. “Your letters will be welcome, and I only wish you could bring them in person” (Kittery Point, Maine, July 21, 1911). Tom Perry had become “the sweetest consolation” of his waning days.

IV

HOWELLS ON HIMSELF

There are moments in these letters to Perry when Howells’ protective reticence lapses and, as through a gash in a screen, we catch glimpses of cryptic turmoil, of abysmal guilts rarely surfaced — glints of Freud before Freud’s vogue. Howells could be solemnly harsh, as in this scourging outcry from San Remo: “There are many things rotting in my breast, as Sancho said. On the whole I have had a beastly time; but then, I am a beast” (March 25, 1905). Or he could be Twainishly droll: “Last night I ‘lay’ at Kittery Point, and Billy joined me at 5:30 this morning. We read and conversed much, and at a certain point he praised the habit of truthfulness, and said, ‘I speak the truth now.’ I could not say as much for myself, but I congratulated him on the habit” (York Harbor, Maine, May 19, 1914).

[Billy is William White Howells (1908—). Howells’ first grandson and constant cynosure, currently professor of anthropology at Harvard, and author of several basic studies in the history of man and religion.]

Although Howells and Perry both lived to eighty-three the ravages of age overtook Howells first; he was eight years older. To other correspondents he referred, not without levity, to “my
regrettable eightieth birthday” (*LinL*, II, 372), and was solaced by the fact that “at least I have my health when most people are sick and sore from long living” (*LinL*, II, 367). For Perry, however, he plucked a glummer tune, rather consistently bemoning the torments of flesh and the inroads into spirit:

“As I draw near my 80th birthday I feel older and older, that is physically wearier. I did not suppose anyone could be so dog-tired as I feel at times. This is possibly an effect in part of my midsummer’s sickness; the part which I shall never be well of . . . . Age is a cruel thing, but I have had a good time and I still have — at times, and when I get fairly launched on my novel I dare say I shall be quite young again” (Kittery Point, Maine, October 13, 1916).

Five days earlier, Howells wrote Hamlin Garland that he was “hoping to finish the scenario of my next novel, The Home-Towners. I bring moving-picture folks into it; you know they abound in St. Augustine where I have put the scene of the story. It will be quite different from all my other things” (*LinL*, II, 363). And on December 31, to Mrs. Achille Fréchette: “I am trying to do a novel, but on this bare ground it is hard sledding. I think I shall hardly finish it, though the notion of it pleased me first greatly” (*LinL*, II, 367). The spirit was willing, but Howells managed to fill only forty-one quarto leaves, as described by John K. Reeves in the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, LXII (July 1958), 352. Mildred Howells is cited as saying *The Home-Towners or Incident of Convalescence* “is her father’s unfinished last novel.”

“Your continued life of reading every new book amazes me. I read old books, books not too heavy to hold in bed, and not too lively to fall asleep over” (Miami, Florida, February 9, 1918).

“I am getting a year older every day, and I work at cruel cost, but I keep digging away. I used to think the aged use of brains and legs was a joke but it isn’t” (Kittery Point, Maine, June 19, 1918).

“I have simply stopped running, like an old clock; I wind myself up everyday, but I don’t tick, and I guess I must see what the old man of the mountain can do for me. After eighty-one years of hard labor, something must be done, or I can never do any thing more. It’s very droll and puzzling” (Kittery Point, Maine, July 19, 1918).

“I have been a whole month in bed, practically helpless, and am just today out of the hospital here, from an attempt to turn my chair under me. I parted with the chair, but broke a ligament somewhere at my waistline, etc.” (Savannah, Georgia, December 30, 1919).

[This was a recurrence of an old injury which now compelled him to use a knee-board as his writing desk.]
Perry quietly went on reading all the new books and, as he passed his own eightieth barrier, let loose this shaft: "Old age is really like standing with your back to the wall waiting to be shot at, and hoping the executioner will hit a vital spot" (Harlow, TSP, 227).

HOWELLS ON HIS WRITINGS

With rewarding frequency in these letters Howells harked to his own writings, past, in progress, or in prospect. Emitting various degrees of glee, hope, puzzlement, despair, disparagement, and even disgust, he provides piquant backstage glances at the children of his brain. Instructive, too, is the extent to which he candidly cadges information and judgments from Perry, who was not unaware of the uses he was put to. In broad vein he once wrote: "I'm away, if you must know, chez W. D. H., who wishes to study a perfectly lovely character, without a flaw, for his novel. I have promised to sit for forty-eight hours and with such a chance he will probably outdo the heroes of the Biographical Dictionary" (John T. Morse, Jr., Thomas Sergeant Perry [Boston, 1929], 47). The novel brewing at that time was The Son of Royal Langbrith (1904).

AN IMPERATIVE DUTY

Howells' earliest allusion, in this group of letters, to one of his works came on September 7, 1890: "I have been working my way fitfully toward the end of my story—I call it An Imperative Duty—and I’ve nearly reached it. Perhaps it will please, but I don’t know. The girl in it is coming out perversely—like a girl" (Lake Luzerne, New York). An Imperative Duty (1892) first appeared in Harper's, July through October 1891. Rhoda Aldgate, the heroine, has a strain of Negro blood in her ancestry.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Howells held strong views on what constituted proper materials and perspectives for autobiography. "I am writing an Easy Chair essay on autobiography apropos of Stoddard’s and Trow-
bridge’s in their contrasting unimportance, which I hope may interest you if you ever read it. I think I will write my own life, but these other minor authors have taught me that if I am to make a worthwhile book, I must tell of what I have been in the love of literature, rather than of what I have done. The way they whoop it up over their forgotten books, T. especially, is amusing” (New York City, November 22, 1903). In the preamble to his review of the abovementioned books (Harper’s, CVIII [February 1904], 478-482), Howells declared unequivocally that: a) autobiography is the form of literature least likely to bore, because the greater part of the lives of extraordinary men are “commonly not much above or below that of the ordinary lives of men”; and, b) whereas biography is tragedy, for the subject dies, autobiography is melodrama, for at least the subject comes out alive. It is incumbent, therefore, that the autobiographer be “wholesomely optimistic. He is, to begin with, not dead ... if he has sorrows, sickness, and troubles, he has outlived them” and should be “cheerfully telling the story of his past.” Neither age nor pain excused the autobiographer from this obligation. Consequently Howells deplored Richard Henry Stoddard’s Recollections, Personal and Literary for its accentuation of the harassing, humiliating experiences, and acclaimed John Trowbridge’s Story of My Own Life for its unfaltering “blithe spirit.”

Howells turned out eight volumes of autobiography, and two or three others falling within a shade of that classification. It is thus difficult to reconcile his published theory of joyfulness and his private expressions of revulsion toward the genre, an ambivalence that may well bear looking into. In respect to Years of My Youth (1916), his last slice of personal history, Howells made these curious remarks to Perry: 1) “There is not much progress to report in literature here. Our aged author is slowly and painfully digging up his memories, and finding each more loathsome than the other” (York Harbor, Maine, June 23, 1914); 2) “I hope you are well and happy. I should be so if it were not for the loathesomeness of my autobiographical papers, now beginning to come in proof, and needing to be cut for the magazine. It is the great error of a blundering, misspent life, to have written them” (York Harbor, Maine, July 12, 1914); 3) “I have done three or four very
short stories, and I have emancipated myself from my autobi­ography for the time, at least” (New York City, February 23, 1915). “The Return to Favor,” “Somebody’s Mother,” “An Experience,” and “The Boarders” were published in Harper’s in July, September, November 1915, and March 1916.

THE LEATHERWOOD GOD

Mildred Howells explains that her father’s library at Kittery Point “was made out of a stable that had never been used . . . . It was lined with sheathing left its natural wood colour, and he called it the ‘Bambury’ as a compromise between its two natures” (LinL, II, 207). He prized it as a refuge from the hurly-burly, and the conditions he describes below were as yet not austere enough to dissuade him from further productivity. One is reminded of his sardonic rejoinder when asked if he were an author — “I’m a library, I’ve written so many books.”

From this Maine haven he wrote to Perry on May 8, 1913: “I thought I should be in a better place when I came here from Cambridge, but it is only a bitter, shrill, chill, and per­petual East wind. I tried writing in my library, but with all my pans I could not get the mercury above 50, though I had a flaming forge of life on the hearth, and a perfection oil heater at my back, almost under my chair. No lolling under the soft skies of Winch­ester, and choosing all-the-year-round seats from that of our victoria. But I have written somewhat on The Leatherwood God, and have lively hopes of doing more: when I get at you I will read it to you.”

Eighteen months and, evidently, several interviews later, Howells returned to the subject. “I have been writing a lot this summer, and have finished up a long-ago begun story of early Ohio life, The Leatherwood God, which I must have often bored you about” (York Harbor, Maine, September 23, 1914). The plot, founded on an actual situation, had been suggested to him by his elder brother Joseph at least a dozen years earlier, but Howells still clung to the notion of making it his “last great novel.” Before it began serialization in the Century, Howells dispatched this typical SOS to Perry: “Can you tell me some­thing about religious imposters and false prophets; so that I can give a learned look to the last chapter of my Leatherwood
God? I mean, give me their names, so I can find them in the Encyc. Brit.” (October 19), and by October 27 thanked him for all his “kind information about . . . Imposters.”

From Perry’s memoranda Howells pulled the names of Mahomet and Joseph Smith. In Chapter XXII of the serial version (Century, November 1916) he refers to the “universal acceptance” of the former’s “superstition” and “the obscurity of the scene” of the latter’s. The last chapter of the book (published November 2, 1916) is numbered XXIII; Howells re-located his major statement on Smith, but left the wording un-altered. His final word on the novel came from St. Augustine, Florida: “I wonder if I have told you that a serial of mine—The Leatherwood God—will begin in the Century for April. I believe I have already made you read it, but you had better read it again” (February 16, 1916). Was he seeking affirmation for the use he had made of his friend’s advisories?

BOOKS ON ENGLAND

Howells evidenced a capacity for self-irony and a tolerance toward editorial contortions of his work which are directly counter to his dogmatisms on autobiography. It may be that the congenial climate of San Remo affected his mood in this first instance. “I’m writing up a lot of my English material, which I expect to make a book of. Some of the London papers quote it from the magazine, picking out the plums which are sugared, but leaving the bitter almonds which flavor the whole. It is droll” (January 9, 1905). Three of his English sketches had already appeared, but in two magazines, Harper’s and North American Review. They eventually found their way between the covers of two books, London Films (October 1905) and Certain Delightful English Towns (October 1906).

Factors other than meteorology must be called to account for these affable remarks made to Perry by Howells upon his return from a six-weeks jaunt to Shakespeare country. “I am writing a very novel, surprising and beautiful thing about Stratford-on-Avon, which I hope to read you before the years have deprived you of your hearing” (York Harbor, Maine, September 17, 1913); and from the cold bastions of New York City on November 12: “I am working away at several things,
mostly a fool thing (but mine own) about Stratford-on-Avon, which I'll show you some time either in print or MS." His labors eventuated in The Seen and Unseen at Stratford-on-Avon (1914), "a fantasy of the reconciliation of Bacon and Shakespeare, returning as materializations for the August memorials of Shakespeare."

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

In January of 1872 Perry was invited by John R. Dennett, an editor of the Nation, to join its regular staff. Somewhat loath to remove himself from Boston and a lifetime of associations, Perry held off. Howells, whose opinion of Dennett was less than exalted, also disesteemed the idea. "I think it a pity Perry should go to New York," he wrote Henry James, "and be Dennettized"; and further confided, "I'm working hard to get him the sub-editorship of the North American Review" (LinL, I, 172). His industry succeeded; Perry was taken on as assistant editor by Henry Adams.

So it came about that over forty years later Howells made another of his emergency calls to Perry. "I am writing a short paper for the North American which comes 100 years old next year, and of course I wish to tell all I know and more of its history personally. So, to keep me on the hither side of fact will you tell me how long you edited, associate-edited, assistant-edited, or editorial-underlined the Review? You need not blush to say; everybody did it; I edited one number myself. Whom did you immediately precede and suc?" (York Harbor, Maine, October 19, 1914). Following week he thanked Perry for all his "kind information about Editors."

What Howells was trying to elucidate in his mind was a period of excessive fluctuation in the editorial seats of the Review. After stable regimes by Charles Eliot Norton and James Russell Lowell, and a brief interregnum by E. W. Gurney, the chief position fell to Henry Adams in 1870. He embarked for Europe in 1872, leaving no determinate principal in charge of the magazine. "There now ensued a space in history where I cannot follow it with a confident footing," said Howells in his centennial article ("Part of Which I Was," CCI [January 1915], 135-141). Four or five men had a hand in editing individual issues during Adams' absence. Upon his return in
1873 he sacked Perry and installed Henry Cabot Lodge, who could serve without pay. Perry’s predecessor is a mystery Howells seems not to have penetrated nor the official historian of the magazine to have recorded. As to the number of issues edited by Perry, Harlow (TSP, 37) refutes the figure three supplied by Howells and Frank Luther Mott, preferring her own deduction of five. However, Howells’ exclamation in his postscript of October 27, 1914—“I edited one N. A. Review; but you three!”—indicates that he got that information from Perry himself.

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

The expansiveness of Florida sunshine permeates the expansiveness of Howells’ note to Perry from The Valencia in St. Augustine: “Across the way, in charge of a handsome property, is an old Caucasian-featured (from his white father) darky who was once a trick rider in Barnum’s circus, and is, after me, the greatest reader in the world. He has told me personally that, after Shakespeare, I am the greatest author in the world. I find myself much known to his race through my praises of their poet Paul Dunbar” (March 21, 1915; compare tone and content of this passage with Howells’ letter to his son, LinL, II, 346).

By a route unusual and roundabout, Howells had become a force in the career of the first American Negro poet to achieve national reputation. James A. Herne, prominent performer and playwright of the period (Margaret Fleming, Shore Acres, Hearts of Oak), read Dunbar’s second book of verse, Majors and Minors, and promptly remanded it to Howells. In his review (Harper’s Weekly, XL [June 27, 1896], 630) Howells bestowed a double accolade on Dunbar for having “fathomed the souls of his simple white neighbors, as well as those of his own kindred.” Later that summer Dunbar called at Howells’ Far Rockaway home on Long Island and was touched by his host’s exceptional kindliness. On July 13 he informed Howells that he had written to thank Herne, whom he did not know but had seen on the stage, and conveyed his gratitude for Howells’ critical attention: “I feel much as a poor, insignificant, hopeless boy would feel to suddenly find himself knighted” (LinL, II, 68).
In December appeared Dunbar’s third collection of poems, *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (New York, 1896), with introduction by Howells. He cited the successes of Dumas and Pushkin but pointed out that they were both mulattos, while Dunbar was “the only man of pure African blood and of American civilization to feel the Negro life aesthetically and express it lyrically.” Moreover, the poems had appeal “for reasons apart from the author’s race, origin, and condition.” In his survey of “The New Poetry” in the *North American Review*, CLXVIII (May 1899), 590, Howells asserted that among poets “worthy of mention” he “could not leave out the name of Paul Dunbar.”

**POETS OF THE WEIRD**

Eager to supplement his own power of recall, Howells once more drew upon Perry’s encyclopedic store of literary ana.

“Can you think of poets who have done weird things especially — not ghostly, ghastly or grievous things, but weird merely? We have thought of Coleridge, Poe, Blake, the Rossettis, Keats, at moments, Tennyson in spots. What others? Ebeneazer Jones?” (York Harbor, Maine, September 15, 1917). Perry obliged with typical celerity, for six days later Howells replied: “You are very good to take all that trouble, and I shall not print the thing. You are quite right, though you don’t seem to have followed my deep-plunging irony to its utmost reach. Who could? Not I.”

Contrary to this asseveration, Howells did publish an “Easy Chair” essay on the subject of poems that bring chills and gooseflesh to be read by the flicker of firelight (*Harper’s*, CXXXVI [December 1917], 146-147. In leading up to a discussion of Walter de la Mare’s “The Listener,” he invoked all the names listed in his letter, and added Dickinson, Scott, and Leigh Hunt, probably Perry’s candidates. The one unfamiliar poet — Ebenezer Jones, his name now spelled correctly — was singled out for his artfulness “in that wonderful thing about ‘when the world begins burning up,’ and the first little soft flames in the woodland show like ‘crocus in the shade.’” His presence was doubtlessly due to Perry’s knowledge of his existence; he had written a critique on Jones’s life and works, “A
Poet Redivivus,” *Harvard Monthly*, IV (June 1887), 127-136. A consumptive and a Calvinist, Jones dragged out his four decades (1820-1860) in joyless, hopeless, loveless drudgery. Perry staunchly certified the “most remarkable quality” of Jones’s passionate sensitivity underneath the “rough husk” of his verses and crude castigations of society.

**SYMPOSIUM ON ARTZIBASHEF**

“Do you see that the English have discovered Artzibashef?” Howells asked Perry (New York City, February 23, 1915). Then he chortled over their conceit in having discovered Tolstoy and Turgenev—ten or twenty years after everyone else had. On July 24, from York Harbor, he brought up Artzibashef again. “When did we hold that famous symposium of ours about Artzibashef? I want it for the instructor of an elderly girl here, who says he’s beginning to be done in English.” The article he could not locate is “Recent Russian Fiction: A Conversation,” *North American Review*, CXCVI (July 1912), 85-103, in which he and Perry carry on a dialogue, Howells mostly in the role of interrogator and Perry the expositor and critic. Half a dozen renowned Russian authors are touched upon, but the preëminent space is accorded to Mikhail Artzibashef (1878-1927), novelist, playwright, essayist, who recoiled from early ideals and all social restraint, and is now best known in English for his erotic first novel, *Sanin* (1914).

Howells makes no assessment of his worth here (could, in fact, not recall his name), nor did he write about him elsewhere. To Perry, Artzibashef represented the “newest and greatest” writer of Russian fiction, not to be compared with Tolstoy or Turgenev but different, like, say, Maupassant. His work is not inspiring but “delightfully agonizing,” calm in manner and simple in style, with no effusive “flowers of rhetoric.” As Turgenev was the culmination of a period just passed, Artzibashef was surely the beginning of a new era, or so Perry insisted. When confronted with Andreyev as chief of the modern men, Perry retorted that he ranked Artzibashef much higher.

**INTRODUCTION TO DON QUIXOTE**

In *My Literary Passions* Howells paints a roseate picture of himself shelling peas and listening to his father read *Don
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Quixote. He was captivated by Cervantes, second in his affection only to Oliver Goldsmith, so his reading of the Spaniard's classic went on throughout his boyhood. "I cannot recall any distinctive period of it when I was not, more or less, reading that book" (MLP, 26). On February 10, 1919, exactly fifteen months before his death, he appealed to Perry from Augusta, Georgia: "I am asked to do an introduction to a new edition of Don Quixote; and Pilla and I are reading the lovable book aloud together; but it doesn't seem the good old Jervas version. Could you send me that in a cheap form? Perhaps Everyman's."

The Charles Jervas edition (variantly rendered as Jarvis) was originally issued in London, 1742, in two volumes, and has been extensively reprinted on both sides of the Atlantic. Howells specified this edition out of nostalgia and intellectual respect. "It is certain that my Don Quixote was in two small, stout volumes . . . bound in a sort of law-calf, well fitted to withstand the wear they were destined to undergo. The translation was, of course, the old-fashioned version of Jervas, which, whether it was a closely faithful version or not, was honest eighteenth-century English, and reported faithfully enough the spirit of the original" (MLP, 22). He had taught himself Spanish the better to capture the novel's true flavor, and he determined, at that age, to write a life of Cervantes (Years of My Youth, 84). He never fulfilled this early aspiration, but in those last days he did complete an abridgment of the Jervas edition—Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, edited by William Dean Howells, with an introduction by Mildred Howells, published posthumously by Harper & Brothers, New York, 1923.

While working on the text in May 1919 he expatiated robustly on "the growing vitality, not to say immortality of the most delightful as well as the most undying novel yet written in any language. The History of Don Quixote de la Mancha, by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, shows no more signs of failing fame than those Histories, Tragedies, and Comedies of William Shakespeare" (Harper's, CXXXIX, 605). In his September "Editor's Easy Chair" he reiterated this conviction. Rare indeed are the marks of such immutable devotion on the calendars of literary criticism.
HOWELLS ON OTHER WRITERS

In the course of these letters to Perry, Howells expressed himself on some two score authors and their books. These are not lengthy, premeditated estimates but terse impressions with an air of being delivered on the wing. None exceeds seven sentences, and most are merely two or three. They are valuable as confidential revelations on writers and volumes he did not review in print, or as contrasts to his publicized views. If from the bulk of his produced works Howells looms as a faceless machine, from these random flickers he comes out a highly sensitized human being. The frequent polarity of Howells’ and Perry’s opinions leaves one to muse upon the subcurrent stresses of great friendships.

HENRI BARBUSSE

“And now I have back *Le Feu* which I hope to read, but I have not my old courage for strange lingoës,” Howells wrote from York Harbor on June 19, 1917. If he did get around to reading this book he did not air his feelings in print, nor has any personal record as yet come to light. On the preceding day Perry had said to John T. Morse, Jr.: “That novel, *Le Feu*, is simply terrible because it is so damnably true. As I wrote to Howells, he makes Tolstoi sound as romantic as Victor Hugo. I never read such a book, though it is not all horror any more than the soldier’s life, even at the front, is all horror. There are capital scenes in it, full of humour, endurable pathos. It is a remarkable book, one that makes a mark on history” (Edwin Arlington Robinson, editor, *Selections From the Letters of Thomas Sergeant Perry* [New York, 1929], 92-93).

In *Le Feu: journal d’une escouade* (1916), Henri Barbusse (1873-1935), poet, political journalist, and anti-war Socialist, exposed with zealous “realism” the goriest aspects of trench warfare in the current European clash of arms. It was translated in 1917 with the title *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad*. There is a touch of tristesse in this admission of lessening vitality by Howells, once the premier standard-bearer for foreign literary realists.
LORD CHARNWOOD

Howells displayed exceedingly greater interest in the biography *Abraham Lincoln* by Godfrey R. B. Charnwood (1864-1945), an Oxford-educated baron and man of letters, who also turned his attention to Theodore Roosevelt and Walt Whitman. On August 15, 1918, Perry had written to Salomon Reinach: "Do you know Lord Charnwood's *Lincoln*? It is a delightful book, full of information imparted with wisdom and intelligence" (Robinson, *SFLTSP*, 183). He must have enthused similarly to Howells, who said the next day: "I commonly agree with you but not beforehand, as you seem to think regarding the Charnwood life of Lincoln. I have never read it or even told you I had, but if you have it at hand, why don't you send it, and let me confirm you in your anticipative impression?" (Kittery Point, Maine). The effect on contact was explosive. On August 29 Howells demanded to know: "Who in h-- - - is Lord Charnwood, anyway? Am reading his Lincoln with increasing despair of convicting you of ignorance and bad taste and other well-known attributes. Charnwood is a noble man, I make out from the title, which I can see you fawning round as I go; but he seems to be almost a man, too—quite a man, for an Englishman." And three days later: "Please let me buy your Charnwood *Lincoln*, and save me the bother of sending it you by mail, and writing Holt for another copy. I hope to make an E. C. about it and about such Englishmen as its author who will constitute the democracy I hope for after the war is over . . . . I have not read Morse's *Lincoln*. Charnwood's, beside Lamon's and my own, and Nicolay & Hay's."

[Howells reviewed Ward H. Lamon's *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* in *Atlantic Monthly*, XXX (September 1872), 364-369; John G. Nicolay & John Hay's *Abraham Lincoln: A History in Harper's*, LXXXII (February 1891), 478-482; and one other he does not mention here, E. Norton Norton's *Lincoln, A Lover of Mankind in Harper's*, CXXXIV (April 1912), 796-798. He had written *Life and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln* in 1860, and had referred frequently to Lincoln in *Years of My Youth* (1916). John T. Morse's *Abraham Lincoln* was published in Boston, 1893. Morse was a close friend of Perry and his first biographer.]

Within two weeks Howells was again entreatying information. From Kittery Point: "Which of these blessed Bensons was Charnwood before he became a lord? I have no *Who's Who*
here but *W. W. in America* and *W. W. in New York* and neither avails to help me hide that ignorance of contemporary literature which a single ray from your universal intelligence will disperse.” (Charnwood was Godfrey Rathbone Benson.) The name and the book hounded Howells: “I wish you could tell me of some important books, like Charnwood’s *Lincoln,*” he grumbled on October 9. And in *Harper’s,* CXXXVIII (December 1918), 134-136, he rated Charnwood as “not a very invertebrate aristocrat,” attesting that “we could not value more highly his interpretation of Lincoln in favor of the common man.”

EDWARD WALDO EMERSON

The impression is inescapable that, for reasons unexpressed here, Howells was piqued over *The Early Years of the Saturday Club, 1855-1870* (Boston, 1918) and was manfully striving to contain his judgment of the book as a whole. From Augusta, Georgia, on February 10, 1919, he scolded Perry: “You are trying to be magnanimous toward a very dull book in praising the *S. C. Book,* and it doesn’t become you; it isn’t natural. I, who am all generosity and good feeling have kept myself from massacring the letterpress by lighting into the pictures. To be sure I have read the 1. p. little or not at all; who could, but a born hypocrite and flatterer?” Howells was being patently hard on the book, and Perry must have held the mirror up to him, for on the 18th Howells resumed more moderately: “I am in quite a quiver of gratitude; when I come down I will write more sensibly. I expect by that time to like the *S. Club Book* better than I’ve pretended hitherto.”

*The Saturday Club,* by Edward Waldo Emerson (1844-1930), son of Ralph Waldo, is a substantial quarto, over five hundred pages, with thirty-six photogravure portraits rather becomingly mounted. Two short chapters outlining the backgrounds and birth of the Club are followed by fifteen chapters covering its history, mainly through character sketches of the more prominent members during this period, i.e., Agassiz, Dana, Emerson senior, Lowell, Motley, Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Hawthorne, Norton, the elder Henry James, James T. Fields, William Morris Hunt, Charles Francis Adams. Founded as a dining club for “friendship and good-fellowship pure and
simple,” it met on the last Saturday of each month at Parker’s to enjoy good food and good talk. Howells was elected in 1874. When he came to assess the book in Harper’s, CXXXVIII (May 1919), 854-856, approximately true to his word, Howells evaded specific criticism of the text. “We can only congratulate ourselves on the fullness of Dr. E. W. Emerson and his associates (for the most part himself)” for this “recollecting and recording,” he said in judicious volte-face, and spent most of his space in faint dispraise of the illustrations. His tone toward the venerable group was uniformly pleasant but he injected what may be read as a concealed barb: “inevitably they have become representative of the great New England of their day, and unintentionally representative of the little United States beyond.” Perry, reviewing the book in Yale Review, VIII (July 1919), 856-858, held stoutly to his position. “It is a handsome book,” he said, “well printed but distressingly heavy ... however ... [a] most readable volume.” He commented on the “geniality” of the biographical sketches and closed with the warranty that “The book is really interesting with a charm of its own.” No more than the long-forgotten Blaine-Cleveland controversy did this difference hinder the smooth flow of their friendship. There lay buried here a tacit rasping of cultures that neither wished to exhume and examine. It could become acutely manifest when the factor of Henry James was added (see below).

JOHN FISKE

References to the Saturday Club seemed to reactivate in Howells a dormant itch. Writing to Perry on April 22, 1913, about a specimen of literary manuscript, he resorted to ponderous sarcasm. “The want of Fiske’s name — even his initials in capital letters — must unfit this for the revered archives of the S. C.” John Fiske (1842-1901), author of thirty-five volumes of historical studies and prime advocate in America of Darwin’s evolutionary biology and Spencer’s evolutionary philosophy, early came into close association with Perry and Howells, the former perhaps the more intimate. All three were instructing at Harvard at the end of the sixties and were later members of the same dining and discussion clubs. Fiske was Howells’
neighbor in Cambridge and moved across the way from him when Howells went to Berkeley Street, the first guest in Fiske’s new home being Perry. The trio held long and repeated sessions on new books and new science, and it may be said without prejudice that Fiske’s *The Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy* (1874) had observable effects on Perry’s criticism and Howells’ fiction.

They were intricately involved in the area of publications. Fiske inserted a “Dedicatory Epistle” in *A Century of Science* (1899) to Perry, whom he had long wished to make “the patron saint or tutelar divinity of some book of mine” preferably one “of the desultory and chatty sort that would remind you . . . of the many quiet evenings of old, when, over a tankard of mellow October and pipe of fragrant Virginia . . . we used to roam in fancy through the universe.” Howells had long before celebrated in *Myths and Myth-Makers* (1873): “To / My Dear Friend, / William D. Howells, / In Remembrance of Pleasant Autumn Evenings Spent Among / Werewolves and Trolls and Nixies, / I dedicate / This Record Of Our Adventures.” They regularly inscribed and sent copies of their books, each to the other two (a good representation of these are now in Colby College Library). As editors, Howells and Perry (in his brief tenure) solicited and printed Fiske’s highly marketable essays. As critics, Howells reviewed four of Fiske’s books, Perry one. Both published tributes when Fiske died, and Perry was prevailed on to undertake a memoir in the Beacon Biographies Series, *John Fiske* (Boston, 1906).

Howells did not let his affection for Fiske blind him to the meagerness of originality and profundity in his writings; the encomiums were more for Fiske as synthesizer and popularizer than as philosopher or historian. Fiske’s application of science to religion proved “nothing very conclusive” to Howells, who also pointed out that “the many-sided scholar” could write with “poetic heat” but always upon “well-known compositions.” In his articles Perry paused over Fiske’s “crystalline honesty” and “pellucid style”; in his book he excused Fiske on the score that “he had to do the work that was asked of him” and so missed the greater things he might have done. In letters to other friends, both Howells and Perry described Fiske as an admirable man and invaluable companion, yet inexplicably spoke of him
as “poor” and “pathetic.” When John Spencer Clark’s *The Life and Letters of John Fiske* appeared, Howells wrote to Perry in that odd vein. “You should suffer my enjoying poor old Clarke’s life of Fiske; but you can’t help yourself. It is very simple, almost childish, and yet it brings that childlike spirit very sensibly back. Of course it blinks a lot that it would be infinitely better for sitting in full light; but I suppose this was the bargain. I should like to talk it over with you, sometime. I shall scarcely write of it, yet I may” (Kittery Point, Maine, June 13, 1918). Their mute understanding may well have lain in their feeling that Fiske had debased his talent by overreaching for popular favor. On third thought, Howells did not review the book.

### Hamlin Garland

Twice in 1917 Howells spoke warmly to Perry of Hamlin Garland (1860-1940). On August 23 from York Harbor, Maine: “I am very old, thank you, and my dry work and the wet weather try me. I have had a great stir in reading Garland’s autobiography; really a great thing, amongst the greatest of its kind.” And on November 30 from *The Blackstone* in New York City: “I’m so glad you like Garland’s book, and I shall instantly gladden him with your letter.” He was alluding to Garland’s *A Son of the Middle Border*, which was a relatively serene account of a somewhat craggy life, thereby according with Howells’ prescription for proper autobiography. While reading the galley proofs in July, he had exclaimed: “So far as I know your book is without its like in literature . . . Never before has any man told our mortal story so manfully, so kindly” (*LinL*, II, 373). He was equally transcendent in his New York *Times* review (August 26, 1917), ranking Garland’s performance above Goethe’s, Rousseau’s, and Franklin’s in this field.

From the June day in 1887 when Garland, with quaking knees, interviewed Howells in the hotel at Auburndale where he was then living, “there was nothing but common ground between us (Howells in *North American Review*, CXCVI [October 1912], 523). He descried in Garland an earnest disciple in the realistic creed, and counseled him in the writing
of his finest interpretations of life along the Middle Border. He eulogized Garland's successive books for their "ungarnished and unvarnished" probity and their "fine, angry sympathy for the familiar and the low." He wrote introductions for Main-Travelled Roads (1893) and They of the High Trails (1916), placing Garland with Bret Harte and Mark Twain as a local colorist, and he included Garland's "The Return of the Private" in his collection of The Great Modern American Stories (New York, 1920). As early as 1894 he assured Garland: "You go further than I do, but you are in the right way, and you will arrive! You have arrived, in fact" (LinL, II, 51).

Garland was energetically grateful. "[Howells'] sympathy, his insight, his soundness of judgment, and especially the dignity and sweetness of his nature have been an inspiration as well as a regulative influence to me as to many others," he observed in Bookman, XLV (March 1917), 7. He wrote approvingly in New England Magazine, II (May 1890), "[Howells has] become the synonym for a great literary movement" (243), and in the North American Review, CLXXVI (March 1903), "Save in the best of Henry James, no such rigidly artistic restraint in fiction has appeared in America" (339). He took the lead in programming the celebration of Howells' 80th birthday, and said after Howells died: "No death since that of my father had so deeply affected me. Howells was more than an elder brother; he was a spiritual guide, an arbiter" (My Friendly Contemporaries [New York, 1932], 295).

Garland and Perry shared the ecological attitude of literary and human development, that is, neither books nor man can be understood except as components of the totality of experience in their times. Perry concurred with Howells on A Son of the Middle Border, calling it "that rare thing — a good book ... a wholesome book, of great value" (Yale Review, VII [April 1918], 642, 643). He joined Garland in the set of tributes printed by the New York Sun (February 25, 1917) in observance of Howells' 80th birthday, but — for reasons probably of disinclination due to age and the fact that Howells was wintering down South and could not be present at the festivities in his honor on March 21 — Perry declined to attend. In two letters, now in Colby College Library, Garland asked Perry as one of Howells' oldest friends to come and "tell us
stories about him — an informal and very personal talk such as I know you can give.” On receiving negative response Garland expressed great disappointment and explained: “It is not a dinner — it is only a kind of symposium . . . . We hope to have some readings and some singing of songs based on the lyrics, etc.” He pleaded with Perry to reconsider: “No speech, just a talk.” But Perry apparently stood adamant. The New York Times did not report him as one of the speakers at the National Arts Club affair that night. Nonetheless, they did correspond cordially again that year and later, Garland thanking Perry for the note of commendation he had sent Howells on Garland’s book. And when Garland sought authentic background details for his memoirs on Howells in 1920, Perry gave generously of his recollections and records.

WILLIAM ARTHUR GILL

Howells is notable as “discoverer” of numerous literary talents — Garland, Harte, Twain, Crane, Norris, for a few — but, like all prophets, he was wont to stumble over his vision now and again. One example is his misplaced faith in William Arthur Gill (1865-1935), of whom he wrote to Perry:

There are a thousand things rotting in my breast for want of speech with you, and immediately some account of a charming young Manxman (not H. Caine!), who after taking all the honors at Oxford except those left for me, could not endure the dense tradition of the place, and cast away his fellowship, and after many years among the husks of journalism is now trying to write fiction. His superstition of me is blinder than anything I have known, but who flies in the face of his worshippers? Not I, least of all the face, topping mine by a foot, of this good fellow. He was here, yesterday, and promises more of himself later, after returning from Canada. I should like somehow to bring you together, for you would love one another like uncle and nephew: I am his only father (Kittery Point, Maine, August 16, 1905).

I am indebted to Professor George Arms for identifying the subject of this veiled allusion. Gill was a fellow of Oriel College who may have had some influence in securing Howells the honorary degree granted him by Oxford in 1904. He published no fiction, as Howells had hoped, but he did contribute able sketches to the New York Sun in 1907-1910, critical essays to
Cosmopolitan (1900) and the Atlantic Monthly (1907-1913), in the last of which he commends Howells for not preaching or philosophizing in The Rise of Silas Lapham. His sole listed volume is an edition of Maurice Morgan's Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff (London, 1912).

Thomas Henry Hall Caine (1853-1931) put the Isle of Man distinctly on the literary map in 1894 with his story The Manxman. He turned out a highly popular series of novels, of which The Bondman, The Eternal City, The Christian, and The Prodigal Son made the widest impression.

GOETHE

In his youth Howells tried mightily to admire a current god, Goethe (1749-1832). He stationed him in “the highest order of poets like Shakespeare and Dante” (MLP, 160), and “worshiped him much at secondhand through Heine,” but even then could not “kindle my heart at the cold altar of Goethe” (188). The insecurity of his passion developed unchecked in subsequent reviews of Goethe’s novels in Harper’s and the Atlantic Monthly, where he noted without quibble their “German clumsiness,” lack of modernity, and remoteness in “the region of the ‘ideal.’” Although he continued to refer to “the great Goethe,” by the time Howells mellowed into his eighties he had taken on a posture of chuckling irreverence in his remarks to Perry.

Read a rambling, scambling book of mine called Their Silver Wedding Journey and know all about Weimar. Eckermann is holding out delightfully. There was a lot of meat in old Goetty which wasn’t the flesh and the devil, quite. I wish I had known him. He would have been a great addition to York Harbor society (York Harbor, Maine, August 31, 1917).

Goethe was a wide-minded old Goat, as the unlettered world calls him. Last summer our previously lost friend lent me Eckermann, which I read with the greatest instruction. Eckermann milks him into his mouth, and then gives his divine juice forth in a welter of Eckermannish, but not spoiled. I too read W. Meister in my hot youth, and almost read the Wahlverwandtschaften, with a young wish to find it greater than it was. Of course I know Faust even in the second part (poor old Bayard Taylor’s version is wonderful, but I read the first act in German); largely, though, I unknow the immortal Goat. You had better read the beautiful chapters on Weimar in my much ignored Their Silver Wedding Journey (Intervale, New Hampshire, July 27, 1918).
Their Silver Wedding Journey (1899) is in effect a sequel in which Basil and Isabel March, the honeymoon couple of Their Wedding Journey (1871), spend a prolonged anniversary in Europe.

When Howells visited Weimar in September 1897 he wrote to his sister Aurelia: "It is a most charming old town — the only one in Germany I've seen where I would be willing to live" (LmL, II, 79).

Johann Peter Eckermann (1792-1854) played Boswell to Goethe and helped him prepare the final edition of his works. Eckermann issued his daily records of talks with Goethe in three volumes, 1836-1848.

For other remarks by Howells on Faust, Wilhelm Meister, and Wahlverwandtschaften see My Literary Passions, 178, 188; and Harper's, LXXIII (June 1886), 154.

Bayard Taylor (1825-1878), most glamorous world-rover of his day, author of numerous books of travel, poetry, and fiction, capped his last years with a rather tepid two-volume translation of Faust in the original meters. In Literary Friends and Acquaintances, 3-10, Howells tells about staring open-mouthed at Taylor — who had come to lecture in Columbus, Ohio — as "the first author by calling whom I had met."

Howells, who told Twain that Taylor was "a really lovable man" (MT-HL, I, 227), may have been swayed by his dear opinion of the man when he wrote, "I do not believe that his version of Faust, so wonderfully faithful to the original as to seem a parallel inspiration, can ever be superseded, much less forgotten" (Harper's Weekly, XL [March 28, 1896], 294), and again when he rated Part Two better than Part One (Atlantic Monthly, XXVII [July 1871], 124). Perry — in whose library repose two sets of Goethe's works, in thirty and in five volumes, as well as German and French editions of Eckermann's conversations — wrote about Goethe on six occasions and delivered three equable judgments: a) that Faust "is undoubtedly the greatest poem of the century" (in his chapter on "The Progress of Literature" in Charles E. Beale, editor, Gately's World's Progress [Boston, 1886], 761); b) that "The amount that Goethe wrote of what is really unreadable is recognized only by the yawns of readers, or whispered universally by them to one another" (Atlantic Monthly, XLIII [April 1879], 541-542); and c) that Part Two of Faust "is a work of the intellect ... and lacks the eternal youth which all true poetry has" (Ibid, 542).

GEORGE GROTE

To Perry, who often expressed himself wary of any interpretation of history which did not encompass every facet of
evolutionary growth, Howells made this rueful observation: “Our minds run like kindred streams beside each other in the same channels. I have long wished I had the courage to read Grote, which I have in 10 or 12 Everyman volumes. Now I will take yours and do it” (New York City, April 29, 1919). It was the utterance of a man, gone in years, who looks back remorsefully at the list of books he always promised himself he would read, and never did. But unlike most, Howells could not be said to have frittered away his time in lesser, catchpenny pursuits. Even the polyhistor Bacon would have to agree that Howells’ catalogue of books tasted, swallowed, chewed and digested is in excess of the ordinary.

George Grote (1794-1871), banker with a liberal education and a founder of the University of London, turned to politics and then to publication. His initial success was achieved with the eight-volume History of Greece, issued serially from 1846 to 1856. Thereafter he bent his writing skills to consideration of the classic philosophers. Neither Howells nor Perry took public notice of any of Grote’s writings, but the latter had this to say to two of his friends around this time: to John T. Morse, “Grote wrote his [history] to have an argument for liberalism in his hands”; to Salomon Reinach, “I have often thought that properly conducted annals would be a thousand times better than the literary histories which are generally written to teach some lesson, to defend some hobby of the historian; thus Grote, Lingard, in fact almost all of them” (SFLTS, 101, 184). Perry’s twelve-volume copy of the History is Harper & Brothers’ 1861 reprint of the second London edition, dated by him on the endleaf “September 30, 1862.”

ALEXANDER HARVEY

Moments of stunned amusement were not unknown to Howells during his half-century dominion over American literary criticism and fiction. One with the deepest potential for hilarity was his convergence with Alexander Harvey, whose William Dean Howells: A Study of the Achievement of a Literary Artist (New York, 1917) prompted this paragraph to Perry from York Harbor, Maine, on August 23, 1917:
Alexander Harvey is certainly not George Harvey, but otherwise I know nothing about him except that his publisher says he is young and too modest to send me his book, which the pub. then sends. After a first look into it I thought I could not bear to read it, yet did so finally, in spite of my small stomach for things about me. First he skies me, inordinately, and then drivels over me with talk about “sissyrian.” All of us, he swears, who are not drunken blackguards are sissies, and I the worst for having kept our authorship sober, as editor and critic. Of course you have seen what the book is, and there is no use telling you. I cannot help being glad that he values some characters of mine; but I am no such prodigy as two thirds of his book makes me out; I warn you of that. Still, my curiosity haunts about him. Perhaps he will answer my letter to his pub.

In a postscript on the back of the envelope Howells added: “He hates the English, Russians, Spanish because he knows no better, or does not know them.” In unflagging enthrallement to the subject, Howells remarked to Francis A. Duneka, business manager of Harper & Brothers, about a month later: “Have you seen a strange book wholly about me by a certain Alexander Harvey? After two-thirds I wouldn’t have spoken to you; after the last third you wouldn’t have spoken to me.” (LinL, II, 375).

The book, published by B. W. Huebsch, is a free-wheeling, wild-swinging analysis of Howells’ work, primarily the thematic tissue of the novels. Harvey’s vocabulary is volcanic, his opinions dogmatic, his tone diatribic. He begins by hailing Howells for refuting “the British literary superstition,” couples him with Balzac as the insuperable literary artist — “greater from that point of view than Thackeray or George Eliot or Tolstoy, or Kipling,” then classifies his genius “as a sister” to Baudelaire’s and Oscar Wildes’. His Chapter XV is titled “The ‘Sissy’ School of Literature,” wherein he coins the attenuated pun Howells quotes in his letter. Harvey lodges Howells at the forefront of “the sissy school of American literature,” seeing “in the world of Howells . . . the subordination of all that is masculine to all that is feminine.” Paeanistic about Howells until his last two chapters, Harvey concludes that Howells has done irreparable damage to American literature by presenting only surfaces and leading it away from the native “subconsciousness.” Howells may be forgiven his mixed feelings.

Alexander Harvey (1868-1949), a born Belgian, editor of
Current Opinion and American Monthly, also wrote short stories, Shelley's Elopement: A Study of the Most Romantic Episode in Literary History (New York, 1918), and volumes of essays on Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, and Christ. Howells’ curiosity about what manner of man he might be was satisfied before the end of the year. “You may as well get the fagots ready for me in your backyard,” he wrote to Perry from New York City on December 7, 1917. “Alexander Harvey called the other day, and I like him too. He is not the callow ass’s colt we figured him, but a staid old horse of fifty with a son in the army. He stood differing from me like a hero and martyr, so that I had not the heart to muster him much.” If Perry put on record his reactions to this molten conjunction, it has not yet come to light.

[George B. Harvey (1864-1928), political journalist, ambassador to England, honorary colonel on the staff of the New Jersey governor, and reputed president-maker of Warren G. Harding, was editor of Pulitzer’s New York World and of the Washington Post. He purchased and edited the North American Review in 1899. The instant success of this magazine caught the eye of J. P. Morgan who, wishing to retrieve the fortunes of the House of Harper, brought him in as president of the company and editor of its two periodicals.

In 1892 Howells had discontinued his “Editor’s Study” in Harper’s. Upon assumption of duties, Harvey invited Howells to his home for an overnight visit. At breakfast the next morning Howells agreed to write “so many thousand words for so much a year, and I was to be a literary adviser, however much or little that meant” (J. Henry Harper, The House of Harper [New York, 1912], 228). Thus came into existence the “Editor’s Easy Chair.”

Although Howells resented having his work treated “reportorially” and being rushed about proofs “as once I was not” (LinL, II, 124), he seemed to view the change in management favorably. “They have a very active man at the head of affairs,” he wrote Twain, “and there is a prospect of things being better managed than under the old régime, where no one was head” (LinL, II, 120-121). For Howells’ 75th birthday, Harvey sponsored a congratulatory dinner at Sherry’s in New York, attended by President Taft and other notables.]

PAUL HAMILTON HAYNE

One of the more peculiar, behind-the-scenes dramas in Howells’ multifarious interrelations as editor involved Paul Hamilton Hayne (1830-1886), sectional poet of the South whose martial songs and nature lyrics earned him a modicum of national reputation in the decades preceding and following the Civil War. For no stated reason, Howells recalled to Perry on October 20, 1918: “I knew Hayne very well, and when we
meet in our poor, dear Boston (which I don’t despise near as much as you do) I will tell you all about him. He spent a whole summer in Boston, and being in utter poverty always drove out in a hack to see me in Cambridge at a cost of $2.50.” (Kittery Point, Maine). Penury and heart disease were chronic conditions with Hayne and they observably embittered his moods.

He visited New York and Boston in 1873, became ill, and had to borrow from several individuals. To what extent his improvidence affected the acceptability of his poems, one must decide from the tone of Howells’ note, above. The graph of Hayne’s publications in the Atlantic Monthly may also be enlightening. James T. Fields turned a persistently cold eye on Hayne’s offerings. When Howells succeeded to the editorship he published five Hayne poems between September 1872 and October 1873. Thereupon, silence. In reviewing Hayne’s Legends and Lyrics in the Atlantic Monthly, XXIX (April 1872), 501-502, Howells had “cordially welcomed” the volume, avouching that it emulated “Mr. William Morris in music.” Seemingly undented by this aspersion, Hayne wrote to Howells on May 21, 1873: “It will, perhaps, prove the high, and exceptional esteem wherewith I regard you; an esteem strengthened and sanctified by affection” (American Literature, V [January 1934], 369). Within two years, in letters redundant with exclamations and underlines, the exceptional esteem was supplanted by sulphurous gripes to Longfellow, Edmund Clarence Stedman, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and others, regarding his treatment at the hands of Howells. Hayne exhibited total bewilderment. Why, after having been encouraged by Howells to “write regularly for his monthly,” and having received entre for a period, was he “suddenly, unaccountably” and silently ignored? “He never even answered my note, enclosed with the MS,” nor was the manuscript ever returned, Hayne swore. He raked Howells as a crotchety, eccentric, fastidious, difficult critic, “radically wrong in his artistic and literary conclusions” (see Daniel M. McKeithan, editor, A Collection of Hayne Letters [Austin, 1944], 109, 110-111, 161, 194, 252, 257, 277; Charles Duffy, editor, The Correspondence of Bayard Taylor and Paul Hamilton Hayne [Baton Rouge,
In addition to the obvious rankle of rejection, Hayne's indignation was fed by Howells' espousal of the Henry James vein of fiction as against Hayne's Simms-Scott-Dickens propensity. Bayard Taylor, friend to both, tried in his sanguine way to embrace both. On March 13, 1878, he cooed to Hayne: "Don't be too hard on Howells. His is a peculiar temperament, and he is living under influences which are probably more potent than either you or I suspect . . . . I like Howells as well as ever. He is a charming fellow, in every way, when one is with him. As an editor, he is an enigma, which I no longer try to solve" (John Richie Schultz, editor, *The Unpublished Letters of Bayard Taylor in the Huntington Library* [San Marino, California, 1937], 206-207). Howells was of course not privy to all this behind-hand bicker and would probably not have been disturbed by it if his disposal of Hayne was based purely on objective editorial judgment. And only Howells would know.

JOHN HOLMES

Howells' sentimentality for his old Cambridge days found vent not only in his own writings but in his appreciation of others' memoirs, suitably couched. John Holmes (1812-1899), younger brother of Oliver Wendell and confirmed Cantabrigian (U. S. A.), was a man Howells thoroughly approved. A graduate of Harvard College and the Law School, he never engaged in the legal or other profession, devoting himself to his mother's needs and to the chronicle of his home town. He published only one essay and one review — of Lucius R. Paige's *History of Cambridge* — which Howells induced him to do for the *Atlantic Monthly*. In *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* (282-283) Howells remembers his first meetings with Holmes in the charming Colonial house where he and Oliver were born. In the years after his mother's death, no longer having a house in which to entertain, John would give delightful oyster dinners at the Howells house, always bringing a bottle of red wine and sometimes champagne, while the Howellses did the cooking and provided the coleslaw.

In 1917 William Roscoe Thayer edited the *Letters of John Cary: William Dean Howells to Thomas Sergeant Perry*
Holmes to James Russell Lowell and Others, with an introduction by Alice Longfellow. In an elaboration of a comparison he made in his letter to Miss Longfellow on December 7, 1917 (LinL, II, 377), Howells wrote to Perry on the same day: “I like the Holmes letters and find them as meaty as can be, and as quaintly and locally whimsical as Lamb’s would have been if he had written them from Old Cambridge. His lingo and squint bless me from every page” (New York City). He used the Charles Lamb simile for the third time in his review of the Letters in Harper’s, CXXXVI (March 1918), 604-605, passing off the slightness of Holmes’s letters in favor of the “delicate whimsicality” which sweetened them to a “Lamb-like lovable-ness.” This tenuity in Holmes’s style Howells had noted before. To Miss Longfellow he had said that Holmes “would suddenly sparkle into some gayety, too ethereal for remembrance,” and she wove it into her preface to the book.

HENRY JAMES

Of the throng of personalities Howells referred to in these letters to Perry, none exceeded Henry James (1843-1916) in number and intensity of recurrence. More than a score of times Howells inquired about or commented on this friend of their early days, now permanently disposed at Lamb House in Sussex, England. Their first link was forged when it befell Howells, as sub-editor on the Atlantic Monthly, to read James’s “Poor Richard.” Asked by Fields if he would take it, Howells replied instantaneously, “Yes, and all the stories you can get from the writer” (Century, XXV [November 1882], 25). James never forgot this furtherance. Forty-six years after, he said in a public letter to Howells, “You held out your open editorial hand to me at the time I began to write . . . with a frankness and sweetness of hospitality that was really the making of me” (North American Review, CXCV [April 1912], 558).

In 1866 the James family moved from Newport to Cambridge, where Howells had been living for several months. He could not recall the circumstances of his first meetings with James, but “we seemed presently to be always meeting . . . and always talking of methods of fiction, whether we walked the
streets by day or night, or we sat together reading our stuff to each other” (*LinL*, II, 397). Here, certainly, must have evolved their ideals of “reticent realism,” the determinations against admitting raw passion, pathos, or power into their fictions. As the years passed, they fought in support of amenable realists and reviewed each other’s books unstintedly. Howells called James “a metaphysical genius working to aesthetic results” and “our finest fictionist.” James claimed that Howells had moved “from one success to another” and had “taken possession of the field.” For Howells’ 75th-birthday celebration James contributed a letter of deeply felt homage. Howells tried all in his power to secure the Nobel Prize for James, and his very last writing was a tribute to James.

Perry formed the other intersection of what Howells’ daughter called “the triangular friendship,” and Van Wyck Brooks, “a literary triumvirate.” Perry was thirteen and Henry James two years older when the James family came to live in Newport. They rambled along the beaches and cliffs discussing art, literature, and idealism; took day-long sails armed with volumes of French novelists and playwrights; argued over teas and dinners; read together in the library; attended the same church and school. Garth James said at this time that Henry looked upon Perry as “his own particular and personal property.” When the Jameses left for Europe, the two young men corresponded voluminously. By 1870 James had introduced Perry to Howells, as recounted above, and the three were active members of The Club, a dinner group much given to deliberations on the arts and the times. Of the three, Perry was far the best informed in matters of historic and current literatures. He was first, for instance, to review and translate Turgenev, whom the other two instantly adopted.

Howells wrote James that they “always” talked of him and that Perry was James’s “most pathetically constant adorer” (*LinL*, II, 350). This was true, with slight reservations. Perry unquestionably admired James “both as a writer and as a man; but,” as Edwin Arlington Robinson said in his preface, “he found too many words in the later novels, and simply would not read them, even for love” (*SFLTSP*, 7). Even in an early review (of *Confidence*, in *Atlantic Monthly*, XLVI [July 1880],...
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125-126), while he duly praised the novel for its “social imagination,” he did call for less “entertaining” stories and more “of a higher flight.” In his turn James spoke of Perry as his “super-excellent and all-reading, all-engulfing friend” (Notes of a Son and Brother [London, 1914], 101). Having become friendly with Turgenev in Europe, James obtained for Perry the right to translate Virgin Soil. When Perry was removed from his editorial post at the North American Review, James arranged for him to write a series of literary news letters for the London Academy. Presentation copies of a dozen James books remain in Perry’s library, now in Colby College.

In the Perry letters, Howells’ passages on Henry James follow three definable lines: James not writing to him; James’s books; James’s expatriation. It has been written and, in the main, accepted that Howells and James had “everything in common.” At least one surreptitious division suggests itself in the insistent repetition and querulous pitch of Howells’ complaints about not hearing from James. Howells sensed it but expressed it only obliquely when he described himself and James as “badly assorted Siamese twins” (LinL, I, 281).

The rift which did not show on the surface and which neither Howells nor James could ever admit openly to each other was the disparity of their birth and upbringing. They were of two distinct worlds, and the frontier and the main line seem never to have coalesced. In his youth Howells looked worshipfully toward the literary capital of America. When his day came, he conceived it in religious imagery — “the passionate pilgrim from the West approached his holy land at Boston” (LFAA, 13). Through sheer ability he made the grade and was received at the highest levels. But the rural democrat within him could not quite abide the urban aristocracy around him. It was a source of insecurity and an eternal affront. Lowell said Howells always wrote “as if some swell had failed to bow to him on Beacon Street” (Frederic J. Stimson, My United States [New York, 1931], 79). And indeed in A Chance Acquaintance, The Rise of Silas Lapham, The Lady of the Aroostook, April Hopes, and elsewhere, the charge is well substantiated. He took to James’s “princely” praise “as if I had been created a peer, or something” (LinL, II, 6).
Howells often imagined himself in disfavor with James and defensively offered to justify the situation. "I suppose you see James; he said he would write me an early letter, but I have not yet seen the color of his ink" (San Remo, January 9, 1905). "James has not written ever since the subscription era, and perhaps he is somewhat mad at me" (Kittery Point, Maine, July 2, 1913).

For James's 70th birthday a plan was hatched to raise funds to buy furniture for his house at Rye. Perry and Howells learned of it and discouraged the "scandalous attempt on poor James's delicacy" (LinL, II, 327-328). Howells, notwithstanding, felt culpable. On another occasion Howells assumed he had hurt James's feelings by adverse remarks about his prefaces to the New York Edition of his works, but within two weeks James answered him cordially.

As often, Howells implied that Perry might be shielding James. "I wonder if you have not seen H. J.; you've never mentioned him" (San Remo, March 25, 1905); "Do you ever hear from H. J.?" (York Harbor, Maine, October 19, 1914); and, "Do you hear directly anything about poor James?" (St. Augustine, Fla., February 16, 1916). The fact is that Perry did see and hear from James with greater regularity. They had known each other longer and their roots sprang from the same soil, but if any conspiracy existed it was purely subliminal; both men were sincerely fond of Howells. Proof of Perry's regard is profuse in his essay (Century, XXIII [March 1882], 680-685), so his depiction of Howells arriving in Boston for the first time with a carpetbag must be counted an unconscious irony.

James was indisputably more at ease with Perry than with Howells, and in Notes of a Son and Brother (127) the reasons emerge explicitly: Perry's famous forebears, his "unintermitted breeding," Harvard. Over and above all, James valued Howells as "a quiet decent honest man," yet some of his attitudes and practices rubbed hard against Brahmin sensibilities. In published and unpublished letters to Perry, James spoke askance of Howells for display of prosperity, for "homelessly roaming the earth," for "perpetually" discovering new authors, for "lush exuberance" of "output," for doing without the comforts of his status — evidences to the man from the Athenaeum of a little too much or not quite enough in the man from the log cabin.
Howells issued well-considered reviews on a dozen James books. In these letters to Perry he tosses out quick fillets that are as useful indexes to his opinion as are the longer evaluations. From the Hotel Metropol in Tours, he wrote on September 29, 1911:

Of course we are enjoying it here, in the heart of the Henry James country. His book bears reading on the ground. He is less severe with medieval Touraine than with contemporary America, but not less charming and scarcely less subtle. The smell which he notes of Plessis le Tour is there yet, hanging around for the traveller in 1911 just as it was in 1870.

Howells could not quite make up his mind about A Small Boy and Others (1913). To Mrs. Perry (March 31, 1913) he cried, “Delicious”; to Perry (April 4), “James’s book is a cloudy glory, but it is a glory. Don’t buy it; borrow my copy, which I’ve finished” (Cambridge). Perry, also irresolute, found it charming and delightful as the “inner history of a human being,” but balked at “the long, complicated sentences . . . the hesitations, modifications, corrections” (Yale Review, III [October 1913], 186-189).

In his Harper’s, October 1888, survey of James’s recent short stories Howells compared “The Liar” to “A London Life” as “the more superficial but not less brilliant performance . . . for there too is astonishing divination, and a clutch upon the unconscious motives which are scarcely more than impulses, instincts” (CXXVII, 800). In August 1889 he opined that no one could accuse James “of drawing the English people in ‘The Liar’ with unnatural tenderness” (Harper’s, CXXIX, 477). A quarter of a century later he said to Perry: “I remember ‘The Liar’ very well, and I am glad that that masterpiece enables you to expose James’s attempt to screen himself in the
late outrage behind an aged suffragette” (York Harbor, Maine, May 19, 1914).

[James’s portrait by John Singer Sargent, on exhibit at the Royal Academy, was damaged at this time by an obstreperous feminist. On May 17 James had thanked Perry for his condolences: “you have poured upon the wounds it was so deplorably to receive the oil of your compassion and sympathy” (Percy Lubbock, editor, The Letters of Henry James [New York, 1920], II, 368).]

Perry’s gift to Howells of Pictures and Other Passages from Henry James, selected by Ruth Head (London, 1916; New York, 1917) brought out their essential agreement on James’s obfuscating long-windedness. This volume contains short cullings from the fiction and essays, arranged alphabetically under topic headings. On May 18, 1918, from Kittery Point, Howells sent acknowledgement and a peerless testimonial: “Thank you truly for the little book of passages from James’s stories. The things have an extraordinary gain in quality through this isolation from the context. One feels almost as never before what a great artist he is. The accusation of obscurity falls from this wonderful clarity.”

Another gift of books elicited these centrifugal comments: “That is a good choice of things from H. J. which you sent me; but Middle Years is draughty and echoy. All the same he was a great genius. He lived too long in England” (Kittery Point, Maine, September 14, 1918). In contradistinction, Perry in his Yale Review notice of the book endorsed “Mr. James’s subtle, pervasive, unobtrusive humor,” not, however, without grousing at his “complicated convolutions of phrase” (VII [April 1918], 644-645).

Collateral to Howells’ brief decrees on James’s books are three equally swift shafts at critics of James. 1) “That notice of James is one of the best notices I have ever read, and your best piece of writing. It is close, fine, simple, true” (Boston, December 19, 1913). Reference is to Perry’s assessment of A Small Boy and Others in Yale Review, III (October 1913), 186-189. 2) “Did you see that really abominable review of James’s Son and Brother in the Nation? It made one sick with shame by its cruelty and perversity. I wonder who did it” (York Harbor, Maine, July 12, 1914). The anonymous critic
arraigned James for mounting "simplest thought" on "heroic stilts," for stretching moments of consciousness upon the rack and the wheel, and for expending "nearly a thousand pages in explaining how a man of twenty-five was enabled at last to sit down in Boston and write credible short stories" (Nation, XCIX, [July 2, 1914], 16-17). 3) "I should like to know more of Miss West's (or anybody's) sensible book about H. J., who is in much danger of being made a crazy cult of, for no fault of his" (York Harbor, Maine, September 10, 1916). In Henry James (London, 1916), a slender book in size and in substance, Rebecca West is not carried away by adulation despite her cultish hyperbole that James's death left "the white light of his genius to shine out for the eternal comfort of the mind of man" (117). She chiefly proceeds by a kind of negatory sanction, building up James's stature by cutting down his peers in 19th century literature. This was patent not the book for Howells — the Springfield Republican condemned it for "irresponsibility."

Reared in the heartland of American patriotism, Howells could not readily reconcile James's vacillation in self-exile — "The poison of Europe was getting into my soul" (1894) — and his ultimate decision to become a naturalized British subject (1915). Howells finally came to understand that James was "a sick man who was less a sufferer in Europe than in America" (LinL, II, 395-396), but even during the difficult days following the change he stubbornly defended his friend. "I am sorry to lose James as an American as well as an Academician; but he had a full right to do what he has done," Howells wrote to Brander Matthews on August 7, 1915, (LinL, II, 352). Ten years earlier he had demonstrated keen sensitivity to James's anomalous position. "Yesterday, H. J. sailed from the land of his adopted nativity. I dreaded for him his coming to these States, and I suspect it has been worse than I feared" (Kittery Point, Maine, July 5, 1905). When James was on the brink of shifting, Howells inquired testily of Perry: "Are you ready to join with James in renouncing Wilson and all his works and swearing fealty to King George? Or don't you believe he's done it, or means to? Not that I should much blame him anyway, though nothing could persuade me to bow
the knee to e’er a crowned head of them all” (York Harbor, Maine, July 24, 1915). Two days later James took his new oath of allegiance. Perry, of course, could comprehend his action; he had spent comparable years in the artistic ambience of England and the Continent and had found it far more to his fashion than America’s gilded age. So he could nod without restraint at Howells’ closing words on the subject: “His own countrymen never treated him decently in any case, and he had no reason to trust them. Never was a great writer so vulgarly hooted at and rejected by his own people. Some time I may blow out about it all” (Savannah, Ga., January 22, 1920). This he did, in his last “Easy Chair,” published in *LinL*, II, 394-397. It was his epitaph to a psychic son and brother.

While Lubbock was in the process of editing James’s letters he asked Perry to write a sketch of the early times in Newport. Before submitting it, Perry let Howells read his first drafts. “I found your pathos for the past at Newport very touching,” Howells wrote back from Kittery Point on June 13, 1918. “It was wonderful being associated there with the James boys, and I wish I could have had such companionship in my time. I had it later with H. J. at Cambridge, of course. I think a good deal of him lately, admiring his advent to the full fame which he was stinted from in his earlier life, almost his whole life; it is such a posthumous renown, with all his tardy generation bowing and genuflecting before his shade.” And on June 25: “Your H. J. notes gave my family here as well as myself great pleasure. I read them, and then read them aloud with increasing gusto, and the wish that there were more. I think you might well have made more.” In print, Perry’s essay takes up a scant three pages (Lubbock, I, 6-9).

ANDREW LANG

Another case of personal abrasion in which Howells became implicated was with Andrew Lang (1844-1912), poet, belles-lettress, classical scholar, critic, bibliographer, anthologist of fairy tales, and folklorist. Lang, unlike Hayne, made universally known his distaste for Howells’ literary judgment. A traditionalist at heart, Lang was incensed by the American’s repudiation of English heritage and his aggrandizement of foreigners.
In the *Critic* for April 1892 Lang ejaculated his scorn: "In the last number of *Harper's Magazine* Mr. W. D. Howells takes leave of that department in which he has so often rebuked us for our many insular infirmities. He keeps up this humor to the last; he girds at writers whom we still believe, still admire, still expect to last as long as literature. Is this to be the end of the game? Are there to be no snaps and scoffs, no more international tennis of flouts and jeers, with Mr. Howells 'smashing' at the net?" (XX, 233). In the accompanying poem of seven cinquains Lang said in part:

And have we heard you, W. D.
For this, the latest time, declare
That Intellectuality,
Save in these Islands of the sea,
Is everywhere?

That all the world, the Muscovites,
The Realists of Sunny Spain,
And every Frenchman who delights
To count the smells and name the sights
Of every drain,

Is greater than clean clumsy Scott,
Than inartistic Thackeray?

This was of course far from the end of the line for Howells, but he discreetly refrained from swatting this gadfly in public. Howells had previously protested to Perry that to create an uproar "It is only necessary to have insinuated that all English novels are not perfection. One of my London friends actually asked me if I didn't hate Thackeray and Dickens because they were English!" (*LinL*, I, 338; March 13, 1883).

In 1895 Lang again buzzed at Howells' forehead: "Mr. Howells, to my mind, has neither the education, the method, the taste, nor the environment of the critic. He is surrounded by the noisy blatant to-day, which will soon be as still and as silent as the age of Elizabeth or of Meneptah. His critical ears are deaf with the noise and his eyes dim with the dust of the present. It was no 'new' discovery of Mr. Howells [that Scott 'is tedious and slipshod,' George Eliot 'almost died away,' Dickens 'crude and artificial,' and Thackeray representing 'only the
Howells seems to have remained unruffled until March 25, 1905, when he wrote to Perry from San Remo: “I met your friend A. L., of Oxford, where his presence for the same honor poisoned the pleasure of my degree. After dinner in All Soul’s, I said to him (being flown with wine and folly), ‘Do you remember me, Mr. L.? ’ ‘Ah, oh! I hope you’ve had a good dinner, Mr. H.’ ” By the sheerest caprice of fate their honorary degrees from Oxford coincided.

In his published memoirs Howells does not reveal when or where he first encountered Lang. Perry, however, appears to have been introduced to him by Henry James, who obversely saw in Lang “a very nice fellow, with a pleasant, graceful mind, and a great facility and industry. He is (I imagine) quite the best, most high-toned, and personally the most gentlemanly of the younger London scribblers” (Harlow, TSP, 299). On a fleeting visit to Scotland in 1910, Howells remarked: “This is the land of Lang, and think of my luck being here three or four days and not meeting him!” (St. Andrews, August 25). Lang was born in Selkirk and educated at St. Andrews University. Howells took one last swipe at him on October 9, 1918: “You seem to think I have the Transcript habit, but I have not seen the praise of A. L.; but if I escape the other calamities I shall not mind it” (Kittery Point, Maine). Toward his general readership Howells maintained unbroken silence on this altercation.

ALFRED DE MUSSET

In Perry’s library at Colby College is an 1867 edition of Musset’s Œuvres, including the play Les Caprices de Marianne, with the date “June 23, 1874” on the flyleaf in Perry’s hand. John T. Morse remembered his “enthusiastic voice” dilating “more than a paltry hundred times” about “that wonderful, that marvelous, that indescribable play . . . certainly the finest play that ever was presented in Paris” (Morse, TSP, 6). Perry had seen it performed there twice in 1867 and again in 1906, after
which he admonished Morse to read it by all means, “It will
give a pleasant taste to your mouth after Ibsen” (Robinson,
SLFTSP, 66-67).

Even in 1923 Perry could think of no other play to mention
in the same breath with Chekhov’s The Cherry Orchard and
The Three Sisters as “the most wonderful things I have seen on
the stage” (Ibid., 210). Despite his commitment to the realis­
tic in literature, Howells spoke up almost as ardently in Sep­
tember 1878: “It is hard to recall a modern play of the same
length that appeals to more varied feelings than this, or one so
full of poetical imagination, so free from the rigid claims of
realism” (North American Review, CXXVII, 299). But the
encroachments of years drastically transfigured his view. On
July 24, 1915, he wrote Perry from York Harbor: “I’m
sending back with thanks the DeMusset plays which H. J. lent
me long ago in our first Sacramento Street days. I don’t know
that The Caprices of Mary Ann much took me, but you know
what a poor beast I am.”

Alfred DeMusset (1810-1857), exemplar and parodist of
the man of feeling, also wrote poems and fiction. In his
Proverbes, witty playlets illustrating truths contained in common
adages, at least one critic espies the germ of Howells’ dramatic
farces.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

Howells reviewed nothing written by Swinburne (1837­
1909); odd, because they were exact contemporaries by birth;
understandable, because that was about all they had in common.
Perry had read Swinburne’s Essays and Studies in December
1875 and upturned “some good criticism” under indiscriminate
heaps of adjectives, “a singular mixture of ripeness and crudity”
(Atlantic Monthly, XXXVI, 756-757); in June 1878 he was
repelled by Swinburne’s “noisy, hilarious, pot-house violence,”
his “faults of style . . . as notorious as those of his literary
manners” (Ibid., XLI, 805-806). Swinburne came to mind
again in October 1918. Perry recalled an anecdote about him
to John T. Morse on the 17th and, presumably, said something
to Howells around the same time. On the 20th Howells ex­
pelled these dicta: “Why did anybody ever think there was
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anything but alliteration in Swinburne? Of course there was idiotic wickedness, and screaming abusiveness” (Kittery Point, Maine). It leaves little to question why Howells passed his books along to other reviewers.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY (& GEORGE ELIOT)

Barely 22, Howells published his first excoriation of “Unworthy Mr. Thackeray!” in the Ohio State Weekly Journal, XLIX [May 17, 1859], 1). Eleven years later Howells had somewhat a change of heart, asserting that “nearly all he did was masterly,” that he “rarely struck the wrong note in character,” and that the “delight in his style . . . atoned for all” (Atlantic Monthly, XXV [February 1870], 247). After a lapse of twelve more years Howells decided that Thackeray’s “confidential attitude” would be inappropriate to the finer art of fiction “of our day” (Century, XXV [November 1882], 28). In My Literary Passions (1895) and Heroines of Fiction (1901) he explains that he was at first misled by Thackeray’s consummate sham and so “gave my heart” to him (MLP, 131). In time he began to see that Thackeray exposed the aristocracy but did not propose to do away with it, that he moralized impertinently (MLP, 130-131, 230), that he was a man of his time — an era of circuitous truth, that he deliberately spoiled the illusions he created, that he put on airs of being above his business, that he treated fiction as “fable-land” not “the very home of truth,” that he clouded his art “by intrusion of his own personality,” that he dawdled over his scene, that he preferred “caricature to character, and sentimentality to sentiment” (HOF, I, 191).

In the late years of his life Howells’ program of re-reading authors familiar in his youth brought him full circle with Thackeray. On August 8, 1916, he sent this intelligence to Perry from York Harbor:

I’ve been reading Thackeray a good deal. His novels are ridiculously bad: things happen as the most childish readers would like them to, and happen, Whack! so as to put no strain on their anxieties. Roundabout Papers good, but talky; Four Georges the best of him; English Humorists a swash of sentiment. Yet he is a man, and would like to have known how to be more of one.
The English, the average, cannot write a novel. Yet God made them, and put good hearts in and good heads on them.

[One cannot be sure that Howells wasn’t being satiric when he observed of The Four Georges, “you feel that a man who could revive the past in that way ought to have written only social history” (Atlantic Monthly, XXV [February 1870], 247).]

In 1917 Howells reverted to Thackeray in three letters to Perry: February 19, “We have read a lot of books and are now (after fifty years for me) deep in Middlemarch. G. E. was a great creature. Also Barry Lyndon, by far Thackeray’s best as I know from twenty other readings of all the others” (Savannah, Ga.); June 19, “In our own gibberish I’m reading The Book of Snobs aloud to Pilla” (York Harbor, Maine); September 10, “We are reading Thackeray with vast delight. Even Philip which I always supposed was so poor. He was a great fellow, T. was, in spite of me” (York Harbor).

[In My Literary Passions (1895) Howells rated Vanity Fair the “poorest” and Pendennis the “greatest” of Thackeray’s books, but he still nominated Barry Lyndon “the most perfect creation of Thackeray’s mind” (131, 132, 136). Back in 1870 he had enounced in “perfect” terms for The Luck of Barry Lyndon (Atlantic Monthly, XXV [February 1870], 247, a verdict he saw no reason to withdraw forty years later in Imaginary interviews (29).

As a callow newspaperman in Ohio Howells would take The Book of Snobs to the office. One day when he had read aloud from it for half an hour or so “the leading editor said frankly, Well, now, he guessed we had had enough of that” (MLP, 193).

In The Evolution of the Snob (Boston, 1886) Perry disagreed with Thackeray that the snob had existed since the time of creation, insisting that he came to life only after democracy had destroyed “the delicious repose of the feudal system.” Perry differed radically with Howells on Thackeray in general and Vanity Fair in particular. Perry cited Balzac as “the greatest writer of the last century” and considered him “a great contemporary” of Thackeray (Harlow, TSP, 195); Vanity Fair he read again and again with undiminishing pleasure.

From the outset Howells held The Adventures of Philip in low opinion, referring to it as “the rinsings . . . of that magical flask out which he poured such wonderful and various liquors” (Atlantic Monthly, XXV [February 1870], 247, but he did savor it more than “the fulness and prime spirit of many a famous tap we could name.”]

George Eliot (1819-1880) Howells initially held at arm’s length, gradually came to prize her among the best of her kind. Eliot’s intellect roused no passion in him as a youngster, “but always the deepest respect.” She “profoundly influenced my
ethics” and imparted a “sense of moral enlargement,” while leaving him painfully aware of her “clumsy exegesis” (MLP, 185, 218, 230). In *Heroines of Fiction* (1901) he devoted three chapters to Eliot’s women, putting her after Jane Austen in English fiction yet of “vastly wider and deeper reach” and “of a far more serious import.” Neither Dickens nor Thackeray nor Reade nor Trollope could match her in the things which give a novelist the highest claim to the reader’s interest.” He then proceeded to pay her the compliment supreme: “Other huge novels have been of as great scope and greater dramatic effects; but *Middlemarch* alone seems to me akin in spiritual power to *War and Peace*” (I, 44, 77). In Harper’s the following year he proclaimed her “one of the greatest moralists who ever lived” (CV [November 1902], 966). Similarly, *Middlemarch* left no room for doubt in Perry’s estimation. His accustomed techniques struck him as too insipid to deal with the excellence facing him. With feelings of “profound admiration, almost of reverence” for so comprehensive a treatment of “the multifariousness of life,” he signalized *Middlemarch* as “one of the most remarkable books of one of the greatest living writers” (North American Review, CXVI [April 1873], 432, 440).

**EDITH WHARTON**

Edith Wharton (1862-1937) always regretted that she and Howells met so seldom owing to the restrictions of Mrs. Howells’ health, “my timidity and his social aloofness.” Although he remained an “irreducible recluse,” she found him “whenever we met . . . full of a quiet friendliness” (*A Backward Glance* [New York, 1934], 146-147). From the first Howells detected too strong a strain of James in Mrs. Wharton’s work, which was deplorable inasmuch as he saw in her “a genuine poet” who “At her best . . . writes as wholly upon her own authority as any one can after so many thousand years of writing” (Harper’s, CIII [October 1901], 823-824). In a letter to Charles Eliot Norton he echoed his hope that she use “her own voice solely,” and told of eschewing *The Valley of Decision* because he dreaded “to find Stendhal in it as I find James in her stories” (Brooks, *Howells*, 264).
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Howells mentioned Mrs. Wharton twice to Perry: On July 19, 1918, from Kittery Point: “Have you seen Francis Hackett’s *Horizons* (why?) which are severe rather than good, but unco kind to W. D. H. and not so kind to Mrs. Wharton. Altogether a lively book.” And on July 27, from Intervale, N. H.: “Mrs. W. did one thing wonderfully well: the story of some one’s dull adoptive daughter, who is adored and married by a young man as dull as she. Bores are often so; but Mrs. W. found not this case. After much relucence of H. J. from her pen this jewel shines afar.”

[Francis Hackett’s *Horizons: A Book of Criticism* (New York, 1918) is a collection of his essays on novels, poetry, the theater, “varia,” and the War, written week by week either for the Chicago *Evening Post*, 1908-1911, or the *New Republic*, 1914-1918. The chapter “William Dean Howells” (21-30) is based on Hackett’s *New Republic* review of Alexander Harvey’s book on Howells (see above). Hackett stings it for being “loosely oracular and discursive” and for failing to treat Howells as “a positive living force.” Hackett concludes: “The task of interpreting Mr. Howells still awaits American criticism. So faithful and disinterested an artist as himself has stored up treasures of national consciousness which will gain in value as time goes on.” In “Mrs. Wharton’s Art” (31-36) and “Mrs. Wharton’s Limitations” (37-42), Hackett impeaches her for “slumming in souls.” Her frigid eye, astringent mood, sniffing attitude, forced note, and mechanical touches add up to failure of sympathy and condescension toward those “who live on, and off, the fringe” of her restricted class.]

The “one thing” Mrs. Wharton did “wonderfully well” is “The Mission of Jane,” first published in *Harper’s*, CVI (December 1902), 63-74; collected in *The Descent of Man and Other Stories* (New York, 1904). Howells valued it highly enough to include it in his 1920 anthology, *The Great Modern American Stories*, and to say of it there: “It is truly an unsurpassed piece of art.” Perry was entirely at one with Howells, admiring her in short stories, finding the novels unreadable because they comprised “no philosophy of life” (Harlow, TSP, 195). In *A Backward Glance* Mrs. Wharton speaks of Henry James’s “unusual social gifts” and of his sharing her delights. Perry, however, took the dimmer view that she kept James “in her clutch, very unwillingly relaxing her hold . . . a most unfascinating spectacle” (Harlow, TSP, 188). Whatever her demerits, it was she and Edmund Gosse who put Howells up to recommending James for the Nobel Prize.
February of 1918 was especially disagreeable and Howells had gone from Georgia to Florida in quest of warmer weather. There he met Francis Duneka, of Harper & Brothers, who gave him a copy of Harry Leon Wilson's *Ruggles of Red Gap*. The book made an immediate hit with Howells. He wrote Duneka that it was "one of the best studies of our life I have read for many a day," and "I think I have got an Easy Chair topic out of it" (*LinL*, II, 378). In the June issue of *Harper's* (CXXXVII, 138-141) he lavished all his space on a review of the "complex humor and uncommon art" of *Ruggles* and some ruminations on the nature of American democracy which it provoked. "The work," he said, "is almost quite of a new kind ... upon the whole, a fresh contribution to the stock of American humor." Not long thereafter Perry must have made an inquiry about Wilson to Howells, who answered with mock asperity:

If you were that constant reader of The Easy Chair which you have somehow abused my fancy to the belief in you would have known months ago all about *Ruggles of Red Gap* if not its author. But I forgive your ignorance in this case to your knowledge in all others. Who publishes the Redgapper's other books, anyhow? . . . No doubt you're right about the best culture for our Redgapper, but he won't get it. Nobody does (Kittery Point, Maine, August 15, 1918).

Harry Leon Wilson (1867-1939) was an editor of the American *Puck* for seven years before turning his hand to fiction. Up to 1918 his books had been published by the Boston firm of Lothrop and in New York by D. Appleton and Doubleday, Page. *Ruggles of Red Gap* (1915) and its sequel *Somewhere in Red Gap* (1916) were products of the latter company, not Harper. Besides its being "really amusing," in the first of these Perry also perceived a promise of achievement free from selfconscious nationalistic purpose (*Harlow*, *TSP*, 217). What Perry thought of Wilson's other books is not here revealed, but Howells was distinctly let down: "I sent for all the other Red Gap books, but at best they are only cosi cosí. The author is staying with Booth Tarkington at Kennebunkport, and expects to look me up, I believe" (Kittery Point, Maine, September 14, 1918).
The homes of Howells and Tarkington on the Maine coast were some twenty-five miles apart. Wilson had collaborated with Tarkington on a number of plays which had been produced and published, and they were currently working on *The Gibson Upright*, issued the following year.

With the persistence of his convictions, Howells reported on the three-year-old *Somewhere in Red Gap* in *Harper's*, CXXXVIII (January 1919), 278. In the course of an imaginary interview, he remarked: “I’ve just been reading his sketches, *Somewhere in Red Gap*, and they’ve made me ten or twenty years younger . . . . But I suppose the author will turn serious or psychological, and begin reminding me that we are in the midst of a world war.” Howells was not to live to read them, but Wilson continued to devise farces and semicomic social fiction for twenty more years.

VII

**“BOOKS, AND MY FOOD, AND SUMMER RAIN”**

As he approached the last lustrum of his life Howells, insatiable reader since boyhood, accelerated even his own stupendous pace, as though he began to hear clearly the creaking of wheels on Time’s winged chariot. Much of his reading was reminiscence, another run around the track before his wind gave out; some was in books new-minted, fodder for his “Easy Chair”; almost all was in company with his daughter, aloud, and thus doubly pleasurable. To Perry he let fly these snippets off the top of his mind.

*May 8, 1914 (York Harbor, Maine):* “We have read the *Germania* and the *Agricola* of Tacitus — a pretty good writer.” From the same place on *June 23*: “We read together and separately a good many books, as Tacitus, his *Annals*, Björnson’s plays, R. Browning’s *Ring and the Book*, Gilbert’s opera texts, Tennyson’s poems, Ade’s sketches, Cellini’s autobiog., Stephenson’s *Travels* (4 vols.), etc. Also, Herrick’s capital new novel, *Clark’s Field*.” And again on *September 23*: “The summer has been beautiful, and I have read aloud to Pilla — Tacitus, Livy, Herodotus, some Plutarch, and the *Saga of Burnt Njal* — a
prodigious book. . . . I have read many novels, and written of them for the N. A. R.”

Of the classic historians Howells had nothing to say in public, except an introduction for The Children’s Plutarch, edited by F. J. Gould (New York, 1910). He received an inscribed copy of Perry’s A History of Greek Literature (see above) but we do not have Howells’ acknowledgement of that volume.

Howells’ first pronouncement on Björnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910), Norwegian poet, dramatist, and novelist, was his discovery of simplicity, reticence, and self-control in three of Bjørnson’s pastoral romances (Atlantic Monthly, XXVI [November 1870], 638). They met in the Cambridge home of Mrs. Ole Bull, widow of the Norwegian violinst, in the winter of 1880, and again on a street in Rome twenty-eight years later. Howells elated that Bjørnson knew him at once and came to him with both hands out (LinL, II, 252-253). Howells reviewed his books favorably, discerning a first period of “unmoralized idyls of peasant life” and a second period of sterner but “spiritual” realism (Harper’s, LXXVIII [February 1889], 491), a trend some critics have seen duplicated in Howells’ own career. He called Bjørnson “a great genius” (LinL, I, 289), compared him in some respects with Tolstoi—“that other giant of the North”—and Turgenev, and declared that Bjørnson “has never, as some authors have, dwindled in my sense” (MLP, 226).

Robert Browning (1812-1889) confused Howells with his “crabbed interrupted interruptions, parentheses, interjections, backings and fillings, crisscrossings, gaaps, hiccoughs,” and his “mosaic turmoil of a thousand fragments” (Harper’s, LXXX [April 1890], 807). Once Howells was “about to say that Mr. Browning goes from bad to worse, but we remember how much harder to read some parts of The Ring and the Book were than The Inn Album” (Atlantic Monthly, XXXVII [March 1876], 372). In 1895 he thought he might class The Ring and the Book among his literary passions “though I have never been otherwise a devotee of Browning” (MLP 236), and in 1914 he wrote to Annie Fields that he was reading it over “after forty or fifty years—a great poem” (LinL, II, 336). Perry was less erratic in his devotion: “One will have to search long for a writer like him,” he said to John T. Morse (TSP, 123).

Van Wyck Brooks (251) quotes Howells’ delight in the “blithe and beautiful inventions” of William S. Gilbert (1836-1911). In a destructive review of American “drama, or non-drama” (Harper’s, LXXIII [July 1886], 315), Howells noted en passant “Mr. Gilbert’s exquisitely woven inventions and ironies” and remarked how they found their way into Howells’ A Sea-Change, or Love’s Stowaway: A Lyricated Farce in Two Acts and an Epilog (1888), generally ascribed to the influence of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Howells lamented the prolixity and strained passion of The Lover’s Tale by Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) in Atlantic Monthly, XLIV (August 1879), 268-269. But by the time he came to write My Literary Passions (1895), in which he assigns a whole chapter to Tennyson, he could summon up no lasting flaw. “I read this now dead-and-gone immortal with an ecstasy unspeakable; I raved of him by day, and dreamed of him by night”; “I have never ceased to adore Tennyson, though the rapture of the new convert could not last”; “There has been no year of those many when I have not read him and loved him with something of the early fire if not all the early conflagration” (MLP, 154, 159, 160). Tennyson’s lack of influence on the younger poets continually troubled Howells, not incomprehensible in view that his earliest poems display derivations
from this early idol. Perry shared none of Howells' exaltation toward Tennyson, in whose work he saw art pushed into "prettiness." "His facile elegance, the deliciousness of his single lines, please the ear, but there are those who fail to find beneath this lusciousness the solid strength which makes poetry" (Atlantic Monthly, XXXVI [October 1875], 410).

Howells veered measurably in his estimate of George Ade (1866-1944). In 1899 he wrote to Mrs. Howells, "Ade is a nice young fellow, regular, smooth shaven face, calm and shrewd"; and just over six years later described him to Perry as "socially inexorable" at the Mark Twain 70th-birthday dinner in Delmonico's (LinL, II, 110, 215). Personality aside, Ade's acerbic morality appealed to Howells and survived unscathed in his regard. "He is without any sort of literary pose," Howells said in North American Review, CLXXVI (May 1903), 743; credited him with "brilliant divinations of feminine foible" in Heroines of Fiction, II, 246; was so taken by Pink Marsh that he sent a copy, with a eulogy, to Twain in 1908 (MT-HL, II, 832); climbed out on a limb in Harper's, February 1917: "There are three or four little books of Mr. Ade's which we name [Artie, Pink Marsh, Doc' Horne, In Babel ... with the feeling that they cannot be surpassed by any like group in any modern language" (CXXXIV, 443); and as a capping laurel included Ade's "Effie Whittlesy" in The Great Modern American Stories (1920), with the comment that "In this collection there is nothing humaner or more humane than Mr. George Ade's quite perfect study of real life, 'Effie Whittlesy.' It is a contribution to American fiction of a value far beyond most American novels."

Benvenuto Cellini did not figure in any of Howells' published commentaries.

The four volumes by John Lloyd Stephens (1805-1852) were Incidents Of Travel in Egypt, Arabia, Petraea, and the Holy Land, 2v., and Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan, 2v., both titles published in numerous editions by Harper & Brothers.

In previous years (LinL, II, 229-230, 262) Howells had corresponded with Robert Herrick (1868-1938), who taught English at the University of Chicago for three decades and turned out some twenty volumes of fiction concerned with tensions between personal ideals and social claims. In a general overview of his novels Howells deemed none of them "unimportant" (North American Review, CLXXXIX [June 1909], 812-820). In Clark's Field, a socio-ethical tract, Herrick examines the ills of industrial urbanism with reforming zeal, and Howells rightfully takes him to task for neglecting the human angle — characterization — in order to stress the economic condition (Ibid., CC [December 1914], 915-918).

The Saga of Burnt Njal is one of Iceland’s most intense national narratives, recorded in epic prose by an unknown author circa 1280. Charged with hatred, nymphomania, murder, combat, and arson, it also has intervals of honor and heroism — the basic battle between good and evil.


June 2, 1915 (York Harbor, Maine): "Your visit was for me a real success, and today came B. Tarkington's Flirt. I'm
rather afraid to read it." On the evidence in other Howells letters and in his one review of a novel by Booth Tarkington (1869-1946), the reason for Howells' present apprehension seems obscure, except perhaps that he had called the conception of Bibbs in *The Turmoil* "a weakness" (*LinL*, II, 389) and was tremulous of turning up another. Otherwise, his comments on Tarkington had been and were to be uniformly laudatory. In *Harper's* CXXX (April 1915), 798, he congratulated Tarkington for sloughing off his "sins of romanticism in the past" and moving forward to "very powerful fiction" in *The Turmoil*, recently serialized in the magazine. To Tarkington's sister he spoke of "your unrivalled brother in his generation," and to Tarkington himself, "I thought you could not do another book as great as *The Turmoil*, but I believe your Magnificent Ambersons is even greater in certain ways" (*LinL*, II, 363, 388).

[In September 1914 Howells invited Tarkington to come to York Harbor, and bring Harry Leon Wilson, in the hope that they might once again meet "my old friend Perry" (*LinL*, II, 389). Tarkington was one of half a dozen colleagues who penned felicitations to Howells at 80 in the *New York Sun* on February 25, 1917. He also wrote "Mr. Howells" for *Harper's*, CXLI (August 1920), 346-350, wherein he acknowledged for all his contemporaries the "strong and gentle teaching" which had led them "out of a wilderness of raw and fantastic shapes where many of us dallied, making childish figures." In 1937 he revised and amplified this text for an introduction to the Riverside edition of *The Rise of Silas Lapham*.]

November 30, 1917 (New York City): "How Tourgineff must roar in Elysium with rage when he thinks of his fool fellow-Russians." When Howells wrote this the provisional government formed after the March revolution had been overthrown by Lenin's Bolsheviks and a condition of riot and confusion prevailed. Howells probably had in mind Turgenev's aversion for social strife, developed after his brief arrest for writing an article in support of Gogol. Thereafter Turgenev kept himself clear of such involvements. In a deathbed letter he pleaded with Tolstoi to "Come back, my friend, to literary labours, back from the lure of social ideals."

[Howells revered Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) as "The man who has set the standard of the novel of the future" (*LinL*, I, 232). More personally, he admitted that after reading Turgenev "Life... became more serious, more awful, and with mystical responsibilities I had not known before" (*MLP*, 231). It was Perry, however, who first translated and reviewed Turgenev in America, introduced him to Howells and induced Henry James to write a thirty-page essay on
the Russian's works in the April 1874 *North American Review*. In that year Perry received Turgenev's "warmest thanks for the very flattering article you wrote on my novels" (Robinson, SFLTSP, 254). Before he could read Russian, which he learned in his seventies, Perry had translated Turgenev from French versions, unsatisfactory he knew, but at least available to readers of English. Howells freely divulged his obligation. Perry, he said, "is a man of the greatest culture, was almost the first American to read Turgenieff" (Joyce Kilmer, editor, *Literature in the Making* [New York, 1917], 78).

After reading three of Howells' books, Turgenev told him: "Your literary physiognomy is a most sympathetic one; it is natural, simple and clear — and in the same time it is full of unobtrusive poetry and fine humour" (Brooks, *Howells*, 102).

*July 19, 1918 (Kittery Point, Maine)*: "I have been reading a long life of Mrs. P. B. Shelley, the woeful woman who wrote *Frankenstein* and lengthier and drearier and duller letters than I have not often suffered through.” He had characterized this biography — Mrs. Julian Marshall, *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (London, 1889), 2 vols. — as "ridiculous" to his daughter five days earlier (LinL, II, 382).

[In reviewing a similar volume — *Mary Wollstonecraft. Letters to Imlay*. With Prefatory Memoir by J. Kegan Paul (London, 1879) — Howells had felt no less depressed. He called her letters "a tragic monologue . . . . They are the letters of a wife though she was not Imlay's wife" (Atlantic Monthly, XLIV, [July 1879], 124). Of her other abilities Howells was able to muster a "superlative," precisely the adjective he applied to Frankenstein as an example of the "psychological type" in English romantic fiction (HOF, I, 114).

*September 14, 1918 (Kittery Point, Maine)*: “I am reading a great many idle books, but now and then a good one, such as *Stop Boone* — a R. R. station and town in the Far West, which is finding itself out in the human terms. I do not remember any study of a raw but harmless youth better than this,” Howells somehow transposed the title *Boone Stop* (New York, 1918) by Homer Croy (1883-1965), which he noticed in *Harper's*, CXXXVIII (January 1919), 279, "His boy makes me think of that great Norwegian Björnson's *Happy Boy*; he has the same sense of a boy's sense of girlhood . . . . That book lasted me like a whole series, and it lasts me yet. I wish the author of it would write more; I believe I could trust him.”

[Croy, who started as a humorist, turned realist in *West of the Water Tower* (1923), was compared rather headily to Hardy and Conrad. He reverted to light fiction and popular biographies, more than twenty books in the next thirty-five years, largely unworthy of the trust Howells had reposed in his future.]

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Not long afterward this considerable chronicle of literary and substantive affinity came to an end. Two men whose lives ran parallel for over half a century, dissatisfied with what they found on the literary scene, each in his way, through public or private persuasion, did much to alter its configurations. When Howells died in 1920, literature authenticated by experience had won the field and was moving into new areas of contention, as he would have wanted. For his part, Perry, always the less combative, withdrew, publishing only one succinct paper in the eight years that remained to him. He attended Howells' funeral in New York, and so fundamental was his sense of loss that he would not speak of it nor did he mention it in his letters.