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## “EVER DEVOTEDLY YOURS”

### The Whitlock-Howells Correspondence

BY GEORGE ARMS

EVERYONE knows William Dean Howells (1837-1920) for his early encouragement of such young men as Crane and Norris, who later became distinguished authors. And everyone knows Brand Whitlock (1869-1934) for his work in Belgium during the first world war. But we forget that Howells encouraged many writers—among them Whitlock—whom later critics have passed over. The following article, largely based upon fifteen manuscript letters in the Library, tells what these two men meant to each other. Dr. Arms, Professor of English at the University of New Mexico, is an old contributor to *THE JOURNAL*.

CURIOUSLY, for it is in exception to the general tone, Brand Whitlock's first recorded comment on Howells is not entirely favorable: "I think that if Mr. Howells has a fault—and it pains me to accuse him of one—it is that he makes, at times, his art his all, he is coldly classical, he seems to be showing one how perfectly, how calmly, how composedly, he can set life before you, but it is apt to be after all icy and cold."<sup>1</sup> The sentence occurs in a letter in 1897 to Whitlock's literary confidante, Octavia Roberts. It suggests more than a fresh acquaintance with Howells, and indeed everything in Whitlock's biography points to a knowledge since boyhood of the man who was to become his master.

In the late nineteenth century Howells would no more have escaped a boy with literary leanings than would T. S. Eliot escape a young poet today. To Ohio boys in the 1880's, the novelist was especially verifiable as a literary fact. When he began to publish his

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters and Journal of Brand Whitlock*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York, 1936), I, 15. Unless otherwise indicated, the biographical data are drawn from this work.

48 WEST 59TH STREET

February 11, 1904.

My dear Mr. Whittick:

I have just finished  
your story, *Her Infinite Variety*,  
and wish to tell you how  
extremely well done, I think,  
and restrainedly, guardedly,  
admirably. Without allowing  
yourself for a moment, you  
have conveyed the impossibil-  
ity, the valuelessness, some-  
times high point, of the  
lover, and have put us  
in possession of a true  
picture of his inner  
public and private life.

Yours sincerely  
H. S. Howells.

reminiscences, Whitlock's sense of their common background would have gained further strength. Urbana, where young Brand spent summers with his grandfather, was in the Howells country—within fifty miles of Xenia and Columbus. One friend of Howells, the sculptor Ward, had been born there; another, Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, had taught there in the early 1870's. Two Ohio worthies connected with Howells' youth, Tom Corwin and S. P. Chase, ranked high in the esteem of Whitlock's grandfather.

During Whitlock's early manhood, a series of events enormously increased this sense of personal relevance. In Chicago, where he worked on the *Herald*, he was drawn into the orbit of John P. Altgeld, the great liberal of Illinois politics. After reporting Altgeld's 1892 campaign for his newspaper, he received a political appointment at Springfield. There he grew close to the new governor, with whom he talked frequently about such novelists as Meredith, Tolstoy, Hardy, and Howells. One day in the state archives, while he was going through papers on the Chicago anarchists, he came upon Howells' famous *Tribune* letter—the letter that had defended the civil rights of the accused in the Haymarket affair when almost the whole world stood against them.<sup>2</sup>

It was also in Springfield that he met Clarence Darrow in 1894, a man who shared Altgeld's delight in Howells. From the first meeting Darrow took home a short story that Whitlock hoped to publish. Four years later Darrow felt that his protégé was good enough to recommend to Howells. But the first definite evidence of Howells' having seen Whitlock's work is not until 1900, when he wrote Darrow asking if "that Toledo friend of yours"—Whitlock had returned to Ohio to practice law—had a novel that he could submit to Harpers.<sup>3</sup>

Whitlock had by him, in fact, part of *The 13th District*, the writing of which had been interrupted when he went campaigning for Bryan, but the "splendid opportunity"<sup>4</sup> of Howells' letter set the

<sup>2</sup> *The Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*, ed. Mildred Howells (Garden City, 1928), I, 399-401.

<sup>3</sup> Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 32. Although no letter appears in the Howells papers at Harvard, Howells may not have begun to file Whitlock's letters until later. All known letters in the correspondence are mentioned either in the text of this article or in footnotes. The sequence is obviously not complete on either side, though Whitlock said that he saved every one of Howells' letters.

young author joyously at work. In the meanwhile he offered a short story and a plan for the novel, either through Darrow alone or with an attached letter. This brought a reply, probably the first letter from Howells to Whitlock. It carries with it a caution against too bold a treatment of sex:

HARPER & BROTHERS

PUBLISHERS

FRANKLIN SQUARE, NEW YORK CITY.

NOV. 19, 1900.

*My dear Mr. Whitlock:*

Mr. Darrow has sent me this story, and your letter about the possible novels. The letter is better than the story, or at least it appeals more to me; though the story is good, too, if it is not so good [as it seems to] me about the lobby. I didn't offer it to the magazine because I knew how full Mr. Alden is; but I want very much to see the two novels you speak of. I hope that of the "Congressional Campaign" can reduce its "French R[ealism]" to a very shadowy tenuity, and I will frankly [admit] that I am afraid of F. R. for our public. If it is the sexual sort of F. R., I don't like it. Can't you make your story just as true without it? The romantic idiots make that sort of thing the reproach of our school; and I believe there is a lot of *clean* truth in life. Do consider this point; but anyway, let me see both of your MSS. when finished. They are for book, *not* serial, use.

Yours sincerely,

W. D. HOWELLS.<sup>5</sup>

When the novel was completed early in 1901, Howells had probably ceased being the active literary adviser for his publishers that he had been when he first wrote. On June 19 he expressed doubt to

<sup>5</sup> From a copy in the Library of Congress, printed here (as are all subsequent Howells letters) with the kind permission of Miss Mildred Howells and Mr. John Mead Howells. Originals of the copies in the Library of Congress could not be located; all bracketed matter has been supplied by the editor to complete the sense.

"Congressional Campaign" became *The 13th District*.

Whitlock that Harpers would take the novel, but affirmed personal faith in it as "the best political story I know."<sup>6</sup> Harpers, dawdling with the novel for a few months, at first asked that it be made more romantic, then requested an additional chapter that Howells had proposed in compromise, and finally rejected it in October.<sup>7</sup>

Whitlock immediately packed the manuscript off to Bowen-Merrill—the most "hustleful" publishers in the country as he called them—and got an immediate acceptance. But Howells was not forgotten either by the author or publishers, as the first available Whitlock letter signifies:

COLE, WHITLOCK & COOPER  
ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELLORS AT LAW  
THE SPITZER BUILDING  
TOLEDO, OHIO

L. C. COLE

BRAND WHITLOCK

JOSEPH R. W. COOPER

16 APRIL 1902

*Dear Mr. Howells:*

Three weeks ago I received the first copy of my book, "The 13th District"—you see we picked out another name for it—and I immediately sent that copy to you. I hope it reached you safely. I write now, however, on another matter, one which has caused me not a little perplexity. It is this: I had told the Bowen-Merrill people of my desire to have an early copy of the book to send to you, and when the book came they wrote and asked me to ask you if you could not give some expression which they could use in their advertisements. I disliked very much to make such a request, and so hesitated from day to day, without however, finding the courage to write them a refusal. They have shown me such courtesy and so much generosity and are so interested in the book's success, that I do not like to decline to accede to any of their requests, though from this one I shrink as from something that is not altogether in good taste. However, let me frankly lay the whole matter before you, with

<sup>6</sup> The letter of June 19, 1901, is printed in Howells, *Life in Letters*, II, 145, and Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 33-34.

<sup>7</sup> Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 35.

the assurance that I shall be abundantly satisfied with any decision you may reach. You have been so kind to me, that I hate to burden you, but I am sure you will appreciate the delicacy of my position.

I look forward to the possibility of seeing you this summer; it would be a great moment for me.

Ever devotedly yours,

BRAND WHITLOCK<sup>8</sup>

The request was not to Howells' liking, as he let Whitlock know.<sup>9</sup> But Bowen-Merrill, in their tradition of hustle, and without permission, printed a Howells endorsement when they advertised the novel in the *Bookman* for May. A surprised bleat of pain came from Whitlock in an embarrassed letter. He disclaimed complicity but confessed that the origin of the endorsement had been a letter to Whitlock which had reached Bowen-Merrill by devious routing.<sup>10</sup>

Time has not dealt kindly with *The 13th District*. But it was a good novel in 1902, even though it did not reach the best-seller lists. This story of Ohio politicians focuses upon an aspiring Congressman named Garwood. While Garwood is not in every sense convincing as a character, he emerges as an individual and not merely as a political type. The "French realism" which Howells had feared finds no place in the novel. In its treatment of marriage, however, it does have a certain harsh perception that distinguishes it from much fiction writing of the period.

Definitely, Howells had reason to like the novel, and it is not surprising to find acquaintance now blossoming into a summer visit. In August, Whitlock stayed at Kittery Point for a week with the announced purpose of seeing more of his literary idol. With their common ideals in letters and politics, the visit resulted in real friendship. "I have become quite intimate," observed Whitlock after the first four days.<sup>11</sup> "It was one of the few times in life," as he wrote

<sup>8</sup> Harvard MS. Printed (as are all subsequent Whitlock letters) with the kind permission of the Harvard College Library and the Guaranty Trust Company of New York.

<sup>9</sup> Letter of April 19, 1902, printed in Howells, *Life in Letters*, II, 155.

<sup>10</sup> Letter of April 28, 1902 (Harvard MS.). Howells' reply is lacking.

<sup>11</sup> Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 37.

devotedly in his bread-and-butter letter, "when the ideal became real."<sup>12</sup>

That letter amply expresses the height of idolatry which Whitlock reached in his visit. One equally enthusiastic and of more permanent interest for its literary remarks was written two months later:

MADISON & 21ST STREETS,  
TOLEDO, OHIO, 5 NOVEMBER 1902

*Dear Mr. Howells:*

We have just finished reading "The Flight of Pony Baker," and I must hasten to tell you of the great joy it gave me. I began it by myself, but had not gone far before I had to call Mrs. Whitlock and begin all over again, to read it aloud to her. It seems to me to be one of the greatest of your many triumphs; it is all so touching and so true and so simple. How you can remember a boy's life so perfectly, and get into him so intimately is a marvel; the lantern making "the shadows of his legs, when he walked, go like scissors blades"! Of course; I remember it now distinctly, but how in the world did you *think* of it again? Jim Leonard and his baneful influence, and the beautiful character of Frank Baker, these were fine, and then, Pony's *intending* to run off; his growing feeling that it was his duty to run off, if he would keep his standing with his fellows; his reluctance, and then his never running off at all; nothing anywhere in literature comes up to this. You do understand boys and their nature; and "except ye become as little children—" this is the great triumph of it.

I have "Literature and Life" here on my table, and so we have another treat in store.

If I were to follow my constant impulse I would send you a daily letter, so that my expression might keep pace with the growth of my regard, and more than regard. But I spare you that, and trust to your prescience. Every time I read the Easy Chair, every time I take up my treasured copy of "A Boy's Town," the other day when I picked up "The Kentons" again; I feel that I must tell you of my love for them all. But you will know.

<sup>12</sup> Letter of August 25, 1902 (Harvard MS.).

I must compress the emotions of a month into these lines, and so I am going to ask if you remember my temerity in begging a photograph? I want one, indeed, need one badly, with your autograph where it will show plainly in the frame. Then we can look up at you often, to say nothing of making others look up at us because of the reflected glory that will thus be shed down upon us. Have you one that you can send me, and if you haven't, will you remember me when you have?

This last month I have done three short stories, and am now working on the Ohio novel again. One of the short stories is that which we lived at Kittery last summer, about the old woman we sought out for the dress maker here. You called the story a poem; I wished all the time I was writing it that I could do it into a poem, but poetry is far beyond me.

Next week I have to defend the murderess. I told her of your interest, and it touched her. The poor, poor thing. I shall let you know the result. I dread the ordeal, for I shall suffer with her: it makes me long more and more to leave the law.— But I have been much happier over the sociological tangle since you said what you did to me last summer. You have always been such a great help to me; I want you to know it, and I feel that I can't tell you often enough.

Isn't it too bad about Frank Norris? I feel a genuine grief, and then I shrank too long from writing him of my admiration. Perhaps we should obey such impulses when they are pure; the day comes when it's too late, and it brings it's [sic] regret.

Mrs. Whitlock joins me in love and remembrances to you and to Mrs. Howells.

Ever devotedly,

BRAND WHITLOCK

P.S. I passed through Hamilton the other evening, going to Indianapolis, and thought during the half hour of waiting, of your having lived there.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Harvard MS. The paragraph on *The Flight of Pony Baker*, even if overdrawn, serves to remind us that Howells' achievement in writing on children was far from inconsequential.



Howells' reply also gives evidence of increased personal regard. What he had written for the *North American Review*, his first public notice of Whitlock besides the abortive *Bookman* advertisement, was that literature's loss in the death of Frank Norris might be made up by such work as could come from the author of *The 13th District*.

48 WEST 59TH ST., NOV. 27, 1902.

*My dear Mr. Whitlock:*

I hoped that by waiting I might be able to answer your letter, but after all I can only thank you for it. What you say of my book goes straight to my heart, and stays there. Thank you and thank Mrs. Whitlock, too.

I have been writing about our great loss in Frank Norris's death, for the *North American*. At the close of the little paper you will find some words about yourself which I hope will not displease you.

The other day I was down at Kittery Point, to look after some changes we are making in the barn, to turn it into a library and study. You know I have bought the place, and intend to make it our home for the greater part of the year. It was lovely, down there, even so late as this, and if you do not go to Europe, I trust you and Mrs. Whitlock will come again to Kittery Point. Your landlord has made the old Sparehawk house over in good taste, and you could get a pleasant room there. Some time tell me the fate of your poor murderess.

All that you say of your literary work interests me, of course, and I shall want to read everything you write. A man who has begun as you have cannot go wrong—he is his own criterion.

My wife joins me in love to Mrs. Whitlock and yourself.

Yours cordially,

W. D. HOWELLS.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Rutgers MS. The article on Norris appeared in the *Review*, CLXXV (Dec., 1902), 769-78. A reply by Whitlock (Dec. 2, 1902, Harvard MS.) seems to me to beat up more enthusiasm for Norris than was evident in his first letter. (I may be unfair in thinking this, but see Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 23.) A response from Howells is dated Dec. 28, 1902 (Rutgers MS.).

Along with such praise, Howells sometimes qualified his criticism of Whitlock's art, as his next letter demonstrates. The story is the one that Whitlock had "lived at Kittery."

48 WEST 59TH ST., NEW YORK, MARCH 22, 1903.

*My dear Mr. Whitlock:*

Your MS. came while I was away at Atlantic City, and your letter to me got mislaid, so that I am writing without knowing quite what you wanted me to do. But I have read the story, and if you say so I will send it to the editor of the *Bookman*, who has lately asked me to let him see any short stories that come to me. To be honest, (a thing I never like,) the effect of your charming situation seems to me somehow to have partly slipped through your fingers. Is it because it was overweighted with too many details as to the experiences of the Bertrands after they get on the ground and before they face their mission? At any rate the adventure lacks the poignancy I had expected of it, but it might have this for a reader who had not been privy to the fact beforehand. I should like to try it on the *Bookman*.

Yours cordially,

W. D. HOWELLS<sup>15</sup>

Evidently he did try it on the *Bookman*, for it appeared there promptly in the May number. Although dilution and awkwardness may be charged against it, it is an interesting attempt in the form since perfected by the *New Yorker*. The Bertrands carry a message from their seamstress in Ohio to her friend in Maine, who as it turns out doesn't remember her. And in way of plot, that is all.

The technique in this story suggests Whitlock as primarily an artist, using political experience not as the sole province of fiction but merely as one legitimate means. *Her Infinite Variety*, a novellette, uses political material, yet it is essentially a delicate comedy of manners with the idea of woman's suffrage controlling but not obliterating the development. Though Howells could not fail to see a good deal of his own work in the story, he evidently thought his disciple retained independence:

<sup>15</sup> Rutgers MS.

48 WEST 59TH STREET

FEBRUARY 11, 1904.

*My dear Mr. Whitlock:*

I have just finished your story, *Her Infinite Variety*, and wish to tell you how extremely well done, I think it, how restrainedly, guardedly, admirably. Without committing yourself for a moment, you have conveyed the impossibility, the valuelessness, from every high point, of the lives, and have put us in possession of a true picture of American public and private life.

Yours sincerely,

W. D. HOWELLS.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time that Whitlock was happily using politics in his art, in his legal career he was effectively applying his knowledge. From a struggling young lawyer in Toledo he had developed into a great civic leader, the logical successor of "Golden Rule" Jones. In 1906 he became Mayor, an office that he held until 1913. He completed the first draft of a major novel just before taking office, and within the turmoil of a hard-hitting city administration, he still found time to write. As his interest in literature was undiminished, so was his love for Howells. Confessing to Octavia Roberts that every now and then he fell asleep in the "Editor's Easy Chair," he immediately cautioned her not to tell anyone: "you know I'd not own to any flaw or failing in him to anyone but you."<sup>17</sup>

The first letter after his election is one of the finest expressions of Whitlock's loyalty. It also serves to introduce correspondence on *The Turn of the Balance*:

<sup>16</sup> Rutgers MS. A letter of Nov. 25, 1904 (copy in the Library of Congress) praises *The Happy Average*.

<sup>17</sup> Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 59. Though always intelligent and urbane, the department called the "Editor's Easy Chair," which Howells wrote for *Harper's* from 1900 to 1920, frequently lacked vitality. In its last decade the author was well past his seventieth birthday.

629 WINTHROP STREET  
TOLEDO, OHIO

WE-QUE-TON-SING, MICHIGAN  
23 AUGUST 1906

*Dear Mr. Howells:-*

I have been intending to write to you for the last six months, but I have had so much to say, and I have been so anxious to say it in the right way, that I have put it off from day to day until—all this time has gone by. Of course, I wanted to tell you how much I was touched by the beautiful letter you sent to the dinner the respectables gave in my honor, but how was I to tell you? How could I *say* it then, how can I say it now? Only—it was so beautiful in you, and you made me more than happy: when I thought of acknowledging it, I really was in despair, and now, still am I in despair. Your kindness to me during all these years has been in many ways the most wonderful thing in my life. Will you suffer me to say that your approval of some things I have done has meant more than anything else could possibly have meant; I can do nothing but assure you of my devotion; I hope I may not prove unworthy. —These last six months have been full, as you can imagine of many remarkable experiences, many of them trying and perplexing, some of them veritable ordeals,—some of them real pleasures. The mayor of a big, turbulent American city has his hands full and his heart full, day and night, and at first I quailed—but I'm getting the hang of it and things are going along pretty well in Toledo—quite as well, I fancy, with me away as with me there. I have been doing my best, and I have at least learned a great deal, about men, and about life, and maybe, after awhile, I can get it into a book. Now that I have written those words, they do not sound quite right; why, I wonder this necessity of putting everything into a book? Mrs. Whitlock told me only last night, as we were crossing our beautiful little bay, that I never enjoy anything—woods, water, sunset—because I'm always longing to write it, or to be able to write it. Well—I'll not burden you with our long conversation

about expression, and the necessity, the [nerving?] necessity, for it. But what I mean, perhaps, [is this,?] that it should be enough to serve people without making copy of them, unless by making copy of them, you can serve them better, and help them more. I have a notion of writing, someday, a novel of the new municipal politics, into which I might put the various types of our reformers (I am growing to distrust and dislike that word)—and our radicals. Wouldn't it be a great thing to do a series of American political types in some such way as Turgé-nieff did Rudin, Laurétky, Bazároff, Litvinoff, Nezhdánoff and the rest? It would be great, indeed, to do one—if one could.

When I went into the Mayor's office I had on my hands still unfinished, a novel I had been working on for more than two years, and it was only just before I left home that I finished it at last. Now it is in the printer's hands, and will be out right after the holidays. It is the book about criminals I once told you I was going to write. I had a dreadful time with it, because, like an ass, I set out to write as if I were Tolstoy writing "War and Peace," and when it was done, so many characters, scenes, and incidents had I crowded into it, and so overloaded it with detail, that it had nearly 300000 words; and then I had [to] go through the agony and bloody sweat of cutting it down. I have just had my publishers send me their readers' written reviews; half of them praised it, even if they didn't understand it. Perhaps after all I didn't make clear what I meant though it was simple enough surely; i.e., that "criminals" are just people like the rest of us; that punishment is no business of ours, and that courts are just what the men that compose them are. But the other half of the readers resented it, bitterly, and got angry about it; and used all the phrases—"photographic", "unpleasant," "sordid," "pessimistic," "lacking in plot" "disagreeable, commonplace people," "lack of love interest," and—oh most unkindest cut!—that the realists "know nothing of the better class of people, nothing of society life!" So I have a foretaste of what the reviews will be, consoled, by the reflection that our reviewers who inhabit of course, only those thin upper regions where the noble rich hold sway, can not waste too much time in anything that treats of the mere imprisoned. But, to come to the

point, and to unfold the reason for my writing at such awful length, fearing that I could not make my meaning clear, I took the liberty of setting forth on the first page of the book, a favorite passage from my favorite book "a Boy's Town." It is that paragraph on page 74; beginning "On the other hand, a boy was bound to defend them," etc., and ending with that incomparable passage, "In fact, it seems best to be very careful how we try to do justice in this world, and mostly to leave retribution of all kinds to God, who really knows about things; and content ourselves as much as possible with mercy, whose mistakes are not so irreparable."

I love that, and often quote it, especially in speeches; no one ever said a better or a truer thing or said it half so well; it sums up a whole philosophy of life, and in a few words what perhaps I have failed to put in 300000. Have you any objection to my using it on the title page where it will help out my story?—and may in some sort serve as a tribute of my admiration for and love of its author? I shall print the accredited paragraph, merely, and I hope you will not mind. The book has many failings, but, like all of us, it has its good points too. John Barry has read the MS. and thinks highly of it.

He has been with us here on the shore of Little Traverse Bay for about two weeks. We are just across from Petoskey, and right beside Harbor Springs; across from us is Harbor Point, the Newport of the West, as the silly phrase is out here. We have come here for several summers—we are very quiet in Wequetonsing. Our little bay is very pretty, very much like yours at Kittery, the whole region indeed, reminds one of Kittery, in its woods and sparkling air and water. All we lack is the salt, in the water, and in our wits too—and you to talk to. But in lieu of that we talk about you to one of your most devoted admirers, Miss Octavia Roberts, an old school friend of Mrs. Whitlock's. She is a fine girl, with a rare appreciation. She has long wanted to write you, and acknowledge her debt, but has hesitated, and I have urged her to do so. I think now she will; she said the other night she would.

We expect to be in New York in the fall, and then, if there's anything left of you after so long a letter, I'll talk you to death.

Mrs. Whitlock and I send all our love to you and to Mrs. Howells, and all your household. Tell them all to be good to you, and to take good care of you.

Your ever devoted

We will be back home  
the first [of] September<sup>18</sup>

BRAND WHITLOCK

Such a letter deserved a prompt reply, and got it, with a prettily extended metaphor:

KITTERY POINT.

AUG. 29, 1906.

*Dear Whitlock:*

I shall be proud and glad to have you take a text from me for a book which I shall also be proud and glad of.

What a nice, long, kind letter you have written me! This is no answer; it is the sob of water which tells you your plummet has struck it. I proposed myself a summer of comparative leisure, but it has been a summer of comparative [bisure?] (there ought to be such a word from business) and yet of no great use: only more and more English sketches, and divers essays. I have a piece of fiction hanging by the gills, but no chance to land it. —We are all very well except my wife who is very poorly, but in the way to be better. She joins in love to your wife and you.

Yours affectionately

W. D. HOWELLS.<sup>19</sup>

*The Turn of the Balance*, a novel about injustice to criminals in both courts and prisons, was indeed a book in which Howells could delight. As we see it in perspective, it appears too heavily weighted by propaganda to retain the absolute quality of humanity that a great novel must have. However, though Howells himself hinted this possibility in the review that is mentioned in the following letter, he rejected it:

<sup>18</sup> Harvard MS. Common admiration for Howells had brought about a friendship between Barry and Whitlock. At this time Barry was known principally as a dramatic critic and playwright.

<sup>19</sup> Rutgers MS. The reading "bisure" is uncertain.

HOTEL REGENT, 70TH STREET, B[R]OADWAY,  
MARCH 17, 1907.

*My dear Whitlock:*

I agree with your wife in whatever she may say of your book and its author, and this without waiting for your gift-copy, for the publisher sent me advance sheets a fortnight ago, and I have read it with the feeling you would both like me to have. It came while I was still very weak from the grippe, and I had a dread of opening the package, for I knew the story would clutch me hard; and it did. Since *The Octopus*, there has been no novel so great, unless it is *Resurrection*, which yours more favors through the resemblance which is natural from the subject. The Editor of the *North American Review* has let me write a paragraph about it for his *Diary*, where I treat of it as a public event. I cannot see how it will escape some such general recognition; it has already been seen in that light, even by the poor, purblind *Herald*. It will not make you friends—among the enemy, and that is a pity—for the enemy; but it will help you with the unhappy and the unfortunate, as it is our convention to call those who are not rich and powerful. In my paragraph I have been first to ask you the question which the enemy will ask you often enough, namely: how you make your personal convictions square with your official functions; but this is a question which you need not answer me or them. My space and point of view forbade me to take note of the high artistic merit of the book, though I did get in something about its scope and grasp, and the infinity of detail which you make perform the effect of mass. I think that the work will set you where you belong, and I hope that this will not be on a merely literary eminence, which you do not care for. Think of your having done such a book when you are only a little more than half my age! I wish you would satisfy a curiosity I have as to what your local papers say of it, and would send me their notices.

With best regards to Mrs. Whitlock,

Yours affectionately,

[NO SIGNATURE APPEARS]



P.S. Just what were those suits in which you forced the State of Ohio to the wall on certain points of municipal legislation?<sup>20</sup>

To a man like Howells, with his doctrine of socialism somewhat worn by the passage of years but with his humanitarianism undiminished, the spirit of *The Turn*—comparatively free from sentimentality—could not but make an appeal. Since his *Suburban Sketches* he had shown a tender sympathy with the difficulties facing released prisoners, a situation fully handled in Whitlock's novel. A month after the book appeared Howells suggested a practical reform to Whitlock:

Cannot you inspire some decent man to bring a bill into the legislature requiring the State to pay a convict's family full wages for the work he does, after deducting a fair price for his board? The present system of robbing his wife and children of his earnings is damnable, and a worse theft than any he could have committed. I have touched on this point in a book supposing a visit to Altruria which I am just publishing—"Through the Eye of the Needle."<sup>21</sup>

Whitlock's practical ability to realize social changes no doubt attracted Howells over and above what he found in the novels of his friend. In contrast with Lowell's advice to Howells to stay away from non-literary work if he hoped to write at his best, Howells strongly urged Whitlock to remain in law and politics.<sup>22</sup> He congratulated Whitlock on his re-election in 1907 with a literary allusion that was significant of this feeling. "The Turn of the Balance," he wrote, "seems permanently in the right direction at Toledo."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Rutgers MS. Bracketed material has been supplied by the editor. The "paragraph" which appeared in the *Review*, CLXXXIV (April 5, 1907), 781-83, was anonymous. Apropos the comparison with Tolstoy, Upton Sinclair called the book *greater* than *Resurrection*. (Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, li). Other admirers of the novel were Jack London, Vachel Lindsay, and Lincoln Steffens (*ibid.*).

<sup>21</sup> From a letter of April 6, 1907 (Rutgers MS.). The relevant material may be found pp. 184-89 in *Suburban Sketches* (Boston, 1871), and pp. 168-69 in *Through the Eye of the Needle* (New York, 1907). See also the short story, "A Circle in the Water," in *A Pair of Patient Lovers* (New York, 1901).

<sup>22</sup> Howells' letter of Dec. 28, 1902 (Rutgers MS.), and Whitlock's letter of Nov. 5, 1902 (printed above).

<sup>23</sup> From a letter of Nov. 6, 1907 (Rutgers MS.).

In return for this admiration, Whitlock, who was no starry-eyed reformer but a relatively hard-headed progressive, respected Howells' political ideals. He even felt that Howells' second utopian novel was "very fine."<sup>24</sup>

When Whitlock came to have tea with the Howellses in February, 1909, he reported the political part of the talk most vividly. Indeed, he was somewhat censorious of Howells' handsome apartment—"cooperative, if not quite Altrurian"—and of his not writing an appeal for the Russian revolutionist Gorky. But in essence they agreed:

We talked, too, of sociology, and the Socialists, and when he asked me "what I was" I had to say that as near as I could define my attitude, it was—in ultimate ideal—that far-off, impossible, hopeless ideal of a day that is reserved for infinite stretches of futurity, when men will be so good and brotherly that laws will be unnecessary—of the philosophic anarchists like Emerson and Tolstoy and Whitman and our Sam Jones. But I thought we'd have to go through Socialism to get to it, and I was willing to do that. He said, "That's just what I am—we'll have to pass under the yoke."<sup>25</sup>

Later in the same year Whitlock called again. This time the talk was probably more literary, for Howells told him that he was preparing a paper on him.<sup>26</sup> As it appeared, the article reviews Whitlock's entire literary career up to its writing, and is the most extended estimate by Howells of his protégé's work. Utilizing four novels as the basis of discussion, it undertakes to defend its title—that Whitlock is "A Political Novelist and More."<sup>27</sup> In *The 13th District*, to which nearly half the study is given, Howells perceives the theme that "a man's public life and private life are of a sole texture." Then rather rapidly celebrating *Her Infinite Variety* and *The Happy*

<sup>24</sup> Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 78.

<sup>25</sup> Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 110-11. The delightful account ought to be read in its entirety. A letter of Feb. 7, 1909, from Howells (Rutgers MS.) had asked Whitlock to call.

<sup>26</sup> The preparation occasioned a number of short letters: by Howells—Dec. 22, 1909, Jan. 2, 1910, Feb. 8, 1910, Feb. 17, 1910, April 30, 1910 (Rutgers MSS.); by Whitlock—Jan. 5, 1910, Feb. 12, 1910 (Harvard MSS.). Following this sequence is another letter by Whitlock of Dec. 22, 1910 (Harvard MS.), largely consisting of pessimistic reflections on the holiday season.

<sup>27</sup> *North American Review*, CXCII (July, 1910), 93-100.

*Average* as delicious comedy and true idyl, he takes up *The Turn of the Balance*. With this novel his principal concern is in the authority of the author and power of his documentation. Though Howells believes it to be a "work of literary art," his concern here—as in the earlier notice—is mostly with its reliability and social effect. "Perhaps after the sins it accuses are repented of we shall enjoy its aesthetic beauty and experience from it in the retrospect that 'noble terror' which the Greeks thought the office of tragedy."

With the *Review* article, the personal and literary relationship of Whitlock and Howells is pretty well rounded out. Friendship and admiration continued, but without the frequency of communion that existed in earlier years. As occasion arose, they would correspond on a specific problem of political action,<sup>28</sup> or on a review Howells had written in *Harper's Magazine*.<sup>29</sup> They saw each other for the last time in the winter of 1915-16. In the meanwhile, largely through Howells' urging, Whitlock had been appointed minister to Belgium.<sup>30</sup> To him in that position Howells addressed the final letter of which there is record:

W. D. HOWELLS, 130 WEST 57TH STREET

MAY 8, 1918.

*My dear Whitlock:*

I duly received the beautiful medallion which you sent me, and I wish to thank you for it after so many days as have elapsed since it came to me in Florida. It is truly classic.

We have been following your story of the Belgian crime, and suffering as if the story, were all new. In fact you have made it new; but I think your full and final record of it will be in fiction, in the novel which the hope and faith of us who went with you abroad to help you write will be effective in your art. No

<sup>28</sup> Whitlock's letter of Jan. 4, 1911 (Harvard MS.) and Howells' letter of Jan. 6, 1911 (Rutgers MS.). The story behind this exchange may well be significant in the attitude of the writers toward political agitation.

<sup>29</sup> [Review of *Forty Years of It*,] *Harper's Magazine*, CXXIX (July, 1914), 310-13. Howells praised the work in Belgium in a letter of Nov. 9, 1914 (copy in Library of Congress), and Whitlock replied Dec. 19, 1914 (Harvard MS.). This last letter is printed in Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 182, and Howells, *Life in Letters*, II, 341-42.

<sup>30</sup> See Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 171-72, and Howells, *Life in Letters*, II, 339-41.

one can be before you in that! You are fit to have been the witness of the great things you have seen.

I am getting old[er] day by day, and I cannot tell you fully what I feel. But sometime yet I hope to do so when we meet after the war I long to outlive.

Just now we are off for Kittery Point where we shall spend the summer with my son and his family.

Do give our love to Mrs. Whitlock and believe me with all affection and honor.

Yours sincerely,

W. D. HOWELLS.<sup>31</sup>

As those familiar with Whitlock's life know, his post-war years were marked by a reaction against the liberal impulses of his earlier career. Seemingly unable to adjust himself either to America specifically or to a post-war world in general, he lived for the most part at Cannes. He continued writing, but probably not the work he had always hoped to do when he was busily engaged in politics.<sup>32</sup> As much as to any of his former ideals he remained steadfast to his faith in his literary master. Howells' death in 1920 had deprived him of counsel that might have sweetened his bitterness. Of this he seemed aware when he wrote in his journal:

There is no one to take his place—not one. There is no literature in America any more; the waves of democracy are swamping it, with all the culture and refinement of the elect. But he, with his deep human sympathies, would have been the first to say that any art that was for the elect alone was no art at all, and perhaps he was right. . . . I have lost a master and a friend!<sup>33</sup>

It had been his daily habit to think of Howells, whose name still continued to the end of Whitlock's life to have the "old magic" of younger days.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> From a copy in the Library of Congress. Concerning bracketed matter, see footnote 5.

<sup>32</sup> Yet Allan Nevins believes *J. Hardin & Son* his best novel (Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, lxxvii).

<sup>33</sup> Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, II, 598.

<sup>34</sup> Whitlock, *Letters and Journal*, I, 312, 548.