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 letter 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

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1 We are indebted to Professor W. W. Howells of Harvard University for permission to republish this letter.
THE INSIDE COVER OF SATIRE, SEPTEMBER 20, 1911

FROM THE DEAN OF ENGLISH WRITERS.

I, Sir,

I have been interested in your letter, and was about to reply, when I received your note of June 18.

I must say that I am not in a position to write a satirical sketch on the subject you mention. I am, however, willing to write a letter on the subject, if you will give me the necessary information.

Your sincerely,

Owen Seaman.

Owen Seaman, Editor of London Punch.

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

Robert Herrick.

Professor of English, University of Chicago.

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

Owen Seaman.

Owen Seaman, Editor of London Punch.

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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