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The Uncollected Short Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett

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WITH AS MUCH ardor as he could muster for any merely mortal author, Henry James referred to Sarah Orne Jewett's lifework as "her beautiful little quantum of achievement."1 He was avuncularly fond of her and had on several public occasions evinced unqualified praise for individual stories, so the second adjective need not be interpreted as one of his sinuous ironies. It is clearer in context that he was considering the stature of her fictions not the scope. Scott's "big bow-wow" manner was outside her endowment, as verified by her few dismal experiments in that line. Austen's "two inches . . . of ivory" was better suited to a definition of her artistry, and this she proved over and over again in her sketches and short stories.

Of the latter, our present concern, Miss Jewett published at least 146. It is conceivable and highly probable that others appeared in obscure sources and have not yet been recovered. Three which are reprinted in The Uncollected Short Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett,2 for instance, are not recorded in the Weber Bibliography. Miss Jewett left no definitive listing and the annual indexes of her time are notoriously spotty. Hope for retrieval lies in serendipity and through allusions in letters by and to Miss Jewett, although these have often led to bootless burrowing after titles revised, rejected, or retired as unworthy. Miss Jewett channeled seventy-three of her short stories into nine volumes, issued at intervals of two to three years between 1879 and 1899. Play Days (1878), her first collection of "A Book of Stories for Children," is not included in this count, nor

1 "Mr. and Mrs. James T. Fields," Atlantic Monthly, CXVI (July 1915), 30.
is *Tales of New England* (1890), eight stories culled from previous collections. Of the remaining fifty-eight, forty-four are reprinted in *The Uncollected Short Stories*; fourteen, keyed in substance, style, and spirit to children's comprehension, are documented in the *Chronology*.

Thirty-three of these newly assembled stories appeared in newspapers and periodicals between the publication of “Mr. Bruce,” her earliest story collected in *Old Friends and New* (1879) and “A Dunnet Shepherdess,” her latest story collected in *The Queen's Twin* (1899). Some of the thirty-three Miss Jewett on second thought had doubtlessly judged below the standard she wished to present to posterity. The others must have fallen victim to Houghton Mifflin's economic sense of saturation — only so many volumes of warmed-over stories would go down with even a devoted public. One example might be “Peach-tree Joe” (1893), a printed copy of which she diligently modified with evident design to reissue. Eleven additional stories released between 1900 and 1904 could have comprised a tidy volume of creditable quality, but by then the vogue of local color had expired and Miss Jewett, partially paralyzed in an accident on her birthday in 1902, was no longer a factor to be reckoned with.

The severest problem confronting the compiler of this volume was of course which stories to revive, which to discard. He could attempt to determine which Miss Jewett might herself have chosen, but the mixed disposition of her own collections provides no sure criteria: more than once she left out better than she put in. He could simply exercise his own taste, savoring delicately one or the other of her several excellences — and run the same risk of exclusion. In the end it was thought best to engross all the stories addressed to adults. Children are the protagonists in some of these. However, each surmounts the finger-wagging, favorite-aunt tone, the hair's-breadth esthetic distance, the bald homilistic peroration that are staples of her juvenile fiction. Each shelters in its core some inimitable attribute of description, situation, or characterization worth reinstating.

In the headpiece about Miss Jewett in their anthology of *Local-Color Stories* (1941), Warfel and Orians declare unequivocally that “no fewer than thirty-two” of her stories “are memorable.” The size and preciseness of the number is impressive,
and it is regrettable they did not divulge the titles that formed the corpus of their acclamation. Miss Jewett indeed maintained an enviable average of high performance from 1878 to her unfortunate fall in 1902. Having descried her métier in the Deep-haven sketches, she only occasionally lost sight of it, notably in stores commissioned for holidays, which she readily bent to formula.

With comparable intrepidity, it may be stated that no fewer than seventeen of the forty-four stories in *The Uncollected Short Stories* are up to Miss Jewett’s optimum level. To take the bull by the horns, they are: “Stolen Pleasures,” “A Guest at Home,” “Miss Manning’s Minister,” “A Garden Story,” “The Growtown Bugle,” “Mrs. Parkins’s Christmas Eve,” “An Every-Day Girl,” “A Change of Heart,” “The Gray Mills of Farley,” “The Parshley Celebration,” “A Landlocked Sailor,” “The Foreigner,” “A Born Farmer,” “The Honey Tree,” “Sister Peacham’s Turn,” “The Lost Turkey,” “A Spring Sunday.” Leaving aside inevitable differences of opinion, these stories represent Miss Jewett in her finer vein of psychological sympathy, nativist perception, and developed suppleness of style. The intimacy of her knowledge about people and places which radiates in these stories lodges them in the sturdiest tradition of regional writing, while her profound insight into human motivation invests them with universality. She had marked regard for the significance of the ordinary and educed from its daily iterations extraordinary fables of the world. The house to house trek of little Debby Gaines in “An Empty Purse” is an unheralded mission of Christ redivivus.

The first short story Miss Jewett published is “Jenny Gar-row’s Lovers” in *The Flag of Our Union*, January 18, 1868, under the pen name of A. C. Eliot. Long misidentified as “Lucy Garron’s Lovers” and sometimes confused with the first story she wrote at fourteen — an unfinished romp called “Philip and Margie” — it was left unmentioned by F. O. Matthiessen (*Sarah Orne Jewett*, 1929) in his account of her beginnings as a writer, most likely because he was unaware of its existence. In light of her subsequent development, Miss Jewett’s own silence about “Jenny” may be construed as a desire to forget that this youthful indiscretion did irrevocably exist. Staged in unfamiliar England, caparisoned with lords and ladies, awash with incident, it is a far cry from the line she adopts and perfects later.
The plot proceeds by a series of melodramatic spasms, quite in keeping with the frenetic talk and doomful mood. Every person except the female narrator is papier maché. Margery Blake, precursor of the Jewett persona who reappears in different masks in so many of her stories, usurps the opening. She pleads inexperience at the craft of writing, grumbles generally at the queer caboodle of authors, then shrugs off the whole matter somewhat petulantly, somewhat defensively, perhaps a necessary camouflage for the scared neophyte launching her first literary vessel. Margery also interjects herself and her sentiments gratuitously throughout the action, capping all with the final line, “How do you like my story?” Although Thackeray’s reduction to puppetry at the close of *Vanity Fair* tempts comparison, there is less of his classical detachment here than sheer adolescent egoism. It rings frivolous after such adversity. Sarah Jewett had a lot to unlearn.

“The Girl With the Cannon Dresses” came out in *Riverside Magazine*, August 1870. In the interval since “Jenny Garrow’s Lovers” Miss Jewett had published “Mr. Bruce” and “The Shipwrecked Buttons,” neither relevant to her ultimate accomplishment. The first is a transparent pseudo-high-comedy hoax in a city setting; the second, strictly for junior consumption. Thus, “The Girl With the Cannon Dresses” is in point of time the first of Miss Jewett’s stories to adumbrate her future course, a distinction improperly accorded the *Deephaven* sketches, which did not begin to emerge until three years later. “Dresses” is the first of her six publications to bear her own name. It abounds in strong autobiographical parallels: the narrator Alice Channing (rhythm from Sarah Jewett, appellative from Alice Eliot) is sickly; has a mother, sister, and father (though not a doctor); lives in a sea-oriented town; at 18 reverts to little-girl ways; is fascinated by nature lore; and is cognizant of a reciprocals father-daughter partiality.

In this story Miss Jewett introduces most of the local-color elements that she gradually masters during the next quarter-century and brings to a crest in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). There is the major theme of conflict between town and country, and Miss Jewett’s roseate dream of reconciling the two; there is the unblinking appreciation of nature’s physical beauty and spiritual beneficence; the discovery of country virtues by city visitor; the self-assured, ascendant female and the
taciturn, acquiescent male; the quizzical child with immense aboriginal potentials; the lackadaisical plot; the resistance to time and change in an idyllic backwater; the concurrent surrender to incursive modernity; the forfeiture of unrealized individuality to social conformity. Dulcidora Bunt is the forerunner of a train of preternaturally wise moppets who grow by stages into Polly Finch, Esther Hight, and the nonpareil Almira Todd, or in the more desolate trend of Joanna Todd, Ann Floyd, and the Dulham sisters.3 "Dresses" lacks the specificity of nature detail which Miss Jewett limns so tellingly later, and a residue of the melodramatic stains the first encounter of Alice and Dulcy. Nevertheless, some of the underbrush has been cleared away and the route to Miss Jewett's cardinal competency becomes visible.

Her next expeditions into the heart of nature's liaison with man are "The Shore House" (1873), pilot of the Deephaven sketches, and "Miss Sydney's Flowers" (1874), which she duly collected.4 Sometime in the 1880s (exact date undetermined), and possibly before those two, Miss Jewett published "Stolen Pleasures," transitional in style and innovative in point of view. Melodrama still haunts the tone and Miss Jewett displays rather raw bias in her contrast of the Stinces, unsavory towners, and Johnny Weber, country boy working in a machine shop. But increasing strength is perceivable in the characterization. Johnny's wife, vacillating between the catchpenny glamor of the Stinces and allegiance to her husband's homelier values, creates a shifting fulcrum upon which the unequal city-country conflict turns. Johnny's mother, an archetypal figure of earth, counsels him with grave, indisputable sapience. In the face of her disillusionment with the Stinces' slick, city-bred morals and her exposure to "dear, old-fashioned, simple country life" in Vermont, it does not surprise that Johnny's wife elects to return to the upland farm of his birth. The silver poplar in Johnny's backyard certifies the spirit of nature persisting within him despite the drabness deepening around him. In Part II Miss Jewett swerves without warning for a single paragraph only into the immediate present tense, obliterating all distance be-

3 Polly Finch of "Farmer Finch," Ann Floyd of "Marsh Rosemary," and the two misses Dobin of "The Dulham Ladies," collected in A White Heron and Other Stories (1886); Esther Hight, Almira and Joanna Todd of The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896).
4 Deephaven, Miss Jewett's first book, was published in 1877; "Miss Sydney's Flowers" collected in Old Friends and New (1879).
between protagonist and reader. The effect is peculiarly disturbing, as of a screen ripped swiftly aside, the reader catapulted headlong into proceedings abruptly magnified and palpitant, stark light laying bare the privacy of one's own dread: "Hallo, there is a folded piece of white paper pinned to the table cloth." This device of sudden cinematic closeup she utilizes again with unfailing shock, most notably in "A White Heron."

Miss Jewett's conviction that a mystic affinity exists between man and nature expresses itself in a sustained language of analogy in "An Every-Day Girl" (1892). Young John Abbott congratulates Mary Fleming on how pretty her pear trees (herself) look; the boarder Davis, presumed to be fond of Mary, bends down a blossoming branch and holds it to his face; John tells Mary she should see the beautiful flowering cherry trees (himself) at his place; when she has difficulty tying up the grapevine, he deftly trims the vine and mends the trellis (he is part of the resolution of her dilemma); when Mary returns home after the fire she sees first two flourishing green pear trees (herself and John); and after their marriage plans are sealed, the pears begin to brown (achieved maturity).

This story is in other respects a staunch and versatile exhibit of Miss Jewett's special art. It exemplifies the chromatic richness and restrained rhythms of parochial speech, without the excess of eye-catching vernacular that doomed most of the local-color movement to quick oblivion. Aunt Hannah is another of Miss Jewett's sure-footed natives who draw sustenance directly from the soil, tangily humorous, intuitively understanding, prudent, and prophetic. Through her resounds the canticle of Yankee caution: don't overreach. Mary Fleming, on her way to becoming Aunt Hannah, picks up the theme and carries it a step farther to Yankee self-reliance: chart your own course and solve your own problems. She lays the track for her irresolute father, who recaptures his verve, sells his house in the "crowded country village" and goes "back up country." The flashes of flora and fauna, consummately spaced, serenely disciplined, signally apt, leave no room to doubt Miss Jewett's stand in the contention of country versus city.

The touch of nature that makes the whole world kin operates under differing circumstances in three other stories. In "A Spring Sunday" (1904), Alonzo and Mary Ann Hallet undergo rejuvenation through a retrospective visit to their early home

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place some distance from the small city they have lived in for over twenty years. Typically prim New Englanders, they steal away like young truants, retrace experiences of long ago, and are refreshed to new apperception of each other. Miss Jewett reinforces her belief in the enduring quality of love by allying it to the cycle of seasons. In the autumn of their years the Hallets rediscover the green days of the soul, renew the loveliness of their beginnings, and glimpse the promise of more autumns and more springs, more springs.

Aging Sally Martin in “A Change of Heart” (1896) overcomes her long term of recalcitrance and voluntarily returns to her lover. Two admirable people are brought to natural fruition by a turn in the psychic season. After the protracted freeze of winter (between them), love thaws out their congealed self-pride. External nature coincides with human nature: change of season, change of heart. Miss Jewett pointedly closes with the observation that “Somehow, their happiness seemed all the lovelier because it had come at last in the spring.”

Nature in more tangible form is brought to bear upon the maturation of young Johnny Hopper in “The Honey Tree” (1901). Unabashedly selfish about his lucky find, he wants to restrict gifts of the honey to only a favored few. His father gently implants the lesson of solidity and joy in community. “You’re goin’ to be just like other folks when you grow up,” he tells the lad. Although it costs Johnny most of the honey, he concurs. Tradition, a tree that grows and ages and gives off good substance, is safe in Johnny’s hands. There will be no generation gap. This story is in the forefront of local-color writing, one of Miss Jewett’s most sagacious realistic-idealistic presentations of people, place, preoccupations, peculiarities—the uniqueness, the unanimity of country folk. She raises the taking-out of the honey to the plane of ritual. Grandma Prime is memorable portraiture in the round; the introductory chorale in Simmon’s store a gem of creative reportage.

As in “Stolen Pleasures,” “An Every-Day Girl,” and “A Change of Heart,” Miss Jewett depends upon the transforming benignity of nature in “A Garden Story” (1886) to accentuate the division between country and city. Brisk, industrious, independent Ann Dunning personifies her beloved garden, thus the country in general; puny Peggy McAllister, the Scottish orphan, epitomizes the city and becomes the channel through
which the two worlds communicate. Peggy nourishes the seedlings which Ann forthrightly tells her to uproot. What to Ann are merely pestiferous weeds represent beauty and vitality in the hospital wards. The little child leads her to unsuspected insights: “Think of all those folks in Boston being so pleased just to have the leavings.” Love of nature effloresces into love of people. In a narrower sense Miss Jewett is giving body to her oft-repeated dictum from Plato that “the best thing one can do for the people of a State is to make them acquainted with each other.” Country prevails here, hands down, for even the least of its properties has much to bestow upon the deprived city. However, country learns selflessness and gains broader awareness of human needs by extension of its severely constricted circle. Ann Dunning is fundamentally the largest beneficiary.

Less stress upon the influence of nature is present in “A Guest at Home” (1882). Annie Hollis is a wholesome, self-reliant New England girl on the style of Polly Finch. She shuttles between her uncle’s luxurious New York home and her father’s old farmhouse. She enjoys the advantages of education and refinement in the city, yet yearns to be a help and comfort to her loving, indigent family in the country. In the end she accepts a kind of comfortable compromise. Miss Jewett stands astride the relative values of country-city here, with just the slightest list toward country because it is Annie’s original source. Until the explicit preachment of the final paragraphs, this story rates among the best in Miss Jewett’s catalogue. It has lithe-some style, satisfying content, slender story line, strength and warmth in depiction of place, people, and family ties. Aunt Harriet is a template of all Miss Jewett’s ailing, whining spinsters; Mr. Hollis of her silent, sacrificial, steadfast patresfamilias.

The establishment of a new box factory in the village strews accumulating blight upon the old inhabitants in “A Visit Next Door” (1884). The Grangers and their next-door neighbors the Filmores drift farther and farther apart, their separation symbolized by the hedge of Norway spruces which they stop clipping. Miss Jewett’s remedy for this deteriorating situation is ingenious and amusing, effective in restoring the former relationship. The theme, unfortunately, outruns the story. Miss Jewett disseminates a basketful of platitudes to endorse her thesis that resumption of country ways in a growingly urban society revives the goodness in people. “A Financial Failure”
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(1890) restates more strenuously the preferability of country over city. Bank and farm are cast in head to head opposition. Jonas Dyer suffers psychic dislodgement when he leaves the land for a junior clerkship, but all is set to rights by auspiciously named Love Hayland when they marry "in planting time" and retreat to the farm. The title of this story would be misleading without its subtitle "The Story of a New England Wooing," yet Miss Jewett's treatment of young love is as stiff as brocade, only conventional interchanges conventionally observed. Between prevailing Victorian rectitudes and Miss Jewett's own maiden constraints, the two youngsters never have a chance to come alive.

In the last of her stories about country pitted against city — "A Born Farmer" (1901) — Miss Jewett places the odds at three to one in favor of the former. Jacob Gaines, who is empowered by a legacy to sell his chattel and move his family to Boston, has lingering regrets about quitting the old gray farm-house, regrets which never die despite his success in business. His wife and daughter similarly miss "the starlit sky and the dim familiar shapes of the old Maine hills" and are overjoyed when he suggests they return. Only his son Jake orients to the city. Perhaps one had to be brashly young and independent and masculine to confute Miss Jewett's dire warning that "it is a serious thing to pull up a human plant by the roots, and start it again with even the least delay in unsuitable soil." Especially the city.

One other facet of the country-city dialectic that engrossed Miss Jewett's attention in her stories, collected and uncollected, is the return-of-the-native theme. It crops up in crude semblance in her very first effusion, "Jenny Garrow's Lovers." Will Tyler departs his home town and returns years later, in the accepted pattern. Miss Jewett makes this no occasion for a canvass of values as she does, for instance, in a "A Guest at Home." Annie Hollis at first hates the thought of having to go back to her paternal home and the dullness thereof after three years of New York City and its opportunities to pursue her "naturally refined" artistic propensity. When she does, however, the elemental pull of family affection and the therapy of plain country routines reassert the tenacity of original roots.

The experience of Hannah Dalton in "A Pinch of Salt" (1897) is forged of the same metal, without the irony, of Hor-
tia Dane's in "A Lost Lover." The young swains of these now mature spinsters plunged years ago into the larger world to take its measure and make their fortune. Depravity exacts such toll of Horatia's hero that he incorrigibly fails to recognize her on his return, an earnest of urbanite wickedness. On the other side, John Brayton demonstrates the umbilical nature of the ancestral terrain and the constancy of rural love. He comes back prosperous and instantly amends the aridity of lost years. Miss Jewett's trappings of local folklore and natty coincidence elicit less of sentimentality, more of heartwarming advocacy for dear Miss Dalton from the reader. "Told in the Tavern" (1894) traces the same stripe, shuns the softer touch.

In a spiritual sense, Miss Prudence Fellows of "The Growtown 'Bugle'" (1888) belongs to this breed of returned native. Although she never travels outside of Simmsby, Massachusetts, her essential self, along with her investments, shifts to Growtown, Kansas. When little Lizzie Peck dies of lung fever, Prudence is whipped back to reconsideration of her own native heath. Miss Jewett unrelentingly pounds out the truisms that riches are not all gold and love thy neighbor, compensating by tempered, seamless unfoldment of narrative, now at the apex of her craftsmanship.

Miss Jewett's fiction abounds with self-sufficient, self-reliant New England women, speckled products of the Protestant ethic, Emersonian optimism, and indestructible heredity. Mrs. Kew, Nan Prince, Hannah West, Ann Ball, Betsey Lane, and Almira Todd spring foremost to mind. The world may often be too much with them but they face it down indomitably. None is in pronounced degree the duplicate of another, so it would be imprecise to label them a type. Their counterparts recur with expected variegation in these assembled stories, affidavits of Miss Jewett's lasting infatuation with their kind. Among the younger set, Mary Fleming in "An Every-Day Girl" and Annie Hollis in "A Guest at Home" roundly qualify for this category, as of the older group do Ann Dunning in "A Garden Story" and Prudence Fellows in "The Growtown 'Bugle.'"

5 Collected in Old Friends and New (1879).
6 Mrs. Kew of Deephaven (1877); Nan Prince of A Country Doctor (1884); Hannah West of "A Bit of Shore Life," collected in Old Friends and New (1879); Ann Ball of "The Taking of Captain Ball," collected in Strangers and Wayfarers (1890); Betsey Lane of "The Flight of Betsey Lane," collected in A Native of Winby and Other Tales (1893); Almira Todd of The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896).
Four other females of radically different status—two spin­sters, a widow, a maid newly out of college—exercise self­reliance and are agreeably recompensed. Narcissa Manning ("Miss Manning's Minister," 1883), fifty, stout and sentimental, is the least forceful of the four, persuading time to trot to her tune rather than grabbing it by the forelock. Having aged in the service of her father's, then her mother's illnesses, she lives alone in the home they have left her, habit-bound and at peace with herself. When the congregation quibbles about the upkeep of their paralyzed minister, an affable, skeptical bachelor in his forties, she volunteers to nurse him in her house gratis. The upshot is that they marry and he provides a permanent outlet for her benevolent energies. Here too Miss Jewett interposes her doctrinal motif of the concordance between man and nature. In the first scene four lilac bushes, described as "elderly" to befit the superannuated romance, are sighted in front of Miss Manning's house, significantly in spring. When the reverend comes back to claim her in a later spring, the lilacs are shown in full bloom. The avid seeker of autobiographical hieroglyphs may read this story as an ambivalent fantasy of Miss Jewett's own hope for release from single blessedness. At the threshold of 34, with no record of male affiliations, she was in rare position to empathize with Narcissa Manning.

The second spinster is not one to leave matters to their own management. Lydia Bent is neat, reticent, and quietly invincible. When her minister drifts into imminent danger of losing his parishioners, she does some determined soliciting and happily turns the tide. "The First Sunday in June" (1897) mounts some excellent woodcuts of the retiring generation in a small town, of a befuddled pastor slowly losing his hold on reality, of a meeting-house full of smiling faces, sun shining on mahogany pulpit—nature's sign of moral approval. Quintessentially a religious story for a religious magazine, the action is dull and curiously unmoving. Yet the image of Miss Lydia walking softly and purposefully from door to door remains fixed on the eye. To the minister she proffers the miracle of Lazarus; for the congregation she sparks a Christian renaissance.

The widow is cut from quite disparate cloth. Lydia Parkins, "a saving woman" who had married a saving man, is now a confirmed skinflint, even to the point of refusing to contribute toward her minister's Christmas present. Her ingrained ego-
centricity, punctured by momentary fear, becomes responsive to the necessities and incentives of other people’s lives. The unaccustomed radiance of traditional family festivals at Yuletide induces an epiphany, after which she takes an irresistible “upward step” in charity and good-neighborliness. In “Mrs. Parkins’s Christmas Eve” (1890-1891) Miss Jewett’s main concern is to fashion an apologue of Christ’s redemptive influence. She succeeds in this handily, and by way of increment offers one of her most incisive etchings of a dried-up New England niggard and a series of scenes drawn with marvelous economy of realistic projection.

Lizzie Harris is a young, spunky Radcliffe graduate who sets her mind on a goal of attainment and attains it. She vows to make a go of her blind father’s tavern in the hinterland, applying the utmost of her intelligence, industry, and amicability to the task. “A Stage Tavern” (1900) starts with what seems a Cinderella gambit and ends with a May-November marriage, the whole pervaded by an aura of happy fiction. Lizzie impresses herself upon the reader as the very model of the healthy, hopeful, sensible, personable, zealous New England country girl, sister to Hawthorne’s Phoebe Pyncheon. Miss Jewett’s depiction of the hospitality accorded General Norton on his first visit to the tavern puts to shame the famous Southern variety. What Miss Jewett sees as common denominators in the self-reliance of her widely diversified individuals are innate acumen from a chain of canny forebears, physical and moral hardiness acquired from long association with the soil, agility to learn from circumstance and turn it to good purpose for themselves and others.

Sarah Jewett never wavered in her tender regard for the younger fry, as attested by her numerous stories expressly for children and by the substantial population of juniors in her fictions for adults. In fact, two of her last stories were written for *Youth’s Companion*. She had ample credentials of empathy. On her 48th birthday she could say without affectation, “I am always nine years old.” This refracted perspective may account for the undue solemnity of some of her literary youngsters. It also invests them with dignity and self-respect unusual in the general run of their class. Dulcidora Bunt in “The Girl With the Cannon Dresses” and Johnny Hopper in “The Honey Tree” support, like tiny Atlases, the burdens of a heavy tradition on
their puerile shoulders. In “The Becket Girls’ Tree” (1884) little Johnny and Jessie Parsons assume their absent parents’ obligations, indeed surpass them in forethought, ingenuity, and neighborliness. The children’s unprecedented surprise party for the elderly Becket sisters anticipates Mrs. Parsons’ motherly commendation upon her return: “The way to have a good time yourself is to make somebody else have one.” What Johnny and Jessie do learn, however, is that kindnesses come home to roost — they enjoy two celebrations that Christmas day. The intricate interplay of awkwardness and covert glee in the relations of the children and the spinster is knowingly registered by Miss Jewett, as is the insuperable thumbnail portrait of Mrs. Peters, a crossgrained, withering New England solitary.

In her childhood years, when she rode with her doctor-father on his daily rounds of farmland and coastline, Miss Jewett raised a curiosity about local legend that became insatiable as she grew up. On foot or on horse she combed the southern counties of Maine, searching out new sources of old lore, listening enrapt to tidbits of antiquity. These filaments she wove lovingly into sketches (“River Driftwood”) hybrid story-sketches (“The Landscape Chamber”), and tales with a tone of “told by the fire” (“Lady Ferry,” “The Gray Man”). Three of the uncollected stories are imbued with Miss Jewett’s adoration of the exotic past. “The Orchard’s Grandmother” (1871), cast for children though not juvenile in execution, is marred by her early predilection for melodramatic incident — a brush with Cromwell’s men, a narrow escape from Indians. Fate is observed floundering, the forces of chaos activated by Tolstoian irony. Over a slight melodic base of authentic history, Miss Jewett improvises a variation on the Johnny Appleseed theme. Aborning luminosity of style and loosening of rigid narrative methodism are clearly visible here.

“Peg’s Little Chair” (1891), a simple tale recalled with charm and beguiling sentimentality, proves Miss Jewett is by now well seasoned in the story-within-a-story technique. By permitting a participant to divulge the remoter events and reserving the contiguous commentary for her personal surrogate, she dispels every esthetic intervention between herself and her

7 “River Driftwood” collected in Country By-Ways (1881); “The Landscape Chamber” in The King of Folly Island and Other People (1888); “Lady Ferry” in Old Friends and New (1879); “The Gray Man” in A White Heron and Other Stories (1886).
reader. In the beginning she affects the country-doctor’s-grown-up-girl persona, admonishing the children in her audience sternly but fondly. As the narrative develops, Miss Jewett humanizes history with ingenuous craft, bringing the superhero General Lafayette within common apprehension by reducing him to a little child’s scope. Everyone laughs or cheers when the quick-witted tot relieves the lame general, for here it is the touch of human nature that makes the whole world kin.

The richest figment of local legendry in Miss Jewett’s repertory is “The Foreigner” (1900). One of the four later germane “papers” which she never inserted into the scheme of her *magnum opus, The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896), it assumes prior knowledge of the Dunnet Landing ambience. Almira Todd, returned in all her fathomless capacity, reigns with — if anything — broader wisdom and understanding. As in *Pointed Firs*, Miss Jewett clothes her with intimations of transcendent cognition, “as unconscious and as mysterious as any sibyl of the Sistine Chapel.” Almira tells the tale-within-a-tale peerlessly, displaying inexhaustible pliancy of subject and idiom, lacing narrative with anecdote, reminiscence, local history, and spirited asides, interrupting the flow by digression into domestic chores, and pressed into continuation by the primary narrator, whose eagerness to hear the outcome matches the eagerness of the reader to know. This story stands among Miss Jewett’s best in terms of plasticity, a stop-and-go performance of surpassing aptitude. Captain Tolland’s bride — a Jamaican French Catholic who plays the guitar, sings, dances (scandalously), and makes no secret of her passion in public — typifies everything that Puritan Dunnet Landing is not. Cheerful but unflinching, Sarah Jewett denudes the ineradicable xenophobia of an insulated community, its resentment of spontaneity and flair, its intolerance toward unrepressed emotions. The ghost motif harks back to Miss Jewett’s more spectacular storytelling days — principally “Lady Ferry” (1879) and “The Gray Man” (1886) — yet is concomitant with Captain Littlepage’s vapid memories in *Pointed Firs*, and Miss Jewett demonstrates journeyman skill with the Gothic apparatus. “The Foreigner” promulgates her most mature manner and matter. It implements and extends *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, and should not be missed in any consideration of that construct as an integrated work of art.

Foreigners of more ordinary sort inhabit Miss Jewett’s fic-
tion, the Irish and Canadian-French who flocked into the United States to work as domestics and factory-hands during the post-Civil War era of expansionary industrialism. She came to know the first through long acquaintance in her home, and the second through close observation at mills nearby and sweatshops in multiplying Massachusetts towns. She learned to portray their speech, habits, temperaments, and ambitions, never, however, as successfully as she did those of her native Mainers. The last of these stories is also the least of them. "Elleneen" (1901), a soap opera of separated suitors, with complications in Irish dialect, skips lightly along the bumpy course of true love to inescapable revelation and reunion, indistinguishable from thousands of its ilk. Mike Dillon makes all the difference in "A Landlocked Sailor" (1899). Miss Jewett endues him with a captivating welter of blarney to countervail his physical and fiscal handicaps. Mike's opulent Irish wit and ebullient life style at first repel, then catch the fancy of an elderly, lone lady. The action unrolls drollly, ending in an hilarious somersault. Unable to concede total victory over her cherished native spirit, Miss Jewett sees in Dillon "the look of an old-fashioned New England farmer, like a kind of veneer, over his Irish sailorhood." She is prepared to accept the invasion of her sacred precinct — providing the invaders resemble the invaded at principal points. This story is remarkable for emotive power of natural details, for limpidity of style, unerring sense of proportion, and coalescence of color and mood.

"The Gray Mills of Farley" (1898) represents Miss Jewett's nearest involvement with the throes of proliferating industry. The Corporation, a capitalized monster, has sucked all feeling of liberty, leisure, and individuality out of its Irish and Canadian-French laborers. By its decisions to cease and to resume operations, it wields the force of life and death over them. Insecurity vents itself in their preference to live adjacent the mill-yard gate (clinging to the iron teat) rather than spreading out toward the country, and their undifferentiated homes reflect their own anonymity. When the factory shutdown is announced, there is no concerted outcry; the indoctrinated workers accept it as they would an act of God. Faith and self-denial, embodied by a Roman Catholic priest, seem their only recourse against economic freebooting. Miss Jewett remarks the ethical obligations of big business to a small community but shies away from ex-
postulation; shows the misery consequent to a philosophy of profit over people, yet is not stirred to anger. She spends her sympathy on little Maggie, unwitting victim of a heartless system, and upon the native mill agent, hooked between love of his own kind and allegiance to his employers. Activism does not befit Miss Jewett’s temper; doting, old-world interdependence does. Noblesse oblige, without titles, keeps the wheels greased. The twentieth century, less than two years off, is already fraught with auguries of predicaments and complexities alien to her comprehension. She could not ignore the ominous intonations, then again, she did not have to orchestrate them. Miss Jewett’s congenital conservatism and reverence for the rural way of life is never so eloquently expressed as in this story, where she leaves them unspoken.

In point of fact, Miss Jewett was thoroughly familiar with urban existence and found it not unpalatable. From her early girlhood she records numerous lengthy visits with friends in Boston, and after 1881 sojourned annually for several months in the home of Mrs. Annie Fields on Charles Street. Out of these backgrounds she concocted her first major publication, “Mr. Bruce” in the Atlantic Monthly, before she was twenty, and others such as “A Sorrowful Guest,” “Fame’s Little Day,” and “A Financial Failure.” Able in their way, none of her city stories exude the unmistakable aroma of humanity that marks her accounts of country people and places. The locale of gridiron streets, crowded housing, and mannered sociality sharply diminished her vision. Some she rescued by introducing elements from her own origins. “Paper Roses” (1879) attempts to bridge the gap between the two cultures by applying Plato’s prescription of letting them get to know each other. Bright young city girls are implicated with quaint old country women in an essentially pathetic situation. What comes of it is neither derision nor condescension but fullhearted recognition and happiness. The tissue-paper roses migrate along an ascending route of ancient, racial understanding that cuts across synthetic barriers to sunlit meadows of the spirit.

“Hallowell’s Pretty Sister” (1880) and “A Dark Carpet” (1883) possess no such saving graces. The first is a standard male-female impersonation farce brimming with sophomoric wit
and wile; the second moves soddenly through several defused crises to a pontifical final paragraph. "The Hare and the Tortoise" (1883) is on the order of a compressed novel, in Miss Jewett's best careful-polished style, competent, mildly amusing, and surprisingly subversive of Aesop's (and Miss Jewett's) bourgeois scripture — the hare wins. Can this have been another of her maiden fantasies about a gallant lover she never had, or possibly exorcised? Characterization is by epithet, Henry Temple "sherry and soup," Richard Dean "champagne and paté," and in the dinner scene at the Chester home Miss Jewett executes the same peculiar shift to the immediate present tense as in "Stolen Pleasures." This instant enlargement, though met before, is nonetheless vaguely disconcerting. "The Spur of the Moment" (1902) qualifies as a city story by dint of its mise en scène yet is so spacious in application that it could have been set anywhere. Kind Miss Jewett urges that we all be kind, for we never know in what unintended ways we may affect lives about us. Her hypothesis of involuntary benevolence presumes that any spur of the moment impulse may well trigger a concatenation of fortuitous events. She aligns this, by axiom, with the functioning of natural laws and sprinkles it with God's tacit approbation. She employs an O. Henryish mechanism of gyrations, which she cleverly brings full cycle. And her etching of pitiable Miss Peets is done with undiluted acid.

Last of the large categories in this volume — holiday stories — is divisible into celebrations of Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, Decoration Day, and Fourth of July. Most were commissioned by the Bacheller Syndicate or by editors of individual newspapers and magazines. As is the proclivity of such pieces written to order, they glorify the cultural import of the day, far too often at the expense of esthetic imperatives.

Of the five Christmas stories only "A Way Station" (1890) does not follow the formula of reasserting Christ's restorative love. A vignette shadowed by the sadness of a solitary Christmas, it offers no surcease in the end, only the prospect of reiterant lorn memories. The other four resurrect Christ's essence in one guise or another. In "The Becket Girls' Tree" it is emblemized by two irrepressible children; in "Mrs. Parkins's Christmas Eve" by a minister and his family; in "An Empty Purse" (1895) by one of Miss Jewett's indefeasible little spinsters. Each of these is a parable hymning the preferability of
giving over receiving, the last one underscoring the superiority of personal service over material goods. At the outset, rich Mrs. Rivers’ monetary values range in direct contrast to Debby Gaines’s solid humanist activities. With noiseless, knowledgeable art Miss Jewett then sends Debby on a figurative tour of the world which describes a circle encompassing Mrs. Rivers’ conversion. The reversible combination of full purse - empty heart, empty purse - full heart is copiously attested. “A Christmas Guest” (1887) cryptically divides Christ’s role between an old soldier and a young girl. Identities are established by the general’s truncated reference to Matthew 25:35 and the child’s sacrificing goodness. Numerous recollections of the “no room at the inn” situation crop up to strengthen the biblical correlation. However, Miss Jewett unaccountably changes tack and concludes the story with a pointless reunion. In Part III she once more reverts to the uncomfortable proximity of the immediate present tense, here with the effect of stripping myth of its magic.

“In a Country Practice” (1894), first of all a Thanksgiving story, carries so great a freight of other components that it founders beneath the hodgepodge of autobiography, melodrama, ruralist doctrine, and holiday homily. The household duplicates the Jewetts’ in South Berwick, widowed mother and two daughters. The doctor-father’s study approximates both in physical accouterments and engendering mood the one Miss Jewett recreates in the opening poems of her Verses. Nelly Ashurst is, syllabically, the sibling of Sally Jewett. A beloved female domestic upon whom everyone depends also shares the scene. The plot hinges on the hoary contraption of a last-minute legacy from a long-forgotten beneficiary of the doctor’s genius. Miss Jewett specifically mentions the Good Samaritan in this respect although a more apposite analogy would be Androcles and the lion. If perchance the moral be overlooked, she leaves no doubt in her summation that casting one’s bread upon the waters is a sure hedge against future calamity. The gritty offhandedness of her country people, their stoic acceptance of circumstance, their pragmatic refutation of miracles in everyday life are missing here. Moreover, the overplus of plot, the slipshod repetition of words and phrases extrude unbecomingly in this advanced stage of her career. Yet the story does envelop some of her characteristic virtues: the ineffable benefits of country living as
against the social and economic advantages in cities; the renewable solace of family bonds; the psychic strength of interdependent community; and the stark, symbolic xylograph of the two old Dent sisters.

On a much higher rung is "Sister Peacham's Turn" (1902). Miss Jewett deploys two elderly sisters — diametric in looks and outlook — in a classic battle of wits, country style. Naturally, the more earthy of the two wins. Mrs. Fellows and Mrs. Peacham are generic representatives of aging New England widows; the first, round, easy-going, hospitable; the second, thin, plaintive, hermetic. Through a stratagem prompted partly by genuine concern and partly by pure prankishness, Mrs. Fellows rescues her sister from a growing void. A triumph of local-color composition, this story congenially purveys the regenerative spirit of Thanksgiving day, quite reversing the strained emphasis of "In a Country Practice." Something between these two is "The Lost Turkey" (1902). Determined to inculcate the day's significance, leaning overly upon a lucky mishap, it still yields two basic, graphic characters in the intransigent grandfather and stubborn mother of little Johnny Jones, and the atmosphere is effulgent with the tenderness of reconciliation. Miss Jewett invokes again her gospel of inadvertent kindness, which obligingly alleviates an ugly impasse.

Outside of Miss Jewett's unfailing mastery in connoting the effect on the soul of the cycle of seasons in its rising arc of "springlike hopefulness," "The Green Bonnet" (1901) has little to recommend it. A fable of forbearance slanted at children, it tritely commemorates the reviving message of Easter. "A Village Patriot" (1896) features the fireworks traditional to the Fourth of July, with a counterpoint of homage to George Washington, but its real interests devolve upon the blissful pangs of young love and the manifest ascendancy of country over city ways. Love of country (nature) breeds love of country (America) by reason of the more deliberate cadence of life in the former and the deeper appreciation of simple pleasures which it induces. The Fourth acts as catalytic agent, animating the disparities between youth-age, country-city.

Decoration Day, coming at the onset of a new season, affords Miss Jewett another opportunity to exploit her faith in the correspondence of man and nature. The villagers in "The Parshley Celebration" (1899) are perversely proud of their "no village"
of acute individualism and decentralized aims. After an epoch of unremitting cold, impending summer melts them to newfound gratification in the performance of human kindness. Martha Binney and Mary Ann Winn galvanize this centrifugal community into one act of selfless cooperation which takes on the aspect of a runic pilgrimage to the vale of man’s best instincts. While Miss Jewett makes no categorical connection, the biblical significance of their Christian names is not to be disregarded. Their personalities emerge through extended dialogues, impact with vitality and subtleties such as few regionalists beside Miss Jewett could contrive.

The blood and guts of war was of course inimical to every fiber of Miss Jewett’s genteel being. She touched on the subject only infrequently and then from a shielded vantage in time (after the war) or in place (lateral to the battlefield). “Peachtree Joe” (1893), a sidewise glance at the pathos and waste of war, fits into the second category. It might be denominated a Down East Red Badge of Courage without the overt wound or the internal agonizing. Joe, like Henry Fleming, wrestles with the demon fear but, unlike Henry, dies in the act of pinning him. Miss Jewett delicately counterpoises male and female compassion over the boy’s struggle with his shortcoming by setting the main narrative in a frame of diurnal chitchat between herself and her man of all work. John’s reaction to the senseless slaughter of his companion in arms is as pragmatic and tender as were his obverse public and private relations with Joe; Miss Jewett sentimentalizes and dilates Joe’s role unconscionably. As in “A Neighbor’s Landmark” and “The Orchard’s Grandmother,” the life of the tree is coordinate with the life of the protagonist, and the periodic renascence of spring convokes both to John’s memory, the brand of immortality reserved for garden variety heroes. Miss Jewett skims the psychological turbulence within Joe but does allow two flickers of her own agitation to surface: scratching a row of x’s on the top of the oat bin when John interrupts his yarn, and hinting at intolerable tension — “somebody must say something” — when he appears to let it peter out unfinished. Miss Jewett’s verbal and phrasal revisions of the orginal printed version are in the main improvements except where she unmindfully created repetitions ordinarily gross in her prose.

9 Collected in The Life of Nancy (1895).
The cult of local color was still ponderant in 1895 when Miss Jewett published "A Dark Night." The public appetite for panoplied costume-drama had been whetted in 1880 by *Ben Hur* and stimulated by *Quo Vadis* fifteen years later. In between, a swelling demand for such stories from established authors emitted from editors' desks. Miss Jewett yielded to the importunities of the Bacheller Syndicate, turning out this conformable tale played out in a milieu charged with perfidy and intrigue. The onus of a systematic plot, dauntless and dastardly characters, titillating contingencies, unfamiliar terrain, and mandatory romantic dénouement was more than Miss Jewett could gracefully sustain. "A Dark Night" is illumined by selective descriptive details, the only praiseworthy characteristic of Miss Jewett that subsists here. On Charles Dudley Warner's insistence she later wrote *The Tory Lover* (1901), a fumbling attempt to ride the bright wave of historical fiction that was now sweeping across the best-seller lists. David Bonnell Green discerns in "A Dark Night" a preliminary sketch for Chapters 42-44 of *The Tory Lover* and contends that the latter is a better book than generally recognized. Underrated or not, neither of these two works can hold a candle to those Miss Jewett distilled from her own environment and experience. Dramatic action and dashing people were not her forte. And when it comes to locale, New England, not England, was the land of her heart's knowledge.

The last two to be considered in *The Uncollected Short Stories* fall into no acknowledged classification of Miss Jewett's oeuvre. "The New Methuselah" (1890) is a pleasurable jape written in a glow of recall, its obvious progenitor Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Asa Potterby, a "doctor of unpracticed medicine," and his neighbor Masters, an eccentric worthy of conception by Jules Verne, are counterparts in mad scientism; Mrs. Yard, sensible autocrat of the hearth, keeps matters in comparative balance. Potterby's dream is shattered by a hard green apple as the point is hammered home that the best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley. Miss Jewett, at her engaging whimsical peak, preens her style and smiles indulgently at human frailty. "The Green Bowl" (1901) comes off less felicitously. Not wholly an unbeliever in the dark powers of divination (she once attended a séance which she described to Whittier in a fourteen-page letter), Miss Jewett converts two green china bowls into crystal balls with every hope
of horripilating her readers. The story is structured over a webwork of interruptions, as was “The Foreigner” a year before. In this case, however, the technique is clumsy and self-conscious, the repartee of the girl narrators precious, and the promptings of their circle of auditors arch. When old Mrs. Patton takes the two girls to her home one is reminded that Sarah Jewett “once laughingly told [Willa Cather] that her head was full of dear old houses and dear old women, and that when an old house and an old woman came together in her brain with a click, she knew that a story was under way.”10 Unfortunately, the story does not come up to either Mrs. Patton or her cozy home. It should be added, by way of extenuation, that “A Green Bowl” was first published as one of twelve anonymous chapters by twelve different authors in a newspaper Guessing Contest, the whole bedecked with a Decameron framework, later brought out as a volume called A House Party.11

So that there be no confusion about the seemingly uncollected story titled “The New-Year Guests” (Harper’s Bazar, January 11, 1896), let it be noted that the Weber Bibliography of the Published Writings of Sarah Orne Jewett is in error. Miss Jewett changed the name to “Aunt Cynthy Dallett” when three years later she included it as one of eight in The Queen’s Twin and Other Stories.

“Looking Back on Girlhood,”12 often cited yet not readily accessible, is the longest and most indicative autobiographical document pertaining to Miss Jewett’s background, aspirations, and emergence as a creative writer. For its value in triangulating her eventual course, it is positioned at the outset of the Uncollected volume—a kind of telescopic lens turned upon the artistic properties of these previously unexamined stories. Miss Jewett’s protean talents resist easy generalization, of course, but viewed chronologically as a separate entity from her collected works these stories bear inarguable resemblance to the others as, say, the two spires of Chartres Cathedral resemble one another. With the occasional lapses to be met in any author’s itinerary, she progresses steadily from redundant structure and

10 Willa Cather, editor, The Best Short Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett (Boston, 1925), I, xvi.
11 Edited by Paul Leicester Ford, and published by Small, Maynard & Co. (Boston, 1901).
12 Youth’s Companion, LXV (January 7, 1892), 5-6.
incident to fluidity of form, incisiveness of locale and characterization, and lucency of style.

Matthiessen says intemperately that "Without style Sarah Jewett’s material would be too slight to attract a second glance." Miss Jewett makes no pretensions of profundity. Her effective voice is muted-lyric, not oracular-epic. She avows that “you must write to the human heart,” which she consistently does in the manner of Mark Twain in his best chapters on boyhood on the Mississippi, staying well within his outer boundaries of romance and realism. She sees as indubitably as did Thoreau the transcendental ligature between man and nature, and a century before “the quality of life” became an ecological shibboleth she deprecates the toxic effect of urbanization on physical landscape and human psyche. Like Whitman, she perceives the likelihood of encountering saintliness in “an every-day girl” or the farmer down the lane. No avid feminist, she nevertheless broaches liberation of women from the deadening coils of domesticity. In A Country Doctor (1884) she prematurely pointed to the medical profession as an outlet. In these stories she promotes schoolteaching to a mystique; a goodly quota of her heroines accepts—or rejects—that road as the way out. War she appraises on the scale of the engaged individual. No prodigious field maneuvers, no spillage of gore, no flags flapping in parade, only the private anguish of a trapped spirit and his perfunctory annihilation.

In a time when all of these issues are under attack of strident rhetoric from factions on every side, the poised optimism of Miss Jewett’s views constitutes a reaffirmation. Spring, she assures, will be around again after long frost—it is immanent in the law of the universe and the nature of man. Only the naive will regard this as naivete.

13 Francis Otto Matthiessen, Sarah Orne Jewett (Boston, 1929), 146. 14 Letter to Willa Cather in Annie Fields, editor, Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett (Boston, 1911), 249.