September 1959

Jewett's Cousins Charles and Charlie

Richard Cary

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq

Recommended Citation
Colby Library Quarterly, series 5, no.3, September 1959, p.48-58
friends (like old ones!) use words without thinking exactly what they
do mean. I am for a class in definitions and derivations!—then we
might not use criticize as if it could only mean to find faults.
But I must not write longer. I thank you again for a true
pleasure, and beg you to believe me

yours sincerely
S. O. Jewett

Miss Jewett’s plea “for a class in definitions and derivations”
may well have caused Thurber to alter some of his subsequent
lesson plans. The letters and the red-penciled advice of the
noted author made his little experiment a memorable experience
for all concerned.

Miss Jewett’s physician had advised her to curtail her extensive and
burdensome correspondence.

JEWETT’S COUSINS CHARLES AND CHARLIE

By Richard Cary

In the Spring of the year 1638, at the substantial age of 53,
Edward Gilman of Hingham, England, set sail on the ship
Diligent with a harried company of 133 religious zealots for the
far but beckoning shores of America. On board were his wife,
three sons, two daughters and three servants. After a racking
voyage of fourteen weeks which claimed the lives of a core of
the pilgrims, they disembarked in Boston and the Gilmans
proceeded to the slight plantation of Hingham. Here, Edward
the Emigrant (as he came to be called by his descendants) es­
established the Gilman dynasty which was to pervade the eco­
nomic, civic and military life of half a dozen pioneer colonies.
By 1652 he had shifted to Exeter, New Hampshire, and had
acquired many lucrative grants and properties.

This Exeter branch of the family is of prevailing interest to
us in respect to Sarah Orne Jewett. It was prosperous and pro­
lific, redundant with judges, governors and tycoons, prominent
in every phase of community activity, especially during the
period when Exeter was capital of the state. Throughout the
Revolutionary ado, no committee of public safety or corps of
volunteers was without a Gilman on its roster. Bulging with
pelf and public spirit, the New Hampshire Gilmans lived pithily and graciously in the early epochs of American efflorescence. With the advent of the 19th century, a syndrome of migration and relaxation made its appearance. Exeter had lost its political importance, had evolved into a somewhat somnolent academy town, renowned for provincial charm and gigantesque elms. Those Gilmans who did not disperse to Maine, Vermont, New York, Ohio, Connecticut or Canada, settled back in Exeter, content for the most part “to live on their acres and be useful citizens.” Among the latter-day constituents who persevered in the dynamic tradition of the colonial Gilmans was Nathaniel, merchant, manufacturer, farmer, soldier and man of affairs, who followed the mercantile trade in Philadelphia briefly after his marriage but returned to spin out the remainder of his career in Exeter. It was his sister Abigail who linked the Gilmans directly to the Jewetts. Abigail married Dr. William Perry of Exeter; their first child, Caroline Frances, married her father’s erstwhile assistant Dr. Theodore H. Jewett of South Berwick, Maine; their second daughter they named Sarah Orne.

In view of Miss Jewett’s cognate connection with this notable and numerous clan, it is remarkable how little has been written of her association with its contemporaneous members. Francis O. Matthiessen, author of the only biography (Boston, 1929), limits himself to two fugitive phrases. Annie Adams Fields, editor of the basic Letters (Boston, 1911), offers no notice of their existence. Frances P. Dudley’s excellent reminiscence, The Mid-Century in Exeter (Exeter, 1943), while citing the potency of the Gilmans in the community, is assertedly engrossed with the Perry line. The presence in Bowdoin College of sixteen letters by Miss Jewett to her Brunswick cousins, however, rescues this relationship from the limbo toward which it was headed and permits partial recreation of yet another facet of Miss Jewett’s amiable mode de vie. Eleven of the letters are addressed to the distaff side and will be subject of a subsequent essay. Five were written to father and son Gilman, both baptized Charles, and with these we are here concerned.

1 The birth and death records of all relevant persons are in the genealogical chart on page 50.

2 Made available through the courtesy of Mr. Kenneth J. Boyer, Librarian.
THE BRUNSWICK GILMANS

(NATHANIEL GILMAN — m. — ELIZABETH GARDINER)

Nov. 13, 1793
Oct. 27, 1838

CHARLES JERVIS GILMAN — m. — ALICE McKEEN DUNLAP

Feb. 26, 1824
Feb. 5, 1901

Aug. 1, 1827
Sep. 15, 1905

DAVID DUNLAP GILMAN

July 26, 1854
Dec. 17, 1914

ELIZABETH JERVIS GILMAN

July 6, 1856
Dec. 18, 1939

CHARLES ASHBURTON GILMAN

Apr. 18, 1859
Aug. 5, 1938

MARY GARDINER GILMAN

July 11, 1865
Oct. 7, 1940

Jewett-Gilman Connection:

Abigail Gilman (Dec. 10, 1789-Feb. 11, 1860), sister of Nathaniel Gilman, married Dr. William Perry (Dec. 20, 1788-Jan. 11, 1887) of Exeter, New Hampshire. Their first child was Caroline Frances Perry (Dec. 11, 1820-Oct. 21, 1891), who married Dr. Theodore H. Jewett (Mar. 24, 1815-Sep. 20, 1878) of South Berwick, Maine. Sarah Orne Jewett (Sep. 3, 1849-June 24, 1909) was the second of their three daughters.
Colby Library Quarterly

Miss Jewett’s disconcerting habit of fragmentary dating leaves the matter open to further proof (for the letter may well have been written to son Charles Ashburton around 1903-1904), but there are reasons to believe that the following letter was dispatched to the Honorable Charles Jervis Gilman, paterfamilias of the Brunswick enclave, sometime in the 1890s. Its salutation is distinguished from the other four by its formal tone; its context, though sportive in a phrase or two, sticks to business and lacks the prattling quality of those directed to “Dear Charlie;” and its unqualified reference to “Cousin Alice” instead of to “your mother,” persuade one to the opinion that she was addressing a relative twenty-five years her senior, not a confidant a decade younger. 3 In either instance, conclusions as to character are nonetheless valid.

148 Charles Street
Boston 6 March

Dear Cousin Charles

Will you please to have a case or good sized jug of water sent to Mrs. Joseph S. Cabot 4
34 Beacon St.

Boston

as soon as possible, marked from the Paradise Spring—perhaps the bottles would be best as they are marked. I found my friend quite ready to try it as she had not been quite satisfied with her Poland Water of late! I will give her my circular next time I see her if you will just send the water. I have told her how much I liked it and that the spring is on my cousins’ land so that I know all about it, but I have not made any personal matter of the business because she likes to feel free, and not to disappoint her friends if she decides against a thing. I have known her to give up having pictures and things sent because of that reason and she was afraid she shouldn’t like them—so I have been dreadfully impersonal about the Paradise Spring Company, only praising the water with a loud voice! If you aren’t quite ready to speak of the agency perhaps if she likes it you could send the water right up from Brunswick only sending her the circular when you are ready to have her order it in town. She would use a good deal and I hope influence some

3 Upon the death of Charles Jervis, Miss Jewett wrote a note of condolence to Mrs. Gilman, referring to him as “Cousin Charles,” and to Charles Ashburton as “Charlie.” She used similar nomenclature in several letters before and after this.

4 Susan Burley Cabot (1822-1907) was the widow of a former mayor of Salem, 1845-48. Though considerably older than Miss Jewett, she was one of her most spirited companions. See the Fields and Cary editions of Jewett letters.
others. Be sure I shall do all I can. And forgive me for writing in such haste.

Yours affectionately

S. O. Jewett

Love to Cousin Alice

Charles Jervis was born in Exeter and became early accustomed to the assured, affluent ways of a family living on the amassed capital of the past. Removed from any incentive to competition, his six brothers and sisters passed their time in travel and amenities, only one entering a profession and none marrying. To this atmosphere of genteel erosion, Cousin Charles reacted with something like vigor. He read for the law and was admitted to practice in Rockingham County, New Hampshire. He later made two attempts to secure the M.D. degree but both were abortive. In 1850 he married Alice M. Dunlap, granddaughter of Bowdoin’s first president, Joseph McKeen, and an heiress. Though a lawyer of prominence now in Exeter, he moved into the elaborate mansion his wife had inherited and set up lavish housekeeping in Brunswick. He slid without friction into the role of squire, listing his occupation as “agriculturalist,” raising prime crops, cattle and poultry.5 Micawberish in regard to money, he gradually expended his own assets then started on his wife’s, with the inevitable result of progressively depleting income. But the style of operation and of entertainment remained conspicuously grand.

Another aspect of his outreaching personality kept him constantly in the public eye. Devoted to “enterprises having the development of his adopted state in view,” he continued in the vein which had led him to office in the 1851 New Hampshire legislature. In 1854 he represented Brunswick in the state legislature, and in 1856 was elected to the 35th U. S. Congress, declining renomination at the expiration of his term. For years he was a member of the Whig State Committee of Maine, and in 1860 a delegate to the first national Republican Convention in Chicago which nominated Abraham Lincoln for President. He

5 He took high pride in excelling at local fairs. Miss Jewett’s eagerness to read about “the premiums” (see her letter of October 16, 1877, below) was to be thoroughly rewarded. At the annual Sagadahoc County Fair, held the week previous, Charles Jervis exhibited in most of the major classes, winning two first prizes in the cow and heifer contests, a first and second prize for full-blooded sheep, and a second prize in poultry for his Plymouth Rock (Brunswick Telegraph, October 19, 1877).
had an imposing platform manner and spoke willingly on holiday occasions and at the frequent fairs.

Paradise Spring may be reckoned one among Charles Jervis’ dreams of restored glory in the dwindling times of his later years. The spring ran through a tract originally granted the Dunlap family in a Land Deed bearing the seal of George III of England. Situated on the road to Bath about a mile from Brunswick, and flanked by the Androscoggin River, it rose in an alcove of dense ferns and evergreens surrounded on three sides by steep banks and approached by a winding path. A romantic haven by any criterion, it was long the favored tryst of young lovers, the mystic Chimborazo of boy explorers, and the locus of uncounted student shenanigans. To this sylvan isle, Hawthorne, Longfellow, and many a lesser prodigy came for refreshment and meditation. And in the crowded annals of tributary verse, this was “one of the few springs outside ancient Greece ever specifically celebrated in a Phi Beta Kappa poem.”

But these were not the thoughts uppermost in Gilman’s mind when he contemplated Paradise Spring. He was aware that it drained more than three thousand acres, that it had a larger flow of water than any other spring in the vicinity, and that it filtered through some fifty feet of clear fine sand before it emerged at the outlet. And he savored the knowledge that it had been analyzed by college chemists and proclaimed the purest water they had ever found. If he should bottle and market the water he could realize a fortune. There was no public water system in Brunswick; he could start there, fanning out afterward. Plausible on the face of it, the plan was put into effect time and again, but always without profit. Throbbing with energy and ingenuity, Charles Jervis was wanting in the kind of commercial acumen and stability that could have made the venture a practical success. Besides, he tilted against some massive dragons. For one, the townspeople affected a cavalier attitude toward the rights of domain. “Sometimes wells ran dry, or became contaminated;” wrote William A. Wheeler in *Brunswick Yesterdays,* “then, with a wagon-load of jugs and bottles, we’d go to Paradise for a supply.” And there was,

---

6 Edward C. Kirkland, *Brunswick’s Golden Age,* (Lewiston, Me., 1941), 23.

7 Gorham, Me., 1944; 13.
to boot, that frightfully popular Poland Spring Water which had
gained so strong a grip on the loyalty of habitual users. (Iron-
ically, Miss Jewett was one of these, visiting the resort period-
ically in quest of its vaunted therapy.)

Charles tried and Charles failed. This might almost be
adopted as a motto of his life. That he tried is evidence of the
long-lived assiduity of his rugged forebears; that he failed is a
reflection of the later patrician drift which undermined the
gritty foundation. Hard enough to enter the lists, he was too
soft to survive the jousting. A country-gentleman by upbring-
ing, he could not master the strategies of urban business. To
Sarah Orne Jewett he must have appeared a symbol of the
vanishing vitality of New England which she recurrently
epitomized in shipless wharves and garrulous captains. In the
truculently changing world of the departing century, she must
often have felt a tug at the heart, sitting amid the doomed
elegance of a deteriorating mansion, watching the last ineffect-
tual spurts of a desperate aristocracy. The pathos of the situa-
tion must have struck her: this cousin who had been of the
first water now hopelessly engaged in peddling water.

The tragedy of diminution was accelerated in the offspring
of Charles Jervis. The only one of seven children to marry, he
bore four children, of which only one was to marry and to bear
no children. To Charles Ashburton Gilman, his namesake,
Miss Jewett wrote letters variously saluting him as “My dear
Charlie,” “Dear Charlie,” and “My dear Charley.” Ranging
from May 9, 1877 to May 14, 1878, they teem
with news,
names, breathless chatter and pious counsel. Miss Jewett was
unabashedly fond of Charlie, treating him by turn as a treas-
ured relative, as an intimate ally, and as a small, bright boy.
The letter of May 9, 1877, for example, speaks of her excur-
sion to the Portsmouth home of her friend Georgina Hallibur-
ton, of their picnic at Newcastle in uncertain weather, of din-
nner before a big fireplace in Mr. Haven’s house, and a walk
along the rocks and beach. Thereafter she hopes he had a
good time in Boston, tells of finishing a survey of Sunday-
school books, passes along greetings of three mutual friends,
regrets that “I have been busy and there was not very much
news,” signs off “sincerely & affly—Sarah.” (After going at an

\* See genealogical chart, page 50.
even breezier pace in her note of May 14, 1878, she naively effuses: "I have so much to tell about and I am not nearly talked out yet either.")

Of the four letters at hand, however, this is the most provocative and typical:

South Berwick
16 October 1877

Dear Charlie

I have been meaning to write to you ever since I came home but I have not found time. I went to Boston the second morning after I left Brunswick and bought the chestnut horse which I like very much. Mary says she likes it better than the others she saw, and so far, every thing seems right about it. I don't know that I ever saw a prettier creature—she's a thoroughbred and it was a great piece of good-luck that Mr. Chamberlain happened to get her. I found out all about her, and who had owned her &c. She knows me already and follows me all round after apples and sugar. I just wish you were here and could go out to see her for yourself. I think I shall enjoy her ever so much.

I did have such a good time in Boston. I went to see Mr. Osgood, and did some other errands and then went up to the Gordons, where I found that Ellen Mason and several other friends of mine were in town from Newport and were all at Ellen's. You can guess that I whisked in and that I was persuaded to send a telegram home and to stay overnight. I stayed with Grace but and we had a jolly time. I wish you had been with us! We went to see Heller the magician and you never saw such things as he did! I hurried home the next day at noon for I thought that

9 Mary Rice Jewett, Sarah's elder sister.
10 Miss Jewett's enthusiasm for horseflesh had a long history, beginning with her childhood admiration for the horses that drew her father's buggy in his rounds of backwoods and seacoast patients. As soon as she was old enough she instituted regular afternoon drives, leading to association with a lengthy series of spanking equines. She even spoke of driving from South Berwick to Boston, but there is no record that she ever consummated this intention. And it is somehow portentous that her death was brought about indirectly by a beloved horse who unseated her in a moment of clumsiness or panic.

A week before (October 10, 1877) she had written to Charlie's mother: "As for the horse... I am sorry to say he is not here yet so I have to wait another day... I wish Charlie was here for I owe him some splendid drives and I shouldn't mind paying up at all." Seven months later (May 14, 1878) she reported to Charlie: "My horse goes splendidly and I have had some splendid long rides after I finish writing in the afternoon."

11 James Ripley Osgood, the Boston publisher who brought out her first book, *Deephaven*, that year.
12 Miss Jewett was the frequent guest of Mrs. Katherine Parker Gordon and her daughter Grace of Walnut Street in Boston, and of the sisters Ellen and Ida Mason of Beacon Hill and Newport.
Miss Preston was coming but I found she was obliged to put it off until a week or so later, and that neither Mrs. Ellis nor Mrs. Furber could come so soon as we had planned, and that even the dressmaker was belated! So we are alone this week after all, but I find a good deal to do.

Yesterday I went to York with John to get the old chair I told you about, and I had a very nice time. We ‘took’ our dinner and went over on Cape Neddick exploring the pastures and in one place we drove over a stone wall! We had General in the little open buggy, and the wall had fallen down considerably just there! I should like to take you where we went, some day. It was not quite so wild as Orr’s Island but it was wild enough. York is such a nice old place—I mean to go down again for the day, before cold weather. I hope you will ‘happen along’ soon.

It was too bad there was so much rainy weather in ‘fair time’ but I hope it didn’t hinder all the pleasure and that you had no end of fun. I thought of you ever so much while I was in Boston. I long to see the Telegraph to hear about the premiums.

I did have such a nice time in Brunswick. I remember it every day, and especially Orr’s Island—and you will not be surprised to hear that I have been reading “the Pearl” over again to refresh my memory.

By the way Charlie did you ever read a book called “Tom Brown at Rugby”? It is one of the books I like best, and I think you would. Perhaps you won’t like the first chapter very well, but you get “Tom” started at school, and see if you don’t read all the rest! I don’t know a jollier or a better book. I wish I could spend this afternoon at your house. Do give my love to all the family. I suppose Cousin Alice got my letter but I want to say again what a good time I had and how kind you all were. Now write to me as soon as you can and remember you are coming to see us.

Yours lovingly
Sarah.
Colby Library Quarterly 57

I just had a letter from Mrs. Claflin\textsuperscript{18} asking me to make her a visit with Miss Phelps the authoress.\textsuperscript{19} Wouldn't it be nice? but I can't very well accept, and my friends want me again to come down to Newport, which would also be very great fun if I could leave home.

I send these patterns of a dress I got, to your mother—\textit{not} to you!

The closing kittenish remark fully demonstrates the density of affection people could feel for Charlie. There was nothing grainy in his character: Charles Ashburton was a lovable youth and he lost none of this attribute as a man. Secure under the wing of his baronial father, he was not ambitious for the best education, neither did he seek a profession nor go away to make money in the new industries. His gregarious nature inclined him toward politics. As ardently Republican as Charles Jervis, he was an attending member of the Town Committee, eventually its chairman; served on the County Committee, and carried the electoral vote for two such disparate presidential candidates as Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Landon. From among his vast acquaintance with nationally known Republicans he was instrumental in bringing the best to orate at rallies, celebrations, and other public gatherings in Brunswick. And it was his pleasure to indulge in extensive anecdotage about them to whatever friends he met at bank, postoffice, or convenient street corner. He spoke robustly but never with enmity, and there was an aura of gallantry about his every gesture.

He was born on the Gilman estate, lived there his whole life, and became master of it in due course. He too made sporadic efforts to commercialize Paradise Spring Water, hoping to recoup the diminishing splendor of his patrimony, but with as little reward. Gradually the famed hospitality of the place shrank to family visits and the calls of close friends. Charlie's sisters Mary and Elizabeth managed the modest entertainment while Charlie hovered about, dispensing small talk and good nature.

The fire in him, banked by several generations of unchallenged ease, flared up after he had passed his fifty-fifth birthday. On May 5, 1914, the Brunswick \textit{Record} laconically announced that Charles Ashburton Gilman had filed intentions

\textsuperscript{18} Wife of William Claflin, one-time Governor of Massachusetts.

\textsuperscript{19} Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (later Ward), writer of religious stories touched with humor; best known for \textit{The Gates Ajar} (1868).
of marriage at the Town Clerk's office. June 12th it reported that the wedding had taken place in Richmond, Virginia, on Wednesday, June 3rd, and that the Gilmans would be at home after the 15th of June in Brunswick. Charlie had been incurably smitten by Miss Martha Brown Ellison four years before at the wedding of her brother to Elinor Dunlap, which was held at the Gilman home. The new Mrs. Gilman proved attractive and verveful; with her coming, the old house experienced a recrudescence of its former animation. Once more there were parties and receptions, lights and laughter to rival the festivities of an era gone by.

To his waning days Charlie remained a communal favorite. As the years mounted, he restricted his appearances downtown to shopping trips—a figure familiar to all Brunswick as he trudged from store to store, market basket on his arm, cheerful quip on his lips. One August night in 1938 he died quietly in his sleep, appropriately in the Gilman mansion at the head of Gilman Avenue, last of the male Gilmans.20

Miss Jewett did not live to see Charlie's marriage and social renaissance. To the end, she knew him as the happy-go-lucky, chartless scion of a great but narrowing family. She had unhappily noted the slackening of sinew that occurred throughout New England as the sailing ship foundered and the machine grimly pre-empted its position. With infinite regret she deplored the calamity of a once resistant stock gone soft through excess of comfort and congenital inadequacy to meet new conditions. She respected one and loved the other, but, inescapably, cousins Charles and Charlie must have appealed to her as salient cases in point.21

20 Illness forced Charlie’s only brother, David Dunlap, to retire from his position of paymaster at the Cabot mill in 1906. An invalid thereafter, he seemed to the younger generation of relatives a shadow in the background of the cavernous house, where he died eight years later.

21 For their generosity with firsthand information about the Gilman family I am grateful to Mrs. Frances D. Shepard, Mrs. Elizabeth B. Smith, Mr. Samuel L. Forsaith, and Mr. William H. Farrar.