

W. D. HOWELLS AT 75 CHATS OF BOOKS AND AUTHORS

His Birthday Comes This Week and He Has Two Books Under Way—One of the Recompenses of His Art He Likes Best—Opinions of Contemporary Literature—New York as It Impresses Him.

William Dean Howells will celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday this week. There seems to be no mistake about the matter. He himself confirms the story that he was born March 1, 1837, and naturally one feels some diffidence about questioning his opinion. But when one reads his recent books or, better still, talks with him in his intervals of writing more books, one is convinced that somehow or other the date of that advent has been shaken out of place by a whole decade or more.

Seventy-five he may be, but he did not look it the other morning when he came from several hours work on the book he is making out of his recent journeyings in Spain. Curiously enough, although he has crossed the ocean eighteen times, this was his first visit to a country which seems always to have fascinated him. From the time he was a boy the Spanish name and nature were, as he says, "always my romance."

The chapter in "My Literary Passions" that deals with the delight he had found in "the matchless history" of Don Quixote is among the most charming of the almost inexhaustible number of charming chapters he has written. He says that in a boy's way he knew the book well when he was and that he was seriously bent on writing a life of Cervantes. He has written tens of volumes since then, but that one has not been among them.

It is significant of some of the traits on which his friends like best to dwell that he was not disappointed in his Spain when he finally saw it. There isn't more loyalty in this, although men who have known Howells for years like to talk of that quality of steadfastness in him. But it is only one more example of the perennial freshness of spirit with which he seems to approach new experiences or to retrace old ones.

Between the writing of "Tuscan Cities" and that of the series of articles on the English watering places printed recently in one of the magazines, something like a quarter of a century must have elapsed. And yet these records of later wanderings are touched with the same grace of humor which made the earlier sketches so captivating. The extraordinary felicity of phrase which characterizes all his essays, his books of comment and of travel grows only more pronounced as time goes by.

One must not make the mistake of saying "felicity" instead of "felicity." They sound alike, perhaps. That is one of his triumphs; that work done with real labor succeeds in not seeming laborious. That painstaking care really is back of the felicitous result Mr. Howells made clear when he was talking of his library.

He had said that he has none of the bibliomaniac's passion for acquiring rare books, or beautiful bindings, or indeed books merely as volumes with which to fill shelves. He does not like to see any book, even the humblest, mistreated. But his own books have been accumulated more or less by accident, except the reference books,

"which he regards as the tools of his trade."

"I make constant use of such books as dictionaries of synonyms," he said.

to him his mind seemed to go to the same quarter for its answer, as if drawn there by an irresistible attraction. The question was this:

"In looking back on your life what experience or phase of it do you recall with the greatest pleasure? Was it some friendship, some experience of travel, or some literary success?"

The answer came with another smile; and the Howells smile is something worth going far to see; it is so like a paragraph out of the most charming of his best chapters, as gracious and gentle as mellow light, full of humor and kindness but preserving somehow a background of seriousness which keeps it from degenerating into mere surface sparkle.

That does not express it. One would need to consult his books of synonyms and to attempt his painstaking search for the right word to describe the Howells smile with exactness. It is easier to tell what his voice is like. A woman who heard him speak the other day said:

"I met Mr. Howells once twenty years ago and I said then that he had the very nicest voice I had ever heard. I say it again now."

So it was with this smile and in this very nicest of voices that he said in reply to the question already quoted:

"To the author there is nothing sweeter than literary success. At least, to the young author. As one grows old perhaps values change; one loses so much," he hesitated—"I think there are no happinesses so sweet as those of youth. I have had much joy in life, but the most poignant sensations of pleasure are often the result of something elusive and transitory; the sort of cause which might seem utterly inadequate in the telling."

"Remember that years ago when I was visiting my father, at that time Consul at Toronto, I was standing at a window late in the afternoon looking at a willow tree in the alley and the moving shadows of its leaves thrown by the sunset light

on the wall of a house. There was something wonderfully beautiful in the picture so simple nevertheless, that I remember speaking to my father about the strangeness of our receiving an impression so vivid and our pleasure so keen from something so accidental and so transitory."

This visit to Toronto was not his first experience in Canada. There was an earlier one which is worth recounting, for it helps to illustrate his belief that the author the literary successes of his youth are the greatest joys that come to him.

Howells had been on the staff of a Columbus paper for three years when in 1860 he made his first trip to the East, a passionate pilgrim visiting his holy land at Boston, as he puts it in "Literary Friends and Acquaintances." But he had also been writing poems at that time he desired above all things to be a poet and sketches for the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *Saturday Press* of New York.

When he was in Montreal on his way to Boston something "very pretty" happened

Emerson, Holmes and the others of that extraordinary group. They were much older than he was, but there was evidently so much of literary promise in the younger man and so much in his character that which those Boston brahmins bore themselves, that his pilgrimage was not only in literary heroes, but put him on most friendly terms with them.

Later, after his consulship at Venice from 1861 to 1865, and a subsequent period of work in New York, he returned to Boston as assistant editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* at a salary of \$50 a week. Approves of this circumstance it is to be recorded that many of the letters sent to the Boston *Advertiser* during his four years in Italy, and published in that paper, were paid for at the rate of about a dollar a thousand words.

"Howells," says their writer, "was richly content with that and would gladly have let them have the letters for nothing."

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He tells how he used to go home from Longfellow's house after the meetings of the Dante Club, which was scarcely a club but a more or less fluctuating group which met at the poet's house and after listening to and criticizing his translation of Dante as it progressed were later his guests at supper.

"Often as I returned home," he says, "I was as if, soul borne through the air by my pride and joy. I still think that was the richest moment of my life, and I look back at it as the moment, in a life not unblest by chance, which I would most like to live over again if I must live any."

Then, is another answer to the question his visitor put to him the other day about the experience upon which he looks back with the greatest pleasure. There have been many young authors who have revered and loved their literary gods, but no one has given us a more delightful record of these youthful adorations than Howells has. It was written after a lapse of more than thirty years and it is not often one finds such blending of young enthusiasm with mature discrimination. Even the perspective of years, however, did not dull his picture of Longfellow, of whom he says almost all the finest things that could be said of any man.

Even his estimate of Longfellow's literary achievements grows rather lessens with time. Twenty years ago he wrote of Tennyson's influence on him when he himself was a youth enamored of poetry and bent on mastering the art he felt to be the finest of all arts. He said then that no other poet ever had been so entirely in sympathy with theirs.

This made it natural to ask whether the custom of taking long walks in all quarters of New York, a custom which bore fruit in some of his best sketches, is one he still follows. He smiled and shook his head.

"I'm too old for that," he declared.

In an essay on New York streets written about twenty years ago Howells expressed himself in unmistakable terms on the subject of the ugliness of the city as it then seemed to him. He spoke of its "arrogant untidiness," of "shabby and repulsive thoroughfares," of "the apparently desperate tastelessness and the apparently instinctive uncleanness" of the place.

"In the development of the short story we are supremely successful; more so even than the French. That represents the highest achievement of present writers from the point of view of comparison with other literature."

Mr. Howells undoubtedly knows whereof he speaks to the degree at least of familiarity with these other literatures, for he reads four or five of them in the original. One of his amusing reminiscences of his boyhood is of the way in which without the aid of a teacher he studied Spanish, spurred to it by the determination to read his beloved Cervantes in the original.

He continued his reading of the language through all the years which intervened before his belated visit to the country itself. But as he was dubious about his ability, or rather certain about his inability to speak it, he engaged a tutor to come to him for an hour a day during the month preceding his trip to Spain. Inevitably, in talking of Howells one cannot insist too much upon his constant absorption in literary interests, he and the tutor found themselves discussing Spanish literature instead of practicing the utility phrases which would have enabled him confidently to inquire as to the vagaries of train schedules or to conduct negotiations for hotel rates. But he does not seem to think he missed his better part in that respect.

It must not be thought that he is a mere reader and writer of books. He would undoubtedly balk at using the adjective "mere." But he would claim that the literature which is independent of life is not the best literature. Certainly his own interest in realities is unquestionable. He frankly and seriously avows his belief in socialism.

"I cannot see," he said, "that the remedy for existing conditions lies anywhere else. But if it is to be remedy, it must come slowly. Violent revolutions do not permanently solve these problems. That was true of slavery. It should have been cured more slowly. It is strange how things happen."

"I remember back in 1859 talking with a young friend of mine out in Columbus and we agreed that slavery would come to an end. And after canvassing the situation we fixed upon 200 years as the probable period that would elapse before it would be wiped out. Inside of two years came the beginning of the war which shattered the institution."

While the talk was on questions of the day his visitor asked Mr. Howells whether he was interested in the woman movement. His reply was immediate and decided.

"Certainly! It is one of the most important developments of this generation and one of the most hopeful. The men have made such a mess of things that if the women do not come to the rescue I'm sure I don't know what is to become of us."

"Then you think they may accomplish some good if they get the chance to try?"

"Undoubtedly! Oh, we are all suffragists in my family. My daughter, my son and my daughter-in-law walked in the suffrage parade last spring. I didn't because I am too lazy, but my convictions are entirely in sympathy with theirs."

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to him. He was lonely and as he turned from a vain search for some familiar name on the hotel register two other young men came up to look it over.

"Hello!" said one of them; "here's Howells!"

It turned out that the two young men were from New York and that this one recognized the budding author's name from having seen it in the *Saturday Press*.

"In whatever world he happens now to be," says Howells, "I should like to send him my greetings and confess to him that my art has never since brought me so sweet a recompense and nothing a thousandth part so much like fame as that outcry of his over the hotel register in Montreal."

His story of that pilgrimage to his holy land at Boston is a delightful narrative. He had adored at a distance the luminaries of the American literary firmament of that time, Longfellow, Lowell, Hawthorne,

Emerson, Holmes and the others of that extraordinary group. They were much older than he was, but there was evidently so much of literary promise in the younger man and so much in his character that which those Boston brahmins bore themselves, that his pilgrimage was not only in literary heroes, but put him on most friendly terms with them.

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SENATOR KNUTE NELSON OF MINNESOTA, THE MAN WHO HELPED BRANDT

A Picturesque Figure in the Senate Who Describes Himself as "Descendant From a Long Line of Norwegian Pirates."

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24.—The man who perhaps has done most to bring about the recent development in the Brandt case and to whom Mortimer L. Schiff's former valet may give first thanks if he finally goes free is United States Senator Knute Nelson, who, for almost three years, has moved quietly but persistently toward securing justice for the young Swede. This the Senator from Minnesota has done simply out of compassion for a young Scandinavian who, he believes, had been treated unjustly.

While Senator Nelson has steadfastly refused to talk of his activities in behalf of Brandt, a few facts concerning his good offices in the interest of the young Swede have been obtained from his friends. It appears that Brandt made an appeal to Senator Nelson for help. At the time, Brandt was in Dannemora prison. One day while reading a newspaper Brandt's eye fell upon a speech made by Senator Nelson in support of a bill, which later became a law, authorizing the parole of Federal prisoners under certain circumstances.

A note of sympathy for the unfortunate was detected by the Swedish prisoner. In the speech, and this prompted him to communicate with the Minnesota Senator. Under the prison rules Brandt was able to write only in the briefest manner, on a single sheet of note paper. The mail of a United States Senator is always loaded with appeals for help, but this letter aroused Senator Nelson's interest, not only because the writer was a young Scandinavian, but also because he was able to impress upon the Senator a sense of the justice behind his complaint.

Just how Brandt managed to convey his story in full to Senator Nelson is not known. It is known, however, that not long after Brandt's first letter was written Senator Nelson received another narrating in detail the circumstances under which Brandt was discharged from the Schiff household and giving an account of his arrest and conviction on a charge of burglary and of the sentence imposed upon him of imprisonment for three years.

Ask any United States Senator about Knute Nelson and he will tell you that the Minnesota man is about the hardest-headed individual in the Senate. Although homely and picturesque in his manners he has the reputation of reaching conclusions after only careful, painstaking deliberation. Incidentally he also

been in public life for many years, and the Norwegians of the United States point to him with admiration. He is the only man of his nationality who up to date has seen service in the United States Senate.

The Minnesota Senator is short of stature, big boned, well set up, and his frame is topped with a large head with deep set eyes of light blue. He has a chin that proclaims the fighting man. Decorating the forehead is a set of whiskers of the shoebrush variety. These whiskers are not at all of the Uncle Sam type. They are too stubby. They are militant, pugnacious, belligerent, a mass of bristles, each and every one of which waggles and appears to be alive when the Senator is aroused to action.

While Senator Nelson is a bit old fashioned, he is proud of it. He takes no part in Washington society, has not been in a theatre for twenty years, and amuses himself in leisure moments by reading about great sea and land fighters of the past. Once in a while when he is tired of the grind at the Capitol he disappears for a day or so. On such occasions he visits a battlefield near Washington and with history books in hand follows the lines of the movement of the hostile forces of the '70s.

Stubbornness and modesty are dominant notes in the Nelson symphony. Both traits have manifested themselves in his connection with the Brandt case. He conducted his inquiries quietly, and since the case has been discussed in the press he has still managed to keep himself in the background.

James J. Hill, the railroad builder, can testify that Knute Nelson is a hard man to win by persuasion once his mind has been made up. Hill and Nelson have had a great deal to do with public affairs in Minnesota and the Northwest generally. It is a tossup as to which of them is the more highly regarded in that part of the country.

In the Northwest Hill has been the builder, but Nelson has had to do with the framing of public opinion. Nelson has many times been honored by the people of his State; Hill and Nelson have known each other since early manhood.

It was thought by many people that Nelson would support Canadian reciprocity, because it was a net measure of Hill's. Hill may have thought so too, but he soon learned that Nelson was hostile to him on this proposition. Hill was disgusted when told that Nelson would fight Canadian reciprocity.

"What's the use of trying to persuade him?" Hill is reported to have said. "If Nelson has made up his mind it's all over."

During his long career in public life Mr. Nelson has devoted his attention to a variety of subjects and he has made his

mark on the statute books. He is the author of the present bankruptcy law. He is the father of the Department of Commerce and Labor. It was at the instance of Senator Nelson that the Republican national convention in 1900 adopted a plank committing to the party to the creation of such a department. Nelson drew the bill under which the department was created.

The senior Senator from Minnesota has an extraordinary record on the tariff. Mr. Nelson is a low tariff man. As a member of the House he voted for the Mills Democratic tariff bill. Two years ago he voted against the Payne-Aldrich bill, a Republican measure. He voted for the La Follette bill at the special session last summer. A week or so later he opposed the conference report on that measure. In the same session he voted against the Democratic cotton revision bill.

Soon after his vote on the Mills bill Mr. Nelson retired from the House.

"A lot of people told me that I would pay dearly for that vote," said Mr. Nelson. "The people of Minnesota seemed to think that I did right. Why? Because they soon after elected me Governor of the State."

The Norwegian Senator is a man of independent thought and action. As a rule nowadays he trains with the Senate regulars. Once in a while he votes with the progressives. He was affiliated with the La Follette-Cummings group when the Aldrich bill was pending in the Senate. In that debate he made a speech that is still the subject of gossip in the Senate cloak rooms.

Nelson W. Aldrich was then the Republican leader. Aldrich complained that Senators were voting on schedules with which they were not familiar. He referred the opposition to the testimony taken by the Senate Committee on Finance.

"Consult these volumes," declared Mr. Aldrich, "pounding a pile of books that were heaped on the desk in front of him. 'Consult them and you will realize the force of our arguments.'"

"This observation brought the Minnesota Senator to his feet. Glaring at Mr. Aldrich Senator Nelson began:

"Why should I consult these dead records?" he replied. "We have living experts here who can give us live testimony. When I want to know about the lead schedule I will ask the advice and counsel of the Senator from Colorado. When I want light on the wool schedule I shall seek out the Senator from Wyoming. When I am in need of information bearing on iron and coal I shall turn to the Senator from Virginia."

The three Senators referred to in the order named were Messrs. Guggenheim, Warren and Scott. Guggenheim is connected with the well known mining family. Warren is said to be the largest single owner of sheep in the United States, and Scott is heavily interested in coal and iron mines. There was a strong intimation in the speech of Mr. Nelson that there were men in the Senate whose interests were affected by particular schedules and that in framing his bill Mr. Aldrich consulted them rather than others. The Nelson speech kicked up a sensation at the time and stirred up a lot of hard feeling.

Senator Nelson was 69 years of age on the second day of this month. He landed at Castle Garden as a boy of 6 with his widowed mother, sixty-three years ago. The Nelsons first settled in Chicago, and then journeyed on to Wisconsin, where Knute remained off and on until 1871. Nelson served as a private and non-com-

missioned officer in the Fourth Wisconsin Regiment, and was for a short time a prisoner of war.

Upon his retirement from the army he rejoined his mother in Wisconsin. He read law in Hudson, Wis., alongside of John C. Spooner, later a distinguished Senator and now a lawyer in New York. He served two terms in the Wisconsin Legislature, three terms in the Minnesota Legislature, and was a member of the House of Representatives for six years. He was twice elected Governor of Minnesota. He has been a member of the United States Senate since March 4, 1895.

WOMAN BOUGHT 232 PAIRS OF SHOES.

She Took Advantage of a Bargain Sale of Odd Ends.

Cedar Rapids correspondence the Shoe Retailer.

Two hundred and thirty-two pairs of shoes sold to one woman customer and every pair paid for. That is what happened last week Frank C. Harvey, manager of a shoe department, was having a sale of shoes at \$1 a pair. The lot consisted of about 1,000 pairs of women's shoes, being a general cleanup of odds and ends and undesirable styles. At the same time Mr. Harvey had a special sale of fancy light colored satin sample shoes and slippers.

The first woman customer was waiting for the doors of the store to open on the morning of the sale. She told Manager Harvey she wished to see the satin shoes that were advertised. Mr. Harvey showed her to a seat and then pulled down the eight pairs of the \$1.50 fancy shoes.

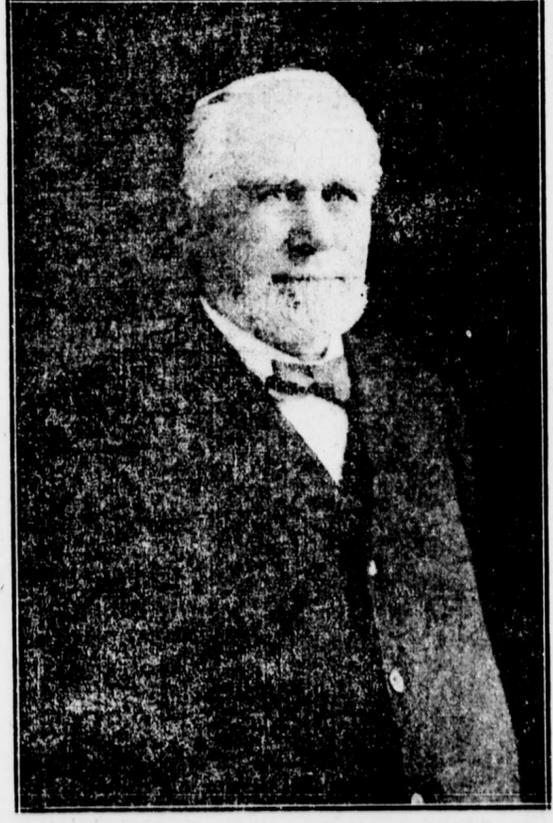
"Which do you admire?" asked Manager Harvey. "I admire them all; in this one on," she said. Harvey did. "Pretty snug," he said. "Not a bit—I like them that way. I'll take that pair. Try this one on." And he did; and so on until the last of the eight pairs were tried on. "I'll take that one too," and that finished the sale of the fancies.

"Now," said Mr. Harvey who had finished trying on the past pair of fancies, "we are having a sale on leather shoes at \$1 a pair—wouldn't you like to see some of them?"

"Not now," said the woman. "I may be in later. Sure enough about 10 o'clock the woman returned for the dollar shoes. She tried on shoes for three hours and when she had finished that day she had thirty-two pairs picked out to be sent to her home.

The next day the woman returned and sat for several hours trying on the dollar shoes. Each day the same performance was repeated. In the eight sittings the woman had bought 232 pairs of the dollar shoes.

The sales were from 3:30 to 5:30, in all leather styles, odd shapes and styles. One can imagine what a collection of shoes the woman must have to pick out 232 pairs from odds and ends. Now can you answer what the woman is going to do with the shoes? She is a prominent woman of Cedar Rapids.



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