

HOWELLS IN CARICATURE

BY CLARA AND RUDOLF KIRK

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In 1911, when Walter Pulitzer was planning a small magazine named *Satire*, he wrote to various distinguished—and humorous—English and American men of letters to ask them to contribute a definition of satire to his new publication. On the inside of the cover of the first number, September 20, 1911, under the heading “Letters from Eminent Humorists,” he displayed the replies he had received from such men as Owen Seaman, the editor of *Punch*, Elbert Hubbard, the editor of *The Philistine*, and Robert Herrick, the novelist and professor of English at the University of Chicago. Three of these replies he reproduced in facsimile: one a typed letter from Theodore Roosevelt, another written in longhand by Andrew Lang, “The Dean of English Writers,” and a third in the hand of W. D. Howells, “The Dean of American Writers.”

Though Howells expressed great interest in Pulitzer’s venture, he declined to contribute, because, he said, “my sword is hired out to Franklin Square”—in other words, he was under contract to give all he wrote to the House of Harper. Howells’s letter pleased the editor so much that he not only published it in facsimile but also placed at the top of the page a tiny cartoon of Howells addressing himself to the Spirit of Satire, who is standing on Howells’s hand. The letter¹ reads as follows:

April 23, 1911.

Dear Mr. Pulitzer,

I shall be so much interested to see *Satire* that I shall be almost willing to find myself satirized in it. As for the rest, I am an old *condottiere*, you know, and my sword is hired out to Franklin Square; (I do my best to make my unswerving fealty a virtue.

Yours sincerely

W. D. Howells.

Six months after the publication of this letter, Howells was depicted as the fourth in a series of caricatures over the caption “Sacrificial Somebodies,” which Pulitzer ran as extras to many numbers of *Satire*. On March 2, 1912, as *Satire*’s contribution to the national

¹ We are indebted to Professor W. W. Howells of Harvard University for permission to republish this letter.



LETTERS FROM Eminent Humorists

You see, SATIRE
has taken you at
your word, Mr.
Howells!



FROM THE DEAN OF ENGLISH WRITERS.

FROM THE DEAN OF AMERICAN WRITERS.

1 Marlborough Road
London, W.1
June 10

Dear Sir,

One could not define
satire without writing a
preliminary sketch of its
history. I do not have time and
space; but it is plain that the
formal English satire in
Roman times is plausible
possibly yours
at long

April 23, 1911
Dear Mr. Putnam

I shall be so much
interested to see satire that I
shall be almost willing to
find myself satirized in it.
As for the rest, I am an
old "condition," you know,
and my sword is fixed out
to Franklin Square; (I
do my best to make my
anonymous fealty a virtue.)
Yours sincerely
W. D. Howells

THIS FROM THE ARCH SATIRIST!

My dear Sir:

I have never tried my hand at satire not as I do not

wish to give you the opinion you desire.

Sincerely yours,

J. Russell G.



I am the happy receiver of your letter wishing me to give you
a definition of satire. Others will perform this task better than
I could, but I will give you a brilliant example of this form of
humor. In your letter you say, "If you are given the opportunity
a rhymed definition will be the more acceptable." Well, I have
done little else but write verses for the last 18 years.

OWEN SEAMAN,
Editor of London Punch.

I surely am interested in your magazine venture. Just what
satire is I do not know, but I rather imagine it is the art of
saying nasty things in a pleasant way. My batting average in
this line is very low, however, so I am not competent to speak
but I wish you all the success you deserve. With all kind
wishes ever.

ELBERT HUBBARD,
Editor of The Philistine

I am heartily in sympathy with the purpose of your project
and much interested in your success.

ROBERT HERRICK,
Professor of English, University of Chicago.

acclaim of Howells's seventy-fifth birthday, Howells was the "Somebody" who was "sacrificed." The *New York Times*, the *New York Sun*, *Harper's Weekly*, and other publications, were at this time paying tribute to the nation's most well-loved author. It remained for *Satire* to print a genial sketch of the occupant of *Harper's* "Easy Chair" with his wares under his arm. The three novels singled out were considered then—and now—Howells's most permanent achievements: *A Modern Instance* (1882), *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885), and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). *London Films* (1906) had recently appeared in the Library Edition (1911); perhaps it was added to the list as a bid for English subscriptions to *Satire*.

Since *Satire* and all its sketches are long ago forgotten, and, indeed, since only two or three copies are now known to have survived, we here reproduce these cartoons of Howells at seventy-five as a reminder of the affectionate regard in which the "Dean" was held by the press in the days before the first World War. A photograph of the sketches and the accompanying letter have been presented to the Rutgers University Library to add to the growing Howells collection.



SATIRE'S Sacrificial Somebodies

No. 4 — WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS