

the poetry of *the ladies' home journal* from 1895 to 1905

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During the 1890's, under the astute editorship of Edward W. Bok, *The Ladies' Home Journal* achieved the largest circulation of any magazine in the world. By 1910 the *Journal* had grown from twenty-four pages to a seventy-five page magazine with a circulation of more than a million. Bok's conception of the *Journal* as a source of "uplift and inspiration" somewhat limited the material which could be included, but in fact, at least in the early years of Bok's editorship, the magazine ranged over a much wider area than one would expect. By 1910, however, Bok's reaction to the "increasing vulgarity" and general decline of the age had led the *Journal* into a much more restricted area of subject matter, although it was more than twice as large as in the early days of his editorship. Such a narrowing of interest, which made the *Journal* much more exclusively a "woman's" magazine, reflects the inability of men like Bok to come to grips with the intellectual winds of change which swept America before World War I.

The shrinking of the *Journal* from a semi-literary magazine to a publication devoted almost exclusively to matters of feminine dress and household hints is most clearly revealed during the decade from 1895 to 1905. Bok came to the editor's chair from Scribners in 1889, and, in general, the tone of the first years under his leadership is quite literary. From December of 1893 to March of 1895, for example, the *Journal* printed in each issue a slightly abridged chapter of William Dean Howells' *My Literary Passions* (published in book form in 1895). These essays are quite serious literary criticism in which Howells discusses such figures as Dante, Henry James, Turgenev, Emerson, Lowell, Holmes, Hardy, Tolstoy ("noblest of enthusiasms"), and they are as good as any of the literary essays printed in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Weekly* or the *North American Review* during the same years. In addition,

during 1895 nearly every issue contained at least two articles devoted to "serious" literature, a column called "Literary Queries" and other items of general literary interest, such as "The Wives of Three Authors: Mrs. Cable, Mrs. Doyle, and Mrs. Hardy." By 1905, however, the number of literary articles had been reduced by more than half, nearly all of these being supplied by Hamilton W. Mabie's general literary column; and the space formerly allotted to literary items was taken up by such household columns as "Before and After Cleaning Up," "The Young Mother and Her Child," "How I Manage My Laundry," "Why I Do Not Believe in Much Meat," "Every Day Mishaps in Cooking," "If I Were You—Little Chats with Young Women," "New Shirtwaist Embroideries" and so on. As Bok admits, in his own modest way, "it is a rare editor who rightly gauges his public psychology";¹ and as long as items of literary interest possessed just enough snob appeal to interest the women of Gopher Prairie, Bok provided an amazingly broad range of literary fare. But when he discovered that fashions, advice columns and floral hints were more to his readers' tastes, the interest of the *Journal* in literary essays, fiction and poetry soon faded.

Such an attenuation of interest in and decline of the semi-literary tone is most clearly seen in relation to the poetry printed in the *Journal* during this decade. In 1895, for example, with an average issue of thirty-two pages, the *Journal* printed thirty-three poems during the year. By 1905, however, the number had dwindled to eighteen, with the average length of the magazine for that year more than twice as much. Again, in 1895 the magazine had a special poetry page called "Under the Evening Lamp" in which from two to nine poems per issue were printed. In 1905 this column had been replaced by a section called "That Reminds Me," containing aphorisms, witty sayings, short jokes and an occasional poem, usually designed for children. Although it is a critical truism that *fin de siècle* popular poetry moves further and further from the main issues of American life, critics have seldom gone beyond this damning generalization, even though it may also be argued that the literature designed for popular consumption is perhaps as essential in understanding the culture as the work of its major writers.² The purpose of this paper, then, is to investigate the poetry of *The Ladies' Home Journal* for the years 1895, 1900 and 1905, in order to study the basic themes adumbrated in the popular poetry of these years, and to study the relationship of the poetry to the rapidly changing climate of American thought during this period.³

The first major theme of *Journal* poetry of this decade is the celebration of childhood in general, and boyhood in particular. More than half of the poems printed in 1895 deal directly with children, although by 1905, children as subject matter have almost totally disappeared, being replaced by the special pages devoted to children's poetry. Eugene Field's poem, "Jes' 'Fore Christmas," illustrates the essential qualities of

the *Journal's* nostalgic attitude toward the age of innocence. Its famous opening lines immediately establish the locale as that of the "midwestern village, hallowed home of log cabins and barefoot boys":⁴

Father calls me William, sister calls me Will,
Mother calls me Willie—but the fellers call me Bill!
Mighty glad I ain't a girl—ruther be a boy
Without them sashes, curls an' things that's worn by Fauntleroy!⁵

Thirty years before, Mark Twain had demonstrated in the contrasting stories "The Story of the Bad Little Boy" and "The Story of the Good Little Boy" that too much goodness in little boys did not square with the American male's image of himself. Like Twain's Jim, Field's Bill is a rascal, sicking his dog on the cat, catching rides on the grocery cart, stealing green apples and slipping off to swim in the pond. But *Journal* readers knew that Bill's rather cynical philosophy, "Jes' 'fore Christmas be a good as you kin be!" in reality concealed a heart of gold. As a man, Bill will be all a parent could ask for. Field's use of dialect is characteristic of the poetry about children in the *Journal*; evidently readers associate dialect with "home-grown" virtues quite alien to the sophistication of the city.

In the April and October issues of 1905, two other poems illustrate that the attitudes toward childhood have changed very little. The first, called "His New Brother," recounts a boy's reaction to the new baby:

Now we've got to dress and feed him,
And we really didn't need him
Mor'n a frog;
Why'd they buy a baby brother
When they know I'd good deal ruther
Have a dog! (p. 19)

The second poem deals with a young boy's first experience with puppy love and, in its patronizing spelling, indicates the essential distance, from the adult point of view at least, that boyhood experiences lie from the world of adult emotion:

uve borak mi hart butt thare are uther gurls
With jusst uz lubly faises. they are purl
Beside uv u ann dyen fore a sho
too be mi awl fore thay have tolled me so. (p. 3)

In the sentimentalization of childhood, girls are rarely mentioned. For their essential chastity, their future roles as wives and mothers and guardians of culture have so limited their childhood activities as to eliminate them from both the dialect and antics of boyhood.⁶ Central to the *Journal's* celebration of childhood is the belief that the youth of its readers was in substance as the popular poetry presents it. But as the world moved on and the idyllic picture was destroyed in fact, the *Journal* shifted from poems about childhood to poems designed solely

JES' FORE CHRISTMAS

BY EUGENE FIELD

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALICE BARBER STEPHENS



FATHER calls me William, sister calls me Will,
 Mother calls me Willie—but the fellers call me Bill!
 Mighty glad I ain't a girl—ruther be a boy
 Without them sashes, curls an' things that's worn by Fauntleroy!
 Love to chawnk green apples an' go swimmin' in the lake—
 Hate to take the castor-ile they give f'r belly-ache!
 Most all the time the hull year 'roun' there ain't no flies on me,
 But jes' fore Christmas I'm as good as I kin be!



II

Got a yaller dog named Sport—sick 'im on the cat,
 Fust thing *she* knows she doesn't know where she is at!
 Got a clipper-sled, an' when us boys goes out to slide
 Long comes the grocery cart an' we all hook a ride!
 But, sometimes, when the grocery man is worried and cross,
 He reaches at me with his whip, and larrups up his boss;
 An' then I laff and holler: "Oh, you never teched *me*!"
 But jes' fore Christmas I'm as good as I kin be!

III
 Gran'ma says she hopes that when I git to be a man
 I'll be a missioner, like her oldest brother Dan,
 As wuz et up by the cannib'ls that lives in Ceylon's isle,
 Where every prospect pleases an' only man is vile!
 But gran'ma she had never been to see a Wild West show,
 Or read the life uv Daniel Boone, or else I guess she'd know
 That Buffalo Bill an' cowboys is good enough f'r me—
 Excep' jes' fore Christmas, when I'm good as I kin be!



IV

Then ol' Sport he hangs around, so solum like an' still—
 His eyes they seem a-sayin': "What's er matter, little Bill!
 The cat she sneaks down off her perch, a wonderin' what's
 Uv them two enemies uv hern that use ter make things hu-
 But I am so perllite and stick so earnestlike to biz,
 That mother sez to father: "How improved our Willie is!
 But father, havin' been a boy hisself, suspicions me,
 When, jes' fore Christmas, I'm as good as I kin be!

V

For Christmas, with its lots an' lots uv candies, cakes an'
 Wuz made, they say, f'r proper kids, and *not* f'r naughty!
 So wash yer face, and bresh yer hair, an' mind yer p's an'
 An' don't bust out yer pantaloons, an' don't wear out yer s-
 Say yessum to the ladies, an' yessir to the men,
 An' when they's company don't pass yer plate f'r ple again!
 But, thinkin' uv the things you'd like to see upon *that tree*!
 Jes' fore Christmas be as good as you kin be!

for children. Copiously illustrated, weak imitations of Lewis Carroll, such poems as Edward Lear's "The Quangle Wangle's Hat" ("On the top of the Crumpetty Tree / The Quangle Wangle sat, / But his face you could not see, / On account of his Beaver hat") and "Paul Piper's Animal Antics" retreat into a world of fantasy where childhood can be forever frozen in a sentimental past, which no longer exists, even if—apparently—it once did.

Closely related to the celebration of childhood, the second major theme of *Journal* poetry is the idealization of the most sacrosanct of American images—Mother.⁷ One would expect this, of course, in a magazine devoted to the "women of America" as they protect the values of the home, but the subject is so insisted upon as to be almost hysterical. Sweetheart, wife, mother—if any theme remains unchanged in *Journal* poetry it is their glorification. One of the leading series of articles which began in the January, 1895, issue is called "The Woman Who Most Influenced Me." The mothers of such diverse figures as Hamlin Garland and Thomas Wentworth Higginson are all apotheosized in the series. This theme in prose perhaps reaches its climax in the lead article of the July, 1905, issue in Theodore Roosevelt's hymn of praise, "The American Woman as a Mother." His concluding remarks indicate the general tenor of the essay: "Her very name stands for loving unselfishness and self-abnegation, and, in any society fit to exist, is fraught with associations which render it holy" (p. 4). That such an article as Roosevelt's can exist along side of the negative attitude expressed by ex-President Grover Cleveland, "Would Woman Suffrage be Unwise?" (October, 1905), indicates the central note of all the articles, editorials and the majority of the poetry—woman's place is in the home; social issues, political responsibilities and careers must be denied for the high calling of the family.

Perhaps the clearest expression of this theme occurs in a poem by Lulu McNab which Mrs. Lyman Abbott praises in her column, "Just Among Ourselves: A Department Devoted to a Social Interchange of Ideas":

Sitting here in the western light,
Hidden here by the sunset seas,
I think of the old ambitions bright,
And cannot but smile at life's mysteries.
I planned for an active, stirring life,
Great deeds to do, and a life of song;
I gave up all as a loving wife
And I cannot think my choice was wrong.

The narrator, the mother of two little girls, was once tempted to be an opera singer, to "sway the souls in opera tiers." But in her role as wife and mother she has found far greater fulfillment:

Far better to be a loving wife,
Than a lonely girl in a world of sin,

Better to live this common life
 And reign a pure home's walls within.
 My husband's smile, my baby's kiss,
 Outweight in my thoughts earth's glittering gems,
 And I think, in future scenes of bliss,
 Earth's mothers will gain Heaven's diadems.⁸

The *Journal* was not above printing articles about opera singers and even actresses, but as this poem makes clear, such careers (any career in Bok's view) took place in a "world of sin" where contamination was an inescapable corollary. In contrast, as Roosevelt expressed it paraphrasing the book of Proverbs, "all men shall rise up and call her [mother] blessed." Or as these poems make clear, the contrast with a world of sin is the pure home and the apparently inevitable reward of "Heaven's diadems."

Because this theme was so near the *Journal's* heart, every major poetic figure was adduced to witness the glory of mother and home. In a rough approximation of blank verse, Henry Van Dyke's poem "A Christmas Prayer for the Home" leads off the Christmas issue of 1904. In the same issue, the ghost of Longfellow is called up to bless the home. The *Journal* had printed W. L. Taylor's illustrations of such Longfellow characters as Evangeline and Hiawatha. The last illustration of the series presents an idyllic picture of a family before a fireplace. From Longfellow's "Song" the following stanza provides the caption to Taylor's illustration:

Stay, stay at home, my heart, and rest;
 Home-keeping hearts are happiest,
 For those that wander they know not where
 Are full of trouble and full of care;
 To stay at home is best.

Other literary lights, not quite so famous as the New England poet, are also called upon to praise the home. Robert J. Burdette, a fairly well-known fiction writer and frequent contributor to the *Journal's* pages, contributes a poem in his essay "The Woman Who Most Influenced Me." Albert Bigelow Paine, of more extended fame as Mark Twain's first editor, also joins the chorus:

The gray old world goes on and on,
 Its labors shall never cease,
 But here is the blush of creation's dawn,
 And the blossoming rose of peace.
 And what do I care for the mountain's crest,
 And what for the lonesome lea?
 My baby lies on its mother's breast,
 And the mother is here with me. (October, 1895, p. 17)

The glorification of mother and home is perhaps the most consistent of the *Journal's* attitudes. Yet even in this area, one can see that by 1905



"HOME-KEEPING HEARTS ARE HAPPIEST" read the flossy type beneath this W. L. Taylor illustration in the July, 1895 **LHJ** (p. 1). The line is from Longfellow's "Song" (see text).

the magazine's insistence on the sanctity of the home is beginning to be somewhat strident, reacting perhaps unconsciously to the breakdown of those values associated with the American woman in her role as wife, mother, homemaker—purity, peace of mind, love of family and devotion to God. In 1895 such values are taken for granted; by 1905, however, such figures as Roosevelt, Cleveland, Longfellow, Van Dyke and so on have been called to the defense of home and hearth, a defense which only ten years earlier was apparently not needed.

Almost as pervasive as the glorification of mother and home is the third major theme adumbrated in the poetry of this decade, that of the glories of rural America. This theme has its roots much earlier in the century, in the "picturesque school" of nature, a kind of watered-down version of Emersonian transcendentalism; in the late 90's it receives a fresh impetus in reaction to the increasing urbanization and growth of the city. Although the superiority of the rural character to his city cousin and of rural values to the corruption of the urban areas is only implied in the poetry of 1895, by 1905, largely because of Bok's editorials and "beautify America" campaigns, the theme becomes quite explicit.

In Field's poem "Jes' 'Fore Christmas," which I have discussed in connection with the theme of childhood, although the childish pranks of Bill are largely those of rural areas, the poem does not make explicit the contrast between urban and country life. But the illustrations, quite unconsciously it seems to me, make this contrast quite evident. Of the four pictures, two show what are obviously rural scenes. In one, Bill is straddling a Lincoln split-rail fence; the background is open spaces and budding nature; in the other, he is sledding in what is obviously a small village street. Throughout the late 90's, when the children's poetry is illustrated, as in the Greenaway and Lear drawings, the scenes are always rural, identifying in an unobtrusive way the glories of childhood with the small rural community. Part of the subtle identification of rural values with childhood is also accomplished by the use of dialect in the poetry. To the leading authors of the "pure beauty" school of poetry, Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Clarence Stedman, dialect poetry was inferior; but to a generation of readers raised on Booth Tarkington, Eugene Field and James Whitcomb Riley (Bok's favorite poet), dialect was simply a part of the agrarian heritage, and not at all a literary technique. The use of dialect is not limited to poems about children either. In "Jest Her Way," published in the Christmas issue of 1894, for example, dialect is used as a part of the sterling character of a grandmother who has a tendency to "meddle" in the affairs of her children, now grown up and away from home. But as the poet makes clear, it is because of grandmother's unselfish interest in her offspring's life; besides, it's "jest her way." Quite incidental to the poem, but related to the use of rural dialect, is the poet's offhand identification of grandmother's location—the children bring "city news" when they come to visit.

Much of the *Journal* poetry of this period is the typical sentimentalization of nature which is associated with the garden-club variety of nature lovers. There are poems on spring ("May," "May Madrigal," "A Robin's Egg" and so on), fall ("October Song," "Grapevine Round the Porch," "Possum Time") and other natural scenes. Much of the incidental imagery is also associated with nature: young maidens are "pure as lilies," mothers are "sweet as roses" and in the Paine poem quoted

above, the home is compared to “the blush of creation’s dawn, / And the blossoming rose of peace.” While these poems do not directly draw a contrast to the urban dweller’s lack of “God’s pure air,” they do provide a ready-made sentimental tradition which is antithetical to city life.

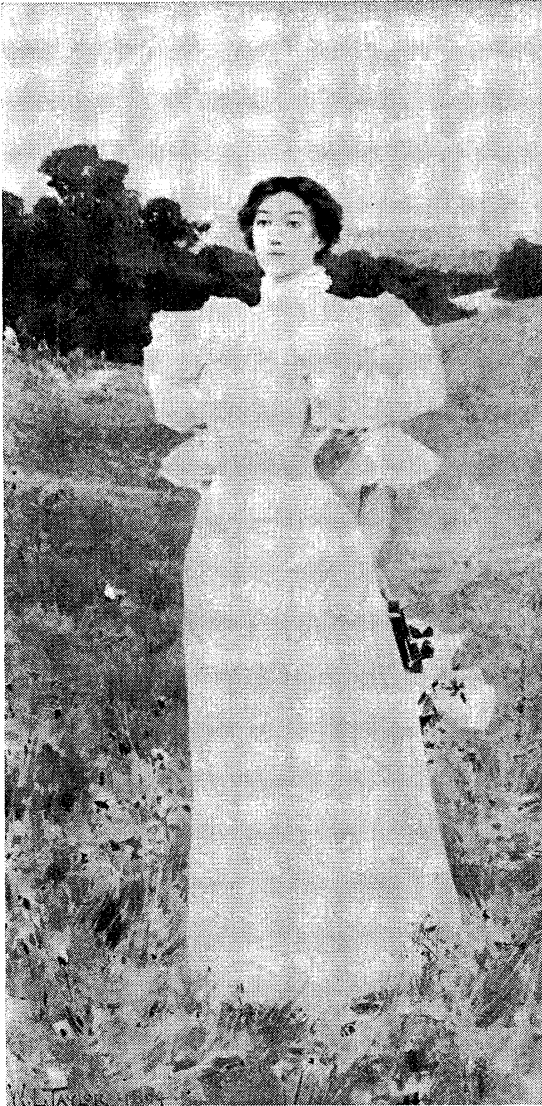
Such a contrast is made explicitly in two poems which clearly establish the *Journal’s* attitude toward city life. The first, “If Only I Might Go,” subtitled “The Song of a Feverish Invalid in Town” (May, 1895), asserts that the country is medicine enough for any invalid imprisoned in “city walls”:

I should get well if only I might go
And lie beside a river that I know.
A river in a great, green, silent wood,
Where even God must *still* find all things “good” (my italics).
I could not move much—I would only lie
On the cool moss and lose my wish to die.
The cool, cool moss! All full of ruby urns,
And little silver moons, and tiny ferns,
How sweet, how dewy-fresh its breath would be!
That woodland scent alone would cure me!
. . . And all this pain and fever drown so deep,
That, waking by that lapping, forest stream,
This pain and fever all would seem a dream!

Obviously Darwin’s nature, “red in tooth and claw,” has not penetrated the *Journal’s* pages. Yet the recognition of the evil in the city has made its impress; the “good” still exists in a poeticized nature of “ruby urns” and “tiny ferns” which, essentially, is a world of fantasy.

For the July, 1895, issue, Taylor abandoned the Longfellow illustrations to do an elaborate layout for Modeste H. Jordan’s poem “Where Town and Country Meet.” In the background is the skyline of a city; a pure maiden, dressed all in white, and carrying what looks like a Bible, is in the foreground. She is surrounded by wild flowers, grass, trees and a quiet river which flows in the right background. The text of the poem not only makes clear the superiority of the rural over the urban, but, as in the invalid’s song, enlists God on the side of rural virtues.

Away, where stretches that hazy line,
Where the town and country meet,
That line where the City’s confines lie
And begin the meadows so sweet,
It seems to me that a mystic spell
Possesses my heart and brain,
When I cross the bound’ry and enter a while
To walk in Nature’s domain.
I feel, as I catch the first sweet breath
Of clover-scented air,
That a higher power my whole soul claims,
And I pause for a moment there,
And wonder if waiting at Heaven’s gate



WHERE
TOWN AND COUNTRY
MEET

BY ROSE H. JOY

WAY, where stretches that hazy line,
Where the town and country meet,
That line where the city's confines lie,
And beneath the meadows so sweet,
It seems to me that a mystic spell
Possesses my heart and brain,
When I cross the boundary and enter a while
To walk in Nature's domain.

I feel, as I catch the first sweet breath
Of a flower-scented air,
That a higher power my whole soul claims,
And I pause for a moment there,
And wonder if waiting at Heaven's gate,
With all life's battles complete,
I shall not feel as I do when I stand
Where the town and the country meet.

TOWN AND COUNTRY AS HELL AND HEAVEN: Page 11 of the December 1904 *LHJ*. The illustrator again is W. L. Taylor.

With all life's battles complete,
I shall not feel as I do when I stand
Where the town and country meet.

No one would argue that "Where Town and Country Meet" is a good poem; it is competent, but hardly more. Yet the assumptions which the writer reveals, and the apparent approval of the *Journal*, indicate as clearly as any reform movement of the Progressive era the difficulties involved in social reform in the cities.

In the first place, life in the city is equated with life in prison; the

line of demarcation, the "new frontier," is at that point where the city ends. In contrast to the sweetness of the meadow, the city is characterized by implication as polluted. The prison image is extended in the word "bound'ry," and the "spiritual" strength of the country is introduced in "mystic" of the same quatrain. Further, the second stanza suggests that in the city man is subject to base controls, to inferior powers; but when the boundary is passed, a "higher power" claims the soul. Yet the most revealing metaphor of the poem is the identification of the rural with Heaven. By extension, then, the city is viewed as Hell. God controls the rural; Satan rules the urban. The significance of the poem, it seems to me, is not in the rather conventional sentiments expressed, but in the underlying assumptions which only the imagery reveals. Social reform is hardly possible—or even necessary—when individuals choose to live in Satan's domains; moreover, the poem suggests that the only reform needed is for the base city dwellers to bestir themselves and return to the simple values of a life in nature. In this poem at least, the streets of the heavenly city are paved with grass.

The number of poems which celebrate rural life increases during the decade from 1895 to 1905, even though the total number of poems printed decreases by half. That these poems demonstrate an established policy is made clear by the editor himself in an essay called "Where American Life Really Exists" (October, 1895). Commenting upon the *New Yorker's* tendency to be intolerant of the "provinces," Bok states that "this is the spirit which runs riot in our large cities, and it is at once not only an un-American spirit but one born of ignorance." According to the editorial, large cities are not "typical American communities"; it is in the "smaller cities of our country that we find the real American life." Smaller communities are more honest, have more opportunity, have greater chances for success and happiness; life is more "fully rounded out," the intellectual life is "refreshing and stimulating," the "religious life is truer" and so on. And Bok concludes: "The great truth [is] that it is in our smaller communities . . . that the truest and best phases of American life exist." One should candidly admit that the majority of Bok's subscribers no doubt live in these "smaller communities" which he praises so highly, and his opinions may not be completely free of self-interest. But one should also note that his statements are not simply the result of commercial interest. Bok actually believes what he is saying; the editorial policies, articles, fiction and poetry of the *Journal* are too much of a piece to be totally false. But what is more important, however, is the *Journal's* almost hysterical insistence on these values. If they existed in 1895, they did so in the face of total challenge. And the magazine's massive concern with them is seen more rightly as a desperate creation of a rural past which never existed, but which was necessary as a panacea for the social changes which threatened to destroy the so-called rural virtues.

The significance of the poetry printed in the *Journal* from 1895 to 1905 is two-fold. In literary terms, *Journal* poetry is almost totally isolated from every important aspect of American poetry. The experiments of Whitman and Emily Dickinson in verse form, Stephen Crane's aphoristic naturalism, E. A. Robinson's portrayal of the industrial backwash of Tilbury town, Robert Frost's realistic picture of rural New England—all of these major impulses in American poetry were a part of the general literary scene during this decade. Yet no recognition of any of these figures appears in any significant way in the *Journal*. It is true that in an article, "A Young Girl's Library" (November, 1895), T. W. Higginson, Emily Dickinson's early editor, acknowledges her poetry, but out of a list of one hundred books, most of the poets recommended are the standard classics or the New England patriarchs. In the first ten books a young girl should buy, for example, the poets listed are Longfellow, Lowell and Whittier; in the next fifteen books, Higginson adds Bryant, George Herbert Palmer's translation of the *Odyssey* and poems by Aldrich and Poe. It is only in the next twenty-five books that Dickinson is added; Whitman is, of course, never mentioned. Even though in Higginson's list and in Mabie's literary column major poets are mentioned, their influence is never felt in the poetry printed in the *Journal*.

Essentially, a strange dislocation occurs in the pages of the *Journal* during this period. Reading only the literary essays, one would think that the magazine's readers were highly literate, that the *Journal* was cognizant of the central impulses in American poetry. But in the poetry printed, exactly the opposite is true. There is no experimentation in verse form; more than two-thirds of the poetry is in the conventional couplet or ballad form. There is no recognition of the central problems which many poets of the nineteenth century faced in dealing with the evolutionary universe which Darwin's theory created; *Journal* poetry presents essentially the same picture of the natural world as the sentimental poets of the late eighteenth century. And Tennyson, second only to Longfellow in popular acclaim, whose *In Memoriam* is in part a reaction to pre-Darwinian theories of his day, appears only once in the *Journal* during these years. In a short article called "Cover for Dainty Books," Florence Barret demonstrates how "ornamental covers for books . . . may be made out of linen, silk, or brocade" (May, 1895). For Tennyson, a cover can be made of "gray moire embroidered with wild roses, and further embellished by a few lines of gold thread, or, better still, by the oft-quoted lines from 'In Memoriam,' worked in a darker shade of filo or else painted in a contrasting color." The lines which she quotes are central to Tennyson's personal crisis:

I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tunes,

That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.

But in the *Journal* they are solely decorative. One would expect Tennyson to be standard fare in the *Journal*, but his recognition of the problem posed by evolution strikes at the very roots of the magazine's idealization of childhood, mothers and rural virtues, and, of course, had to be excluded.

On the surface, the *Journal* seems to be aware of the major literature of its time. But, as the poetry reveals, such is not the case. In fact, during this decade the poetry retreats further and further from the contemporary American scene into a never-never land where childhood is idyllic, women are angelic and rural life is the Golden Age. One can easily see why poetry becomes less and less important as a part of the *Journal's* literary fare. Even the idealization of children and mothers and back-country villages has to end somewhere. It is for this reason, I think, that the ghosts of the New England triumvirate hang over the pages of the magazine and are quoted, illustrated and recommended in nearly every issue. Longfellow, Whittier and Lowell celebrated a past which was over half a century removed from the 1890's, but which exactly suited the tastes of *Journal* readers. Stedman called this period the "Interregnum," and could confidently look forward for younger poets to take the place of the Longfellows and Whittiers.⁹ But none appeared, and few contemporary poets were suitable for the *Journal*. By the end of World War I, all attempts at comprehending the revolution of American poetry had ceased.

The same is true, of course, in the relationship of the poetry to the major social issues of the decade. In the list of one hundred books which Higginson recommends for a young girl's library, Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, Howells' *A Traveller from Altruria*, Ely's *Socialism and Social Reform*, Fiske's *Darwinism and other Essays*, George's *Progress and Poverty*, Sumner's *What Social Classes Owe to One Another*—all these books are recommended for a girl of fifteen. But there is no indication, in the poetry at least, that these books had ever been written. And I suspect that *Journal* readers, at any rate, never read them, nor did Higginson expect them to. The interest which the *Journal* displays toward social issues can only be described as superficial. In the December, 1904, issue, the magazine seems to recognize several major movements for social reform. On a page called "What They Need at Christmas," the *Journal* prints pictures of Frederick Booth-Tucker (Commander of the Salvation Army in the United States), Jacob A. Riis (President of the Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement), Maud Ballington Booth (President of the Prison League of the Volunteers of America) and Booker T. Washington (Principal of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute). In letters printed below the pictures, each of the major figures requests from *Journal* readers some contributions for

the Christmas season. Booth-Tucker asks for toys, Riis for coal, Mrs. Booth for shoes and Washington for books. Such a page would suggest some dawning social consciousness on the part of the *Journal*.¹⁰

And perhaps it does. But no where else in the issue is there any recognition of the social problems which these figures symbolize. On the facing page is an article about Christmas treats and games, "Chocolates and Christmas Secrets." The title page of the issue prints Henry Van Dyke's thoroughly traditional "A Christmas Prayer for the Home." There are six Christmas stories in the issue, all with happy endings. The only contemporary poem (other than the conventional Christmas verse) is called "The Pessimist":

Nothing to do but work,
Nothing to eat but food,
Nothing to wear but clothes
To keep one from going nude.
Nothing to breathe but air,
Quick as a flash 'tis gone;
Nowhere to fall but off,
Nowhere to stand but on.
. . . Nothing to sing but songs,
Ah, well, alas! alack!
Nowhere to go but out
Nowhere to come but back.
Nothing to see but sights,
Nothing to quench but thirst,
Nothing to have but what we've got;
Thus thro' life we are cursed.
Nothing to strike but a gait;
Everything moves that goes.
Nothing at all but common-sense
Can ever withstand these woes.

And if the point is not made clear in the poem, Bok's editorial in the same issue called "The Value of Limitations" underlines the poet's meaning:

It is a great thing to be satisfied with what we have; to believe, as we have every reason for doing sanely, that what is is very apt to be for our greatest good; to make the most of what we have, and to do the most with what has been given us; to do those things which will bring out not the most that is within our purses as the most that is within ourselves. . . . What is higher and better than that? (p. 18)

If it is true that there is in the *Journal* during this decade some recognition of the watershed of American social problems, then it is equally true that this recognition is superficial, that it is little more than a sop to the complacent consciences of the *Journal's* editors and readers. As for the poetry, such ideas never disturb the vacuum in which it exists.

The lasting significance of the poetry printed in the *Journal* during these years is perhaps the most important, for it represents a failure which is perhaps first clearly seen in this period in our history, the almost total disassociation of American intellectual life, both literary and social, from the mass of American citizens. In 1895 the *Journal* is a relatively respectable publication, especially for a magazine designed solely for women. It is not, of course, a muckraking or avant garde magazine; but it seems to be genuinely concerned in faithfully portraying the dominant interests of American life, both literary and social. Ten years later, however, there is hardly any serious concern with literature, particularly poetry, and whatever social awareness the magazine has never goes below the surface of the agrarian dream which it is dedicated to perpetuate. One cannot expect to find a popular magazine like the *Journal* in the vanguard of social and intellectual change; but one should be able to expect more than an almost total denial of the dominant challenges of American life.

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footnotes

1. Edward Bok, *The Americanization of Edward Bok* (New York, 1924), 163.

2. One cannot argue, of course, that the subculture represented by readers of the *Journal* is adequately representative of the culture as a whole. One can argue, as I do, that Bok's recognition of the formula necessary to commercial success, and his demonstrable ability in securing an amazingly large number of subscribers (and hence a considerably larger number of readers), indicate broad aesthetic and literary values held by a significantly large segment of the literate populace. (For a discussion of Bok's success in appealing to the "middle class," see Frank Luther Mott, "*Ladies' Home Journal*," *A History of American Magazines, 1885-1905*, IV (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 536-555.

3. Although I have analyzed the poetry in all of the issues during this decade, I cite only from 1895, 1900 and 1905. These years adequately represent the *Journal's* position during this period.

In discussing the major themes of *Journal* poetry during these years, I have not dealt with the religious verse. Its subject matter is so general and so closely related to the other themes I discuss that it seemed to me to be unnecessary to consider it separately.

4. Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence* (Chicago, 1964), 95. May's comment is, of course, not about Field's poem, but the general climate of opinion in which it exists.

5. *Journal* (December, 1894), 1.

6. For an interesting analysis of the image of the "good little girl" in American fiction, see Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York, 1959), 266 ff.

7. Bok's dedication in the *Americanization* is perhaps the best statement of this theme in *Journal* poetry: "To the American Woman I owe much but to two women I owe more, MY MOTHER and MY WIFE, and to them I dedicate this account of the boy to whom one gave birth and brought to manhood, and the other blessed with all that a home and family may mean."

8. *Journal* (December, 1894), 32.

9. Quoted in Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry* (Princeton, 1961), 254.

10. In his essay, "A Changing Attitude Toward Poverty in *The Ladies' Home Journal: 1895-1919*," *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* (Spring, 1964), William W. Nichols finds "no dramatic change" in the attitudes toward poverty, but he also notes that "there seems to have been a genuine awakening to poverty," particularly after the beginning of World War I. The somewhat different conclusions which we have reached may be explained by the fact that his study extends over a longer period than mine. Such changes were perhaps inevitable after the war began.