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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF E. W. HOWE'S MONTHLY

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Division in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science

By

Della Josephine Heckert

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ABSTRACT

E. W. Howe's Monthly (1911-1933), a privately owned and financed small magazine, was the subject of this study.

Edgar Watson Howe wrote his indignations and personal comments on many headlined political and news events as well as other items each month. He expressed his candid opinions and did not care whether his readers approved or disapproved of his remarks. Subscription fees were refunded to those who wrote "grumbling" letters. He was the only writer for the Monthly although he quoted other magazines freely.

Among Howe's journalistic accomplishments were these: Owner and editor of the Atchison Globe, author of an early controversial novel, five more novels, several travel books, a number of pamphlets, Little Blue Books, many magazines articles, his autobiography Plain People, and E. W. Howe's Monthly.

The Howes were of such different temperaments that they were divorced and his niece Adelaide became his housekeeper-companion. The Howes' three children also became writers.

Howe commands admiration for his writing despite the business failures, lack of formal education, rejection of his first novel and marital troubles. At one time his aphorisms and witty sayings were quoted by many other editors in the nation. These were also collected and published.

Howe was awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws at Washburn University, Topeka, in 1927, but was more familiarly known as "The Sage of Potato Hill."

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

Edgar Watson Howe, a dynamic editor, newspaper owner, essayist, and writer, published The Atchison Globe (Atchison, Kansas), until his retirement in 1911. The Globe was "probably the best known small town paper in America,"¹ at a time when many country newspaper editors made names for themselves and influenced a majority of their readers.

Howe was born in Treaty, Indiana, May 3, 1853. His father was Henry Howe, a teacher, farmer, itinerant preacher, printer and newspaper owner. He had been left a widower with two small children. His mother was Elizabeth Irwin Howe whose father was a shingle maker and mother a backwoods country Doctor. The Howe family migrated to Fairview, Harrison County, Missouri, where Ed (as he preferred to be called), went to a country school until he entered his father's print-shop at the age of eleven.² He had to learn to spell accurately setting type and was required to handset two columns each day or be whipped.³

As a boy, Howe often accompanied his father on preaching circuits and helped with the camp-meetings in the communities

¹Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (eds.), Twentieth Century Authors (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1942), p. 676.

²Edgar Watson Howe, Plain People (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1929), pp. 1-18; 209.

³Edgar Watson Howe, "Confessions of a Common Man," American Magazine, XCV (June, 1923), 34.

where his father served as itinerant preacher.⁴ He recalled many early experiences in stories and in his autobiography Plain People.

Howe received a profound shock from which he never entirely recovered when his preacher-father ran away with his aunt. As a result of the desertion of the family, they were thrown into quite penurious circumstances, because they had never had much money in the first place. For some time they did not know where his father was, and Mrs. Howe appealed to her minister and to a lawyer in the town to try to locate him.

There was great bitterness on the part of Howe's mother. Even so, she maintained the family household. This shock to her evidently made quite an impression on the young man, especially after hearing his father preach week after week on any and all the sins and wrong-doings of the human race.

When Howe wrote his first novel, The Story of a Country Town,⁵ the plot was largely of a semi-autobiographical nature, centered mainly on a deserted wife and family. In that novel, the father left his print shop to the son, who then supported the family, which was almost paralleled in

⁴Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years: 1885-1915 (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1952), p. 98.

⁵Edgar Watson Howe, The Story of a Country Town (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917). (Howe claimed 100 printings before he died.)

Howe's life, because as a young boy he worked in a print shop and helped support the family with at least part of his wages.

The galling sting of his father's desertion of the family embittered Howe against what his father had preached for so long; the religion he had lived by was tossed completely aside for another woman. What religion Howe professed he called Protestantism, although he did not belong to or attend any church. From many of his personal editorials later about religion, it is more popularly thought that he was an atheist or an agnostic.

However, this writer feels that Howe had instilled in him in his early youth and in their Christian home, the absolute knowledge of right and wrong. He was very aware of his own conscience, as would be agreed upon were one to read all the issues of the Monthly available. He was also critically aware that every man had a so-called "Christian" duty to fulfill on this earth, that everyone must do some good for his fellow man. Somewhere in his makeup there was that desire to try in his own way, to crusade, write, preach, talk, or sway others to the right way of thinking, as he saw it. This he endeavored to do in his Monthly, writing for those selected few who believed as he did, or who continued to subscribe to his magazine because they liked to read his latest outbursts against anything that he considered immoral, illegal, or what he chose at the moment to express himself about in his indignation.

To this writer, he evidenced all these "Christian" duties in his desires to help his fellow man by writing for them articles, aphorisms, essays, editorials and resumes of critical reading that he had done, in order to pass on to them the pertinent facts of many things, life, behavior, social customs, news events, politics, strikes, disasters, scandals in politics, and/or the whole gamut of whatever struck his fancy each month.

Ruth Brune examined "The Early Life of Edgar Watson Howe," in a study several years ago, in which she drew the conclusion that Howe's attitude toward religion and life in general stemmed from his father's actions while Howe was still a boy, because he crusaded all his life against religion.⁶ In her study, she wrote of Howe's newspaper activities and then mentioned the fact that after his retirement from the Globe in Atchison, he established, wrote and produced the Monthly for twenty-three years.

By 1872, Howe was the publisher of the Globe Journal in Golden, Colorado, and then was a printer on the Press in Falls City, Nebraska. While living in Falls City, he became engaged to Clara L. Frank, formerly of Philadelphia, and they were married in 1875. After moving to Atchison, Kansas, the first two of their five children died, leaving a void in their hearts. Divorce proceedings in 1901 caused quite a

⁶Ruth Esther Brune, "The Early Life of Edgar Watson Howe," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, May, 1949), pp. 493-494.

scandal in the small town of Atchison,⁷ another hard fact that he had to accept, for by that time he was a successful publisher there.

This writer also believes that this separation affected Howe a great deal in his lifetime for several reasons. First, he was the newspaper publisher and, as in all small towns, was regarded as a leader in his community. The divorce did not help his status in that respect. Secondly, the separation from his wife and lack of attention to his household made him dependent on some one whom he could trust for maintenance of his daily living, and when a man is so dedicated to the writer's craft, that it is always foremost in his mind, he does not care for homely responsible details. Thirdly, the fact that he could not bend his wife and children to his will, and impose his ego upon them over all objections, spelled defeat for him and separated him from the only people whom he really loved, for he confessed later in Plain People that he had never known any affection as a boy. Howe did not like to be crossed or defeated in any way. He wanted to be the literal as well as the figurative head of his household, and he lost that status, because it became divided. Mrs. Howe took two of the children with her, and Howe kept Gene.

Gene disclosed many revealing aspects of their life together after the divorce in "My Father Was the Most

⁷Ibid., p. 407.

Wretchedly Unhappy Man I Ever Knew," which was published in the Saturday Evening Post. Gene recalled that his early life in the home was a nightmare, where his father continually upbraided his mother on the slightest occasion. For some months before the divorce, however, he did not speak to her.⁸ After the separation, Howe cringed at all the gossip because he was so sensitive. As a result he commented in his Monthly that he hated gossip.

Gene's article was not well received in Atchison, where they still thought of Atchison as "Ed. Howe's Town." The citizens there resented Gene's "washing his father's dirty linen in public," but they admitted that every word of it was true.⁹

When Howe sold his newspaper business to his two sons and staff in 1911, he bought a farm on the Missouri river, which he named "Potato Hill." He then began the publication of E. W. Howe's Monthly, which he wrote and produced for his personal satisfaction, he being the sole owner, writer, and contributor. He died in 1937 after a long illness.¹⁰

No full biography of Howe has been published, nor has his autobiography Plain People had a very large sale. No critical review of his Monthly has been cataloged. Very few people in this generation have even heard of Edgar Watson Howe.

⁸Gene Howe, "My Father Was the Most Wretchedly Unhappy Man I Ever Knew," Saturday Evening Post, CCXIV (October 25, 1941), 44.

⁹Brune, op. cit., p. 407.

¹⁰Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), p. 411.

CHAPTER I

E. W. HOWE'S MONTHLY

Howe's Monthly was the sole product of one man's mind and thoughts. The sub-title, displayed in bold type underneath the banner title of the paper was, "Devoted to Indignation and Information." These two departments he wrote, maintained and edited faithfully for the twenty-two calendar years that the Monthly was published. The largest department was always that of "Indignation," which often made up the complete magazine. The "Information" which he wrote for his readers was smaller and often appeared on the back page of the paper.

The Monthly was one of the many privately-owned and maintained "one-man" magazines that come and go upon the American scene. Magazines of this type have flourished for a time, then lost favor, subscribers, and money, and been discontinued. Some have ceased to exist for the reasons just stated, while others have simply gone bankrupt or the editors have died. While the Monthly did not become bankrupt, it did not make expenses, though Howe admitted the loss was not great. He appealed to his readers in every issue for subscriptions at the price of ten cents per year, three years for twenty-five cents. Later the price was raised to twenty-five cents, five years for one dollar. At

times, he told his readers point blank that their subscriptions did not come in very fast and that fewer and fewer of them were sending in dollar bills.

The transition Howe had to make in writing the Monthly was a definite challenge to his journalistic ability. Previously, he had been busy as a reporter-editor-printer-publisher on the streets of Atchison, gathering news and jotting it down on the back of an envelope or any scrap of paper.¹ In transferring his story to type, he often actually composed it as he set it on the printer's "stick." In preparing copy for his new venture, the Monthly, however, he was faced with the problem of writing about events which were a month or more old and making them interesting and informative to his readers. He wrote each article from his own point of view, expressing his homely opinions, good or bad, and criticizing any and every thing and any and every one whom he cared to.

The first several issues of the Monthly were not available to this writer, but in the March 1914 issue, he wrote, "that when he got most of the indignation out of his system, he would devote more time to information."² In later years he would request complaining correspondents to refrain from

¹Walt Mason, "Interesting People," American Magazine, LXXI (March, 1911), 609.

²E. W. Howe's Monthly, Vols. IV - XII (February, 1914-November, 1933), on microfilm from the Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. (Hereinafter cited as the Monthly.)

pointing out new things to be indignant about, because he already had such a long list that he could not attend to half of them.

Howe's son, Gene, said of him, "He was the greatest newspaper reporter in America; he was so regarded by leading newspaper men....Atchison people could not resist reading his paper."³ Now in retirement, and editing a monthly magazine, he needed to garner selected items from the many monthly magazines he received and the four daily newspapers he read consistently each day, to furnish copy for his Monthly. This he did by voracious reading and digesting for his readers items, ideas, articles, thoughts, political news, and world happenings. He rewrote the selected items in a manner and style which he believed would be of interest to those who read less than he did and hoped to lead some of them to his way of thinking by choosing an editorial style in many instances. He also read many books which he considered the average man would not take time to read and wrote interesting and informative book reviews of them for the Monthly.

Certainly, he hoped to increase his circulation by making his Monthly interesting while he chose this media to grind his axes on politics, religions, reforms, industry, thrift, manners, or human failings. This writer feels that Howe considered his readers neither "high-brow" intellectually

³Gene Howe, op. cit., p. 44.

Mason, Walt. "Interesting People," "A Few of 'Ed.' Howe's Paragraphs," American Magazine, LXXI (March, 1911), 608-611.

Unpublished Material

Brune, Ruth Esther. "The Early Life of Edgar Watson Howe." Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado, May, 1949. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation)

nor stark illiterates, but people still seeking knowledge, so adhered to one of his pet beliefs that they were of the group to which he himself belonged, the plain people. (This title he chose for his autobiography, which was also written while he published the Monthly.) He was pleased to announce at one time that the circulation had reached 5,000.

In some respects, the Monthly was not too attractive because paragraphs were not indented and instead the old-fashioned "hand" sign was used to denote the first line of a paragraph. This made for a very full printed page, in contrast to what is considered good newspaper format today. In the early issues there were no pictures or advertisements, no "boxes" to set off pertinent items nor any headlines or sub-heads to which the mid-twentieth century newspaper or magazine reader is accustomed.

Howe advertised regularly his own pamphlets and Little Blue Books, and other books, such as Travel Letters from New Zealand, The Story of a Country Town, The Blessing of Business, Country Town Sayings, and Ventures in Common Sense in a standing column on page four. Other small commercial advertisements were also carried on the last page for years at a time.

In 1925-1926, realizing that his publication was not paying expenses, he appealed to his readers for advertisements. These pleas paid off to some extent, because eight advertisements appeared in early subsequent issues but they were not sustaining copy to furnish him additional revenue.

Cancellations of subscriptions from disgruntled readers who disagreed with him were received at times, but Howe kept on publishing regularly. If subscribers objected enough to write their opinions to the editor, his country secretaries returned the subscription fees.

Carl and Mark Van Doren, writing in American and British Literature had something to say about the monthly magazine edited by Howe, especially about the republication of various items from it gathered together under the title Ventures in Common Sense:

His "Ventures in Common Sense" (1919) is not a treatise, or even a group of essays, but a collection of aphorisms upon the homely qualities of life, all of them taken from the monthly magazine which he wrote himself on his Kansas farm. Few men have written more pungently than he does in such sentences as these: "The people are always worsted in an election;" "A loafer never works except when there is a fire: then he will carry out more furniture than anybody;" "With women, men are the enemy; I suppose they abuse them as a nation abuses a people with whom it is at war, with old stories told in other wars;" and, "There are no mysteries. Where does the wind come from? It doesn't matter: we know the habits of the wind after it arrives."⁴

"Wisdom as hard and sharp as this defies contradiction and resists time,"⁵ according to the Van Dorens. They also wrote of his keen observations:

Howe contrived to irritate a great many readers who do not like to use their naked eyes as much as he does. Optimists took so little comfort from him that they charged him with being sour and harsh. A more accurate charge would have been that he moved about, intellectually, within limits past which his imagination was not

⁴Carl Van Doren and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890 (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1939), p. 139.

⁵Ibid.

sufficient to carry him. That, however, is true of all but the greatest minds. Howe's limits must be taken into account. He lived in the tradition of the old-fashioned America, not in the tradition of a cosmopolitan culture. But within his limits, he is master, and he is so astute that persons of his disposition everywhere are likely to agree with him. Moreover, he has remarkable gifts in the art of making statements with edge and clarity.⁶

Carl Van Doren in Many Minds, credited Howe with some influence on the people at the country cross roads:

The newspaper which E. W. Howe long owned and edited in Atchison gave him a provincial reputation...but it is for his Monthly that he is really known. Only a man with a powerful urge could have been faithful for a dozen years to the task of writing the whole of a monthly magazine; only a man with a notable literary gift could have given expression to so much matter in a manner so precise, so lucid, so arresting, so personal. For sheer skill in making words serve him he has no superior and few equals among his contemporaries. He is a master of the difficult trick of the aphorist.

Simple as his point of view is, his range of topics is great. He can compress centuries of history and character in a single sentence....Many an old man in the tradition has sat in his established chair of the cross-roads tavern or the corner grocery and delivered himself of such wisdom as he had in such words as he could find. But rarely has one lived so profoundly, so broodingly, so questioningly, or looked so far as Mr. Howe. His wit, though that is eminent, could not give him his influence if it came from a flat or angular personality. He has the depth and the intensity as well as the edge of genius.⁷

Howe's notable literary and journalistic achievements were not confined to the area of the Mid-West, by any means, as the following editorial by Dr. Frank Crane was in the New York Globe on April 7, 1916. Howe reprinted it in the

⁶Ibid.

⁷Carl Van Doren, Many Minds (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1926), pp. 36-49.

Monthly largely because he doted on the tributes he found in other publications about himself:

Ed Howe is a national institution....For years he ran the Atchison Globe, and his sayings therein were widely quoted, simply because they were interesting. He is now publishing a monthly....It is just a broad stream of horse sense....The main charm of his writing, perhaps, is that he is autobiographical. His whole product is strictly personal....The reader gets the impression of the writer's sincerity....His language is so simple that the devotees of literature think it childish....It is so plain that the sophisticated think at first he is fooling, nothing so plain could be worth printing....It is cranky, because any man's opinions honestly set down will seem cranky to the general public....I write this because he is a national figure, utterly American, and beyond the reach of my praise or blame; you couldn't get him to pay you for advertising him, and if you barked at him he wouldn't look around to see who it is.⁸

This writer believes that Howe considered himself a dedicated writer from the time he wrote his first novel, which he had to publish himself, to the last page of the Monthly. This lifetime actually devoted to the fourth estate covered more years than many of those of his predecessors, contemporaries, or followers.

Howe had had the taste of editorial leadership in his home town. His fame soon spread in the Mississippi Valley and then reached New York. His son wrote that "He dedicated his life...trying to be helpful to his fellow man."⁹

When he was nearly at the end of his career, Howe wrote that he did not feel the world and his readers were any

⁸Monthly, VI (April, 1916), p. 4.

⁹Gene Howe, op. cit., p. 47.

better off morally, intellectually, politically or culturally, after all his years of trying to improve them. Perhaps no one of his age was more persevering in his efforts to stimulate men's thinking, but he had to admit after all his efforts, that he had been unable to change his readers for the better.

CHAPTER II

HOWE'S COMMENTS ON WORLD WAR I AND POLITICAL FIGURES

Events leading up to World War I did not seem to provoke too much comment from Howe, since he was not writing copy for his daily newspaper, but soon after the outbreak he wrote this: "The world needs to have the nonsense knocked out of it. It is drunk with its own importance, and should sober up. I hope hell will be raised until the people are finally convinced that they do not like it."¹ Then he continued, "Patriotism has harmed Germany more than treason has ever been able to harm it,"² after the war had just really begun in Europe, and long before the United States became involved in the conflict.

Even as the European war raged overseas, a great deal of concern was felt in the United States about whether we as a nation would become embroiled in the conflict. War atrocities, mammoth headlines about important battles, and numerous Americans who joined the foreign armies, were topics of every day conversation. The war and all its rights or wrongs, if any, was the subject for thousands of sermons, filled many an editorial column on newspapers in the nation, and was a gnawing worry for the American people.

¹Monthly, IV (October, 1914), p. 1.

²Ibid., IV (September, 1914), p. 2.

But there was another issue also before the American public that was of a great deal more interest to the habits, customs and morals of not only the average American, but affected many laborers, white collar workers, and the man on the street. This issue was the agitation for the prohibition and sale of all intoxicating beverages, sponsored by the prohibitionist factions in many states, and Kansas furnished her share. The issue of prohibition was also the subject of an equally large number of sermons, editorials, and comments in the newspapers of the nation.

The prohibitionist forces were successful after a long struggle in getting Congress to legislate the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting the manufacture, transportation and sale of liquors. Instead of curbing the consumption of liquor it served to increase drinking desires and illegal intoxicants were purchased at "speakeasies." Other factions immediately laid plans after the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 for continuing the liquor industry. A large lawless group of criminals controlled the "rum running" organizations in numbers of the states. These two topics were of such national importance that Howe combined his sentiments against both in one article, part of which is

The argument for war is weak as the argument for the right to pay a high price for intoxicants which are not only useless but harmful....

If the nations of the earth could agree on two laws and their enforcement, what would they be?

1. Prohibition of the manufacture of all fire arms.
2. Prohibition of the use and manufacture of all intoxicating liquors.³

In the early stages of the war, Howe praised the Germans for their industry, thrift and ability to whip twice their number of opponents in battle.⁴ As the conflict progressed, he commented on the fact that Germany was winning the war and that eight civilized nations were fighting it.⁵ In numerous issues, Howe gave his readers pertinent information about other European countries, such as the facts that their food supplies, horses, and plows had been confiscated and they had no transportation nor way of working the fields.

Then he seemed to concentrate many writing hours on Russia, for in early 1917 when that country collapsed internally and became completely demoralized, he wrote about the Rasputin scandal: "The Russian people are being fooled by their priests."⁶ He also kept his readers informed of the Russian Revolution and the rise to power by Trotszký and the Bolshevists. When Trotszký had just come into the world's eye as their leader, Howe called him a dangerous man, in a column entitled "The Only Man I Hate."⁷ Later events proved his judgment to be correct.

³Ibid., V (March, 1915), p. 1.

⁴Ibid., IV (December, 1914), p. 1.

⁵Ibid., V (June, 1915), p. 1.

⁶Ibid., IV (January, 1915), p. 4.

⁷Ibid., IV (March, 1918), p. 1.

As the conflict continued, he wrote about Russia while that country was at war with Germany and brought his readers up-to-date on the deplorable situations in Russia, where along the border the peasants had practiced the "scorched earth" policy before the advancement of the Kaiser's troops. First, he gave a resume of Russia's history, rulers, and reforms, then as developments occurred in the Bolsheviki revolt, he devoted long columns to the current social conditions and his personal observations on their rulers, voicing his hatred for Rasputin, Trotszky, Lenin, and Gorky.

Howe wrote that he had read in The New Republic how demoralized Russia had become under their leaders and the corruptness of the revolution and the Bolsheviks.⁸ A few months afterwards he presented a tirade on socialism and the Russian Revolution.⁹ Later he wrote that "my Russian correspondent reported that that country [Russia] was in such a state that no cure was possible."¹⁰ This correspondent was undoubtedly his son, who was in Europe representing the Associated Press as a reporter during the war and afterwards at the Peace Conference.

Howe seemed to feel sympathy for the Russian people when he wrote that forty millions had died as a result of the war, freezing, neglect, and starvation. Then he also

⁸Ibid., VII (September, 1918), p. 1.

⁹Ibid., VII (December, 1918), p. 1.

¹⁰Ibid., XI (March, 1922), p. 1.

intimated that Russia exaggerated the total number of dead to elicit sympathy from the American people.¹¹ Since Russia was still in the unmanageable throes of the Revolution, and the common people were suffering from the injustice of the Bolsheviks, Howe compared Russia's Revolution to the French Revolution in an article and then added his own thoughts: "The real objection is that it won't work."¹²

From what correspondence he had with his son, his daily reading of the newspapers, and magazines, including The New Republic, Howe had predicted the assassination of Lenin:

There cannot be found a single excuse for Lenin. He was a bloody-minded scoundrel and the reforms now being brought about in Russia--that he advocated shortly before his death--were reforms as old as the world itself....God will consign him to hell for a million years and then sentence him to a longer term for other crimes.¹³

Howe wrote long discourses on the international signs of war and the aspects of the entry of the United States into it. This timely topic kept him busy writing for many issues, resulting in several long columns in 1917. When he had to comment on the sinking of an American ship by the Germans, he wrote: "Let German militarism be destroyed, but not German efficiency in the Arts of Peace,"¹⁴ as he started pleading for the end of the war.

¹¹Ibid., X (March, 1921), p. 2.

¹²Ibid., VII (January, 1920), p. 1.

¹³Ibid., VII (September, 1918), p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid., VI (February, 1917), p. 4.

When the United States did enter the war and men were conscripted, he wrote: "When conscription of men for war is necessary, it is just as sensible to conscript women for reproduction."¹⁵ Continuing to express his venom for other things, he wrote, "What fools we are," in a long column entitled, "We American Asses,"¹⁶ and expressed his ideas of American folly: "When it is possible to overdo a thing, Americans rarely fail to do it."¹⁷

He had previously written on the financial aspects of the war, pleaded in the Monthly for peace, and reprinted pleas from other magazines "for the end of the war, bring the boys back home and let Europe pay for its own war,"¹⁸ Added to his comments about the war, he wrote that the public was not really told the truth about the battles and that he himself did not believe all the war news.¹⁹

Howe asserted that we were devoting more millions for the army, navy, education, religion, and research, but were failing to raise enough food to feed the people.²⁰ This was the year of "Victory Gardens" when everybody was encouraged to raise all the food he could in small home plots.

¹⁵Ibid., VI (February, 1917), p. 1.

¹⁶Ibid., VII (August, 1917), p. 1.

¹⁷Ibid., VII (January, 1919), p. 4.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., VII (July, 1917), p. 1.

²⁰Ibid., VII (March, 1917), p. 1.

At the conclusion of World War I in November 1918, he wrote that he believed the men who fought in the war would come back better men and was "thankful that there would be no change in the flag."²¹ He had wondered previously in writing of war happenings if Germany realized the mistake it had made in starting the war.²²

Then he threw out a few quips on "American Brag," that "everybody and everything was or is the best,"²³ when he wrote that he had observed the modesty of foreign writing in comparison with American writing. He still kept the war in his readers' minds as he continued to write about the aftermath of the war and warned them about postwar propaganda.²⁴ Obviously he was disgusted with some American ways of life and other things in general when he published a column: "The Jackass Should Be Our National Emblem, Instead of the Eagle," in which he declared that: "The American man has no opinions of his own. He is always swayed by others, preachers, women, and so on."²⁵ In rather an aside, he asked, "Why the women did not prevent the last war if their influence is as great as it is supposed to be?"²⁶

²¹Ibid., VII (November, 1918), p. 1.

²²Ibid., V (June, 1915), p. 1.

²³Ibid., VIII (March, 1919), p. 1.

²⁴Ibid., VIII (February, 1920), p. 1.

²⁵Ibid., VIII (September, 1919), p. 3.

²⁶Ibid., VIII (June, 1919), p. 3.

Howe continued to print in each issue something on Russia as he had for months previously. Then he dreamed up a gathering near Atchison and wrote that "The Society to Oppose Stupidity" had held its annual convention at "Potato Hill" the first week in September. A complete division of land and wealth was suggested and the first man who complained of injustice was to be hanged.²⁷ This was Howe's own hypothetical society and his critical and ironical comment on the Russian Revolution and the injustice of all their political upheaval.

Howe's final conclusion after he had written and published so much about Russia in many previous issues of the Monthly was: "After the Russians have finally settled down to peace, their laws will be no more just than have existed in the United States for at least a century."²⁸ He was a good prophet, for even today most readers would concur with him that the Russians are still behind the United States in religion, social reforms, housing development, and some agrarian methods. Some of their laws, however, have now been changed radically under Communism, whether for better or worse, who can say? In 1920, Howe claimed that: "The communists are murdering Russia."²⁹

²⁷Ibid., VI (September, 1918), p. 2.

²⁸Ibid., IX (August, 1920), p. 1.

²⁹Ibid., IX (September, 1920), p. 1.

After all these years of wars, intrigues, diplomatic relations being worn to the breaking-point, concessions on the part of the United States, and the rise of Russia to a world power in her enslavement of millions of innocent people, this writer, and it is hoped other readers, concurs with Howe's original estimate in sizing up the leaders in Russia and his homely early twentieth century ideas regarding that country.

After the war was over and the World War I combatants had returned home, he advocated the thought that, "In the next forty years, this country will be what the members of the American Legion conclude to make it."³⁰ This writer would disagree with this statement because of Howe's belief that the Legion would be a very strong faction in politics. The Legion does exert some political power in bringing pressure to bear at election times both in individual states and in the nation as a whole. Also in thousands of local posts of the Legion activities are carried on in civic, patriotic, philanthropic and social projects the whole year through. These local influences seem to be more than Howe anticipated when he thought that the Legion would exert so much power nationally.

All the time the war continued, Howe printed objections to various and sundry policies of the Federal government, of

³⁰Ibid., X (March, 1921), p. 1.

the policies of the Congress, the income tax laws, and President Wilson. Seldom did he express any approval of any measure passed by Congress, and was quite critical of Wilson. He expressed these personal feelings about Woodrow Wilson in a long column entitled, "Our Greatest Democrat:"

My objection to Wilson is that he is a tremendous sentimentalist, and, in occupying a great position, and consequently exercising a great power, has tried to put his notions into effect....Had Mr. Wilson been a business man, and acquired common sense by contact with practical affairs, possibly he would have become a useful man.... But he was born into a sentimental atmosphere, and has never been out of it....Mr. Wilson is saturated with false notions...and has become the most thoroughly discredited man the world has ever known....Mr. Wilson plunged in with all the fervor of a mad man, and adopted theories as impossible, as foolish, as ruinously expensive as a railroad to the planet Mars.... Millions have cheered his sentimentalism when he promised beautiful but impossible things.³¹

In the centuries to come Woodrow Wilson will stand out as the embodiment of American Big Talk. In May, 1917 he stated "We have entered the war without having suffered a specific injury but the heart of our people is in this war. We would never have entered it did we not believe that it was an opportunity to express the character of the United States....We are the helpful friends and saviors of all mankind; our soldiers are crusaders."³²

Since the first issues of the Monthly were not available on microfilm, Howe's political discussions before the March 1914 number were not procured. By this time, however, he was voicing his candid opinions against the Democratic party as a whole, mainly because he was a Republican and his party had been in power for a number of years. Obviously,

³¹Ibid., IX (November, 1919), p. 2.

³²Ibid., IX (April, 1920), p. 1.

he did not care for any Democrat, so expressed these views:

Today the Democrats are in control of the nation and some of the funniest looking men in the country have been statesmen since March 4, 1913. These funny looking gents are making more promises, and spending more money, than the Republicans did; they are creating so many commissions and positions as to even make Washington dizzy.³³

Then he went on to remark that he was already tired of seeing Wilson's picture in print, and wrote: "Sayre, who married into the family, is worse looking than any of them."³⁴

In every issue he had a column or two on some phase of American government, political parties, corrupt practices of various officials, or then items on miner's or street car or train strikes, the Mexican war (while it was in progress) bureaucrats of one sort or another and politics in general. Howe then told his readers: "We talked about great reforms being accomplished, yet politics has never been touched," that "the corruption in our courts is disgraceful and no steps had been taken to reform lawyers."³⁵ Speaking about the income tax law, he contended that the people did not want it, but the politicians demanded it because they wanted more money to waste.³⁶ These were his thoughts:

Of the so-called civilized nations, we have the most extravagant government. The people of the United States are ruled as unfairly by the politicians as the people of India are ruled by the English; the people

³³Ibid., IV (February, 1914), p. 1.

³⁴Ibid., p. 2.

³⁵Ibid., IV (April, 1914), p. 3.

³⁶Ibid., p. 2.

of the United States are fooled as mercilessly by their statesmen as the people of Russia are fooled by their priests.³⁷

After the presidential campaign of 1913, when Wilson was elected to the presidency, Howe had expressed his dislike of Wilson and the "filth of politics,"³⁸ as he still tried to influence his readers against Wilson. As Wilson's term of office continued, Howe expressed himself in some issues both for and against Wilson, but the majority of his opinions were in the nature of disapproval.³⁹

In one issue he found occasion to commend the Democrats regarding a position which was created near the beginning of the Wilson administration for a certain man. "That man turned out to be a mutt, and the position was abolished."⁴⁰

Another approval of Wilson's actions was when the trainmen and their employers failed to agree. The controversy was appealed to President Wilson. "He promptly took the side of the trainmen and demanded that the railroads grant ten hours pay for eight hours work."⁴¹ Wilson also said that he would advocate an increase in freight rates to help all the railroads concerned. Howe also printed some of the things that Wilson was in favor of, such as, better pay for teachers,

³⁷Ibid., IV (January, 1915), p. 4.

³⁸Ibid., IV (July, 1914), p. 1.

³⁹Ibid., VI (September, 1916), p. 1.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

better education, shorter working hours for the day laborer, the teaching of trades, and better roads.⁴² We are still striving to accomplish these things today; basic ideals of the American people.

Howe always tried to influence his readers against the Democratic Party. He also campaigned against all labor unions and their leaders and claimed that the real leaders in the United States were in the newspaper offices, not in public positions.⁴³

Still thinking in terms of expenses, Howe wrote:

Mr. Wilson will cost us in one way or another, during his four years in the White House, one million dollars....Why talk of equality?...Why doesn't he give us his services...for what he was able to earn at schools and colleges?⁴⁴

Then he added this quip: "Every good thing is doubled through the gold-rimmed glasses through which he looks at it."⁴⁵ Howe called him a dangerous man and predicted his defeat in the coming election. He also expressed his personal wish for a "humiliation of Mr. Wilson so absolute that the world will take notice."⁴⁶

While the League of Nations was being formed, Howe printed a column expressing his personal views on it. He

⁴²Ibid., IX, (July, 1920), p. 4.

⁴³Ibid., IV (July, 1914), p. 1.

⁴⁴Ibid., IX (November, 1914), p. 3.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

contended that too much was involved in such a peace conference and that in his opinion and in the opinion of other thinkers of the world the real issues were still the same that they had been for years before, namely: socialism, Bolshevism, and the code of the politicians, who wanted to run things their own way. The only really favorable thing that he printed about the Peace Conference was that his son Jim had been selected to report the Conference in Paris.⁴⁷

Even after Wilson was dead, and the Peace Conference had failed, Howe still had the two of them in mind when he wrote, "While President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson went to Paris on an idealism drunk. The hard-headed sober Allies robbed him and no one doubts it."⁴⁸

Much later in the Monthly, Howe said that he had found fault originally with Wilson because he was a sentimentalist, and in winning the presidency put his sentimental notions into full effect...with the result that he believed that Wilson had harmed America more than any other American.⁴⁹ Those were the major objections that Howe voiced against Wilson. It did not matter whether his readers agreed with him about his political views or not; he set down his individual opinions anyway.

When Wilson's administration was nearing an end, Howe

⁴⁷Ibid., VII (January, 1919), p. 2.

⁴⁸Ibid., XII (February, 1927), p. 1.

⁴⁹Ibid., XII (February, 1924), p. 1.

predicted Harding's election.⁵⁰ In a column the next month, after Harding had won the election, Howe was most complimentary and reminded his readers that the election was so much in favor of Harding because Wilson was a "sick man." He never let his readers forget that when Wilson was elected he had opposed war, and when he was re-elected because he kept us out of war, we got into World War I. anyway.⁵¹

When all the scandal broke about Harding, Howe told his readers about it several times and this was typical:

Perhaps in history no man has suffered before execution as Harding did....Gossip attended to him.... In addition he had a fool mistress, he had a fool wife who had long been jealous of Nan Britton....I wonder worry did not kill him earlier.⁵²

Howe's views on the Harding administration were expressed as follows: "We need economy now as never before; we need common sense, freedom from foreign entanglements, freedom from domestic broils."⁵³ Later, he observed, "In the United States our policy seems to be: make new mistakes, and continue the old ones for the excitement of quarreling about them."⁵⁴

When Calvin Coolidge was to run for the presidency after the death of Harding, Howe wrote him an "Open Letter," and

⁵⁰Ibid., IX (October, 1920), p. 1.

⁵¹Ibid., IX (November, 1920), p. 1.

⁵²Ibid., XII (September, 1928), p. 1.

⁵³Ibid., IX (November, 1920), p. 1.

⁵⁴Ibid., XII (February, 1929), p. 1.

gave him a lot of advice as to what not to do, such as:

Announce that you will be content to serve out Harding's unexpired term; and will not seek to occupy first place at the next Republican convention. Announce that during your occupancy of the White House, you will perform the duties of the President in the interest of the people, and not in the interests of the Republican party. And this announcement made, stick to it, without fear or favor. It would be so novel, so just, a course that the people will soon rally to your support.⁵⁵

Howe also advised him against making speaking and junketing trips, golf, and wearing himself out and then continued, "You lack the good looks of Mr. Harding: the dynamic quality of Mr. Roosevelt. You must try something new."⁵⁶ He suggested to Coolidge that he let the Republican convention take care of itself, and then continued, "The course I have outlined is not only just; it is sensible. Well performed, it will prove good politics. By the old method you can do nothing: by the new you may become a hero not only at home but abroad."⁵⁷ His suggestions were that Coolidge take advantage of this new plan for he was sure that it would work.

After Coolidge had been elected and was in his first ~~term~~ in office, Howe had this in the Monthly: "I am learning to like President Coolidge, although I have made a bet he will not succeed himself....Mr. Coolidge's policy of saying little appeals to me."⁵⁸ Coolidge's lack of speeches was a notable characteristic, remarked upon not only by the press

⁵⁵Ibid., XII (August, 1923), p. 1.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., XII (December, 1923), p. 4.

but also by Congress and really one of his qualities that was so outstanding that he was given the nickname of "Silent Cal."

Coolidge had a great following however, after the Democratic administration of Wilson. The country had settled down after the war and prosperity was evident, the "Roaring Twenties" was the nickname given that era of the decade. News men were alert for statements given out to them, and many words and columns were written about Coolidge, even though he did not make public speeches very often. Howe also had his bit to say, although he did not write something every month. After reading some statement, which he did not clarify, he wrote this:

The statement is made that Calvin Coolidge is one of the greatest men of his age...he is nothing of the kind....He is a plain, honest, man with plain ideas.... Mr. Coolidge does not write or speak particularly well, but he thinks well and acts well, and has sufficient genius to know what should be done for the country in the present crisis.⁵⁹

When Coolidge was about to run for election, Howe forecast the nomination and election, and added his bit about the management of the campaign:

Mr. Coolidge can be elected president easily if he makes no mistakes, and pursues the simple policy at first assumed. If he is beaten he will beat himself by playing the old political game.

Mr. Coolidge made a good political speech and was well managed by Andrew Mellon.⁶⁰

Nothing more of real significance was published in the

⁵⁹Ibid., XII (June, 1924), p. 3.

⁶⁰Ibid., XII (August, 1924), p. 1.

Monthly until Coolidge's term was about over. Then Howe wrote that "An editor declared that Mr. Herbert Hoover would have the support of Calvin Coolidge as the next Republican candidate for President."⁶¹

One of Hoover's talking points was river improvements which Howe was sure would cost the government millions of dollars. Howe suggested as Hoover's platform a common sense issue, a sound policy and said that by adopting those, he could do the country a lot of good.⁶²

Then Coolidge, who was still in office, made a glaring mistake according to Howe. In a column entitled "He's Through," he wrote:

President Coolidge...like a politician...like a business man often makes mistakes. The action of signing the bill giving a bonus to the Spanish War Veterans was bad politics....Mr. Coolidge may as well be an honest president until the end of his term; he's through.⁶³

Even though he had found fault with him over the bonus, Howe wrote later that he still admired President Coolidge:

I am still a strong admirer of President Coolidge... his success has been notable....I believe Mr. Coolidge is the only president in my time who has realized that being president is merely an administrative job...he has no wild fancies of being called for a high purpose, and realizes the rights of the people more consistently than any other man who has occupied the office. I like him because he is homely and unable to make a great speech. Mr. Harding was well disposed but suffered the curse of good looks.⁶⁴

⁶¹Ibid., XII (November, 1925), p. 1.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., XII (May, 1926), p. 1.

⁶⁴Ibid., XII (February, 1927), p. 1.

When political talk about Herbert Hoover was on the tongues of the politicians and people, and the nation was planning the election, Howe stated his views on Hoover, too: "One of my objections to Herbert Hoover for president is I don't like his looks...on the other hand, I liked Warren G. Harding's looks exceedingly well and he turned out badly."⁶⁵ Then Howe discussed Hoover: "Herbert Hoover's plan in seeking the White House was to smile, smile, smile, and talk the language of women."⁶⁶ As will be noted, Howe thought that woman suffrage was a great mistake.

But all was not quiet on the political horizon that year. The Democrats nominated Al Smith, a Tammany Hall man, and a Roman Catholic for their candidate. Naturally all the Republican newspapers in the country took up ~~arms~~ editorially against the Democratic Party and the Catholic nominee. Words, words, words, were written by all factions concerned. Howe put in his share:

Why is Al Smith the first Catholic to be nominated for president? The politicians decided that such a religious affiliation would prove a handicap in a country largely Protestant....I shall vote for him but Smith cannot be elected....Hoover is a weak candidate but will win, because of another democratic mistake....In twenty years, a Catholic, a woman, or a Jew may be elected president, but not now, religious prejudice is too strong.

⁶⁵Ibid., XII (April, 1928), p. 1.

⁶⁶Ibid., XII (May, 1928), p. 4.

⁶⁷Ibid., XII (June, 1928), p. 1.

In the same issue Howe still had more to say about Smith, when he declared:

Now that we are about to lose Calvin Coolidge we need a man of Al Smith's practical common sense in the White House...but we will not get Smith as president, he will be defeated by a landslide....You will find during the present campaign that the bread of editors is buttered on the Hoover side.⁶⁸

But Howe took a verbal swing at Herbert Hoover also for something that he had said:

I am mad at Herbert Hoover because he says so many things like: "I wish the women would apply their higher sense of service and responsibility, their freshness of enthusiasm, their capacity for organization to the public problem."...This is such an annoying and unnecessary nonsense I cannot overlook.⁶⁹

Naturally, Howe would resent all entrance of women into planning any political organization.

With all the controversy that raged, Howe still approved of Smith's nomination:

Although a Republican I would like to see Al Smith elected President. The professional prohibitionists have become offensively impudent and disturbing: they need such a rebuke...Smith's nomination was a Democratic blunder.⁷⁰

Readers of the Monthly certainly knew for whom Howe would cast his vote: "I shall vote for Al Smith for the only reason anyone ever votes for a Democrat: in the hope of making the Republicans more reasonable and economical and not in the hope that my candidate will be elected."⁷¹

⁶⁸Ibid., XII (June, 1928), p. 1.

⁶⁹Ibid., XII (July, 1928), p. 4.

⁷⁰Ibid., XII (August, 1928), p. 1.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 2.

Whether Howe had a change of heart before he admitted it or whether he waited until election day is unanswerable. He had told his readers that he felt Smith would not win, and tried to point out that he was a mistaken candidate that the Democrats had deliberately nominated because they thought Smith had enough following to win the election. As it was, Smith lost his own state of New York. Whether the Democrats hoped to repeal the prohibition amendment is also an enigma. Howe changed his mind at the last moment and this is what he told his readers:

At the last moment I voted for Hoover; when I went to the polls I saw an Irish Catholic wearing a Smith badge. It happened I didn't like him, and my old prejudices had their way.

Had I seen an old Methodist prohibitionist I didn't like instead of this Irishman, I should have voted for Smith....In spite of myself I have long had a good deal of admiration for Herbert Hoover, although I picked at him. I never doubted he is a fine gentleman, and honest man, and possessed of unusual intelligence and information....Probably the responsibility of the office will sober him.⁷²

Howe was soon to meet Hoover in person, as events turned out, for in the year-end issue of the Monthly, there was a quotation from the Miami (Florida) Herald saying that Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus H. K. Curtis had entertained President-elect and Mrs. Herbert Hoover at luncheon on their yacht Lyndonia and E. W. Howe was among the guests. Howe added, "Hoover appeared tired after the campaign and predicts that 'he will gradually regulate the spotlight and make it endurable and

⁷²Ibid., XII (October, 1928), p. 1.

and possibly comfortable."⁷³

Hoover had politicians for enemies as well as certain newspaper and magazine editors. Howe quoted Mencken as making these editorial comments: "H. L. Mencken is possibly the outstanding enemy of President Hoover, yet he writes: 'Mr. Hoover is no more to blame for most of the things he is damned for than you or I.'"⁷⁴ Howe said that he could not agree because he considered Hoover as extravagant in hard times as Wilson was in war and boom times, and added his own conclusion, that "Washington is drunk, it better sober up."⁷⁵

Howe's opinion of Hoover rose still further, when he printed in the Monthly an account of the honorary dinner given for Thomas A. Edison by Henry Ford on the occasion of the anniversary in recognition of all the work that he had done in electricity. President Hoover refused the seat of honor at the banquet, graciously insisting that it was Edison's honor to have that seat. Howe commented:

(P. S. I intend to vote for President Hoover for a second term because of his good taste in giving old Tom the place of honor at the Edison dinner; my next car will be a Ford because of the action of Henry Ford for arranging the Edison celebration.)⁷⁶

Then Howe contended that Hoover had introduced a new

⁷³Ibid., XII (December, 1928), p. 1.

⁷⁴Ibid., XII (April, 1932), p. 4.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., XII (November, 1929), p. 2.

and dangerous idea into politics after providing relief for farmers who previously had been able to care for themselves and the farm relief bill immediately became a scandal. Howe believed it to be a wrong principle and the rise in taxes expensive, and said that every dollar of farm relief shrank fifty per cent before it reached the needy.⁷⁷

In a column entitled "Politics our Greatest Danger," Howe proceeded to point out lessons that we should have learned from the Romans, when they were ruined by high taxes.

Nothing irritates me more than the manner in which politicians impose on me as a citizen; nothing astonishes me more than the indifference of the people to the insult and the danger.

There is nothing I would work at with more enthusiasm than reform in politics but there is no place I can begin and no one will join me.

In nothing are the people being trained in evil as in politics.

And we call it patriotism.⁷⁸

Then he continued to tell his readers about the huge relief bill that millions of intelligent voters had opposed, and added, "It was largely a question of whether the Republicans or the Democrats were going to spend two and one-half billions of dollars."⁷⁹

Again it was an election year, and when the new Democratic candidate was announced, Howe went on record as follows:

⁷⁷Ibid., XII (August, 1930), p. 2.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 3.

⁷⁹Ibid., XII (July, 1930), p. 1.

The rich hate themselves, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, a candidate for the presidency is an aristocrat and rich, but already is talking about the forgotten man, and being supported by William Randolph Hearst, who is enormously wealthy.⁸⁰

As the campaign progressed, Howe asked what had become of the art of public speaking, and added that Herbert Hoover had been the best of the public speakers. Then he told his readers, "After I heard Franklin D. Roosevelt twice, I no longer take the trouble of turning a button to hear him."⁸¹

Then Howe went on to say that he intended to vote for President Hoover in November:

If he is elected he will be free to exercise his judgment as an honest and intelligent man (he is both) without regard to politics, whereas Mr. Roosevelt, if elected, will immediately begin campaigning for a second term--indeed, he is at it now....Mr. Roosevelt will be the winner.⁸²

And his predictions of Roosevelt's election were correct, as well as his campaigning for more than one term, as he was the president to serve the most number of terms in history. Then Howe condemned President Hoover, by writing, "Herbert Hoover was a weak man in his best days as president; he is a weak man now that he is preparing to leave the White House."⁸³

After the inauguration of Roosevelt, Howe wrote his appraisal of the first executive acts:

⁸⁰Ibid., XII (September, 1932), p. 1.

⁸¹Ibid., XII (October, 1932), p. 1.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid., XII (February, 1933), p. 4.

President Roosevelt started his measure proposing a tax measure to save one and one-half million dollars and was received with a lot of applause.

When he reaches other propositions, he will have to propose appropriations for a much larger sum.⁸⁴

Then as the first year of the administration began, Howe printed his own objections and backed them up by some of his reading in leading newspapers:

President Roosevelt says the papers of the country are so generally supporting his policies that he would welcome criticism....Probably a president's duties are so enormous he never reads newspapers; certainly he has not seen the Chicago Tribune, the New York Times, the Saturday Evening Post, the Kansas City Star or any other American publication. Especially he has not seen the London Times which declares American politicians seem determined to destroy the country in spite of the screaming of editors and people for common sense and a chance to live.⁸⁵

And in the last issue of the Monthly, Howe wrote that in various newspapers he had read that companies, corporations, and merchants were objecting to the new N. R. A. bill, which was also one of Roosevelt's ideas. The new Congress passed the law which was later invalidated.

The Monthly ended in the first year of Roosevelt's administration. Howe lived for **four** more years, although he was not able to voice his protests against some of the revolutionary practices begun then. All during Howe's journalistic career, he was an astute critic of politics, political acts, national policies and the various presidents.

⁸⁴Ibid., XII (March, 1933), p. 3.

⁸⁵Ibid., XII (October, 1933), p. 2.

If he did not like their commitments on major or minor issues for the nation, he never hesitated to say so.

Whether he corresponded with any particular people whom he attacked or disagreed with, he did not say, except to state mildly that someone had disagreed with him. Many editors have been very outspoken in their editorial columns and E. W. Howe was certainly one of them. His Monthly served as the outlet for his exasperations, his prejudices, and his dislikes of politics as well as his indignations at other measures, acts, and happenings upon which he cared to comment, and did.

CHAPTER III

HOWE'S COMMENTS ON NEWSPAPERS AND LITERARY FIGURES

Considering that Howe was a journalist, one would have expected him to be sympathetic with his colleagues in the field of journalism. Instead he used his Monthly to rail at and deride them about time-worn practices to which they were addicted. He seemed to take delight in making continual remarks about how they let their subscribers down in not always printing the whole truth about many events.

He contended that the newspapers and editors were unfair to the public and misrepresented the attitude of the courts and the well-to-do people towards the poorer classes of society. He wrote that

...newspapers exaggerated the poverty of the poor; the riches of the rich; the comforts of the home; the goodness of women and the meanness of men; the importance of the Old Flag; the importance of our schools and churches; the patriotism of old soldiers and the importance of a free press.¹

Howe's criticism of the editors was that the people loved sentiment and hated the truth; therefore, since newspapers were not edited for glory or printed for fun, they (the editors) printed what the people wanted to read. He felt that

We have become a nation of liars because reading is cheap. It won't do to say it is the duty of the people

¹Monthly, XII (November, 1927), p. 2.

to support those newspapers which keep their standards of honesty highest; that is more good advice the people will not take. The only remedy is, if you are lied about, see that a correction is made.²

He contended that the country was going to hell, and the men who were pushing it that way were good fellows in the newspaper business who did not realize what they were doing. He believed that some editors always printed news that would create sensations, mainly for purposes of enlarging their circulations. He told them they "allowed the foolish sensational things the maximum coverage, every sensible thing gets the minimum."³

Howe did remind the editors however, that they had an obligation to their country, and insisted that if the country was really to be saved, the newspapers must do it. They were the real power, he believed, because public men of every description lived on newspaper notoriety, and they were most careful not to offend reporters and editors.⁴ Writing about one particular editor (unnamed), Howe said:

The real leaders are in the newspaper offices, they are the leaders because they have almost unlimited power. Even though some newspaper editors were disliked, people bought their papers because they produced better newspapers than their rivals; but whatever he advocates is beaten at every election he is so generally disliked. The man actually has no influence except away from home.⁵

²Ibid.

³Ibid., IV (July, 1914), p. 1.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

He also had this to say about the press and editors and gave them a little praise when he wrote:

Newspapers and magazines are worth all they cost, but we take them too seriously. Buy a newspaper or magazine as you buy a ticket to see a play; get what you can out of it, but do not expect that the actor loves you, and is constantly thinking up plans to benefit you.⁶

All through the editions of the Monthly he complained about the press. He again expressed himself when he wrote that "one never picks up a paper without reading that something is radically wrong and that the people are compelled to devote most of their time to reading and quarrelling about it."⁷

Knowing from experience that newspaper reading was one of the daily habits of Americans, Howe wrote that "when an important news story breaks, the people can hardly wait until the next edition of the newspaper to hear further details."⁸ He also said that he had often remarked that a reader may look through books, newspapers, magazines and pamphlets and find little of interest because most of the writers had a bad style.⁹

After Howe retired to "Potato Hill" he was busy reading books, magazines, and the four daily newspapers to which he subscribed. He explained his sentiments about his voracious reading this way:

⁶Ibid., V (March, 1915), p. 1.

⁷Ibid., VII (February, 1919), p. 2.

⁸Ibid., VIII (August, 1919), p. 1.

⁹Ibid., X (July, 1921), p. 4.

Perhaps I read more than the average man, now that I have more leisure long denied me...my knowledge of literature is still meagre; and I am not ashamed to confess it....Many noted books are not worth the paper they are printed on...they are dull to me.¹⁰

Although Howe believed some books worthless, there were many that he considered commendable. While he did not print Bacon's theme insofar that the reading of some books was to be chewed and digested, each issue of the Monthly contained a resume or book review. These Howe wrote after having read the book carefully and prepared what he considered a creditable review.

He often chose a short excerpt from an editorial, some magazine article, quotation or effort on the part of some other writer, to add to his store of copy for his magazine. From the sources which he gave in the Monthly it would appear that he made selections for his quotations from some of the lesser known magazines and printed these selected items especially for the enlightenment of his readers. He contended that his subscribers needed to be informed and he proceeded to inform them with quotations from magazines with smaller circulations as well as from the more popular ones.

Howe especially admired the American Magazine, the Literary Digest, The American Mercury, as well as many others. He admitted that the National Geographic was one of his choice magazines but complained that the writing was not as good as

¹⁰Ibid., VIII (May, 1919), p. 2.

the photographs in it.¹¹ He had one favorite magazine, however, the Saturday Evening Post, which he recommended to his readers as the best buy in American literature in 1924, saying: "I look through many newspapers and magazines without encountering the truth once. It is an age of Liars. God's bookkeepers must be very busy these days recording sins."¹² Howe also quoted McClure's Magazine, The New Republic, Vanity Fair, Smart Set, and the Country Gentlemen in numerous issues of his Monthly.

Because of the fact that he was a writer, he appreciated fully the art of creative writing and journalism and all the efforts of those of his profession who attained success. He admired many of his contemporary fellow craftsmen and wrote various statements telling his readers why he held these writers in such high esteem. W. S. Maugham, George Bernard Shaw, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, were authors whom he admired.

Howe concurred with H. G. Wells on the idea of printing a series of books telling the plain and simple truth about everything: history, biography, religion, science, sociology, etc., to teach people what had gone on in the past so that they might judge the future for themselves. Howe claimed to have advocated the same thing for twenty years.¹³

¹¹Ibid., X (April, 1921), p. 4.

¹²Ibid., XII (April, 1924), p. 2.

¹³Ibid., X (April, 1921), p. 4.

In no especial month would any particular writer or author be mentioned, but in each issue one or more of those writers whom he admired would be quoted. Howe expressed his admiration for G. B. Shaw many times, calling him "the master writer of our day," and adding that "G. B. S. in my judgment has more clear common sense than any other man, and expresses it most agreeably."¹⁴ Other references to Shaw in succeeding issues were in the same vein; Howe never let his readers forget that Shaw was his favorite writer.

He also admired E. Haldeman-Julius and his Little Blue Book Publishing Company and advised his readers to purchase and read the small literary offerings.¹⁵ Then Howe wrote in the Monthly that he had heard that Haldeman-Julius would close out the five cent Little Blue Book Series and expressed himself that he thought "he is throwing away a Great Idea--there is none better than the Little Blue Book Library."¹⁶ Obviously, Howe did not like the idea of Haldeman-Julius' dispensing with the publication of the Little Blue Books, for reasons that will be pointed out later. That same year Howe, his niece and companions traveled to Girard, Kansas to visit Haldeman-Julius and his family. He described the automobile trip and the warm and cordial reception they received. "My

¹⁴Ibid., XII (December, 1925), p. 1.

¹⁵Ibid., XI (May, 1922), p. 1.

¹⁶Ibid., XII (May, 1925), p. 3.

strongest impression of the man...was his gentility and I greatly like that...reasonable in his dislikes, another quality I greatly admire."¹⁷

Evidently they also made some kind of a writing-business arrangement, for without any previous comment or announcement there appeared on the fourth page of the Monthly, a two-column framed box, two inches long, advertising "Little Blue Books," by E. W. Howe. The three titles were "Notes for My Biographer," "Sinner Sermons," and "Preaching from the Audience." Instead of the customary five cents, Howe offered them to his readers, autographed and postpaid for ten cents. This list of Howe's Little Blue Books increased later to five, and then to eight.

Howe continued the advertisement with offerings of his own travel books, short books, his novel (of which he boasted one hundred printings by then), and his autobiography, soliciting sales from his readers. Below each book and the price were at first a few, then more and more thumbnail sketches praising that particular book, all signed by famous literary people, such as: William A. White, Edward Bok, W. D. Howells, J. E. House, Heywood Broun, Mark Van Doren, S. S. McClure, Henry J. Allen, and others. Endorsements as to the reading quality of the books was also assured readers by short quotations from various newspapers, such as the Los

¹⁷Ibid., XII (October, 1925), p. 1.

Angeles Times, Buffalo (N. Y.) Times, the New York Sun, the Kansas City Star, and others. It should be added that after the paid commercial advertising stopped, this was the only advertisement carried in the Monthly.

In another frame of mind, Howe championed William Randolph Hearst in his assaults on public men and said that "Hearst is the boldest of reformers and demands the most for the people,"¹⁸ after reading some of Hearst's editorials. Other authors whom he admired were Dorothy Thompson, Ring Lardner, George Jean Nathan, and H. L. Mencken. Howe admitted his indebtedness to William Allen White for fine examples in the field of writing and journalism. At times Howe and White did not quite agree on style.¹⁹ Another Kansan whom Howe quoted was J. E. House, then mayor of Topeka, who wrote for the Topeka Capital.²⁰ In keeping up with reporting the daily news, he said that he considered the Associated Press the best news gathering organization in the world.²¹

A great many times in the Monthly, Howe had expressed his admiration for H. L. Mencken, then editor of The American Mercury:

I find it very inconvenient to get along without The American Mercury....Its contents may not always be

¹⁸Ibid., VII (June, 1918), p. 1.

¹⁹Ibid., IX (February, 1921), p. 2.

²⁰Ibid., IV (October, 1918), p. 1.

²¹Ibid., VIII (April, 1919), p. 4.

of vital moment but are always interesting. The editors...are occasionally mistaken but always vigorous, original and pleasing in their mistakes. Most of their contributors write like them.²²

In expressing his approval of the magazine that Mencken edited, Howe also had some criticisms of Mencken which he published in the Monthly.

H. L. Mencken refers to Ralph Waldo Emerson as senile. This is purely unfair, impolite abuse. No other American has written so well as Emerson.

Mr. Mencken's unjust reference to Emerson is to deny the New England contention that Emerson was as great as Nietzsche. So far as talent is concerned, the two men were much alike, the marked difference between Emerson and Nietzsche is that one was a gentleman and the other was not. Emerson expressed Nietzsche's thoughts in a cleaner way.

So far as I am a student of any writer, I am a student of Nietzsche. I admire his great ability as a writer, his tremendous intelligence and information; his naturalness, which many call meanness. But I do not recall an absolutely new idea he expressed.

The work of both Nietzsche and Emerson was mainly defense of the work of men who had written long before.

I hope H. L. Mencken, a corporal in the literary war, does not imagine he says anything new. He is merely defending some ideas and abusing some others. The older leaders said nothing new, certainly their disciples have not.²³

As has been previously stated, Howe was almost as constant a reader as he was a writer, so had read and studied Mencken's books, especially The Infernal Feminine and The Virtue of Cowardice, in which Mencken had attacked women and marriage and taken a journalistic swing at Christobal Pankhurst and the Suffragette Movement. Mencken condemned the women who followed the vermillion path, had illicit love

²²Ibid., XII (July, 1924), p. 2.

²³Ibid., XII (April, 1925), p. 3.

affairs, and appeared in the haunts of vice. Since so much of Howe's writings were expressions of indignation against actions of women of which he did not approve, and more especially vice and wrongdoings of all kinds, the two editors had a great common meeting ground upon which they had like feelings.

Howe read The Philosophy of Frederick Nietzsche by Mencken and quoted excerpts from it in his Monthly. This knowledge of Mencken's books, added to the fact that Howe was a student of Nietzsche and quoted his works so freely, gave Howe and Mencken another ground of mutual interest. Howe had admired Mencken so much, he decided to visit him in New York one year enroute home from Florida.²⁴

It was at this time that George Jean Nathan and Mencken were editing The American Mercury, so Howe invited both to his hotel room. From his writings and being a confirmed bachelor, Mencken supposedly did not like women. Nathan was definitely a woman hater. At any rate, Howe introduced them to Adelaide and they were both very nice to her, but she was hustled out of their sight by Howe.²⁵

Howe wrote about his visit with Mencken in New York and published it in the Monthly. He said that he had been pleased to meet the great critic and converse with him in a language

²⁴Ibid., VII (February, 1918), p. 1.

²⁵Ibid.

that he could understand. Seemingly they both enjoyed their short personal meeting.

Mencken also wrote an article about his visit with Howe which was published in the Smart Set, so Howe quoted that in the Monthly. Mencken was "so pleased to find a Kansan interested in literature and proclaimed it as great a feat as the man who originally harnessed a sheep and a hyena together."²⁶ Then Mencken went on to say: "Despite a novel and several travel volumes, he maintains that rum is a viper, that women who smoke should be licensed...and what the country needs is not less Puritanism but more."²⁷ Two things about Howe were commendable, he went on: "Howe had mastered the trick of putting his writing into graceful American, and that he is an absolutely honest man, one of the few in the whole United States."²⁸

Later on that year, Howe quoted Mencken again to the effect that Mencken, being a bachelor, claimed that women did not cook well in their homes. Howe rose to their defense, claiming that because Mencken lived in hotels, he could not be considered a good judge, and offered him a dozen girls around Atchison who were good cooks. Howe claimed that Mencken was really ignorant of good women, having lived all

²⁶Ibid., VIII (March, 1918), p. 4.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

of his life in cities.²⁹

In keeping himself and his readers up-to-date on Mencken's activities, Howe wrote later.

Mr. Mencken is now writing a weekly syndicated letter....He has unusual opinions and expresses them violently. Readers of different newspapers are writing protests and editors timidly defending him.... Mr. Mencken's wit is so keen, and his ability as a writer so great, I do not believe he need use an exaggeration....I hope the newspapers will continue to print his weekly feathre, also, that he will heed such protests as are reasonable.³⁰

For years before these remarks about the syndicated column, they had been mutually admiring the writings of each other.

The two drew verbal swords over the stand which each took for business men. Mencken attacked the business men of the nation in an article in Pearson's Magazine in which he contended that the average business man was "childish." Howe objected to this statement. He agreed that "the average business man was thought to be inferior but actually they were not as tricky and mean as they were thought to be."³¹ Howe claimed that business men were misrepresented and said so in his Monthly, so Pearson's devoted two full pages of scorn to Howe in its January 1919 issue, in which its editor said: "Howe writes as if...he had as much right to his own opinion as Mr. Mencken has to his." So Howe contended, "Well, in the

²⁹Ibid., VII (October, 1918), p. 3.

³⁰Ibid., XII (February, 1926), p. 1.

³¹Ibid., VII (November, 1918), p. 2.

name of high heaven, have I not? Have not the plain people the same right to opinions as the writers have?"³²

Evidently their relationship became more friendly again for in January the next year, Howe wrote in the Monthly that "Mencken has been making a collection of my writings and with my consent will have them issued by a New York publisher."³³ As a result of Mencken's interest in Howe, arrangements were concluded and Ventures in Common Sense was published.

But then Howe had a surprise for both Nathan and Mencken, when he wrote that

...two tremendous fellows who criticize us common people, and who have entree to one of the famous New York magazines, frequently criticize my taste....I have a joke on Mencken. The book of mine for which he wrote an introduction (and it is the best part of the book) was reprinted in London and the London publisher didn't care for Mr. Mencken's introduction, in fact wrote one of his own.³⁴

Whether the new introduction was liked or not, Howe came back at Mencken again, when he said that

H. L. Mencken is a notoriously rough writer; what he doesn't say in disparagement of the common people no one has ever thought of in private thinking;

Yet I hear no more abuse of him than I hear of those writers who are forever paying us compliments we notoriously do not deserve.³⁵

Yet Howe felt that some consideration was due Mencken. He had complained to his readers that he had a house full of books

³²Ibid., VII (January, 1919), p. 1.

³³Ibid., VIII (January, 1920), p. 4.

³⁴Ibid., XII (April, 1927), p. 1.

³⁵Ibid., XII (April, 1928), p. 2.

and magazines and often had nothing to read that was interesting and challenging to his thoughts. So he directed the following to those who wanted something to read: "I advise all before quitting reading to try The American Mercury. All contributors to the Mercury try to write like H. L. Mencken, the editor, who has done much to give respectable paganism a place in respectable modern life."³⁶

Then Howe told his readers further about other magazines and advised that they read the Atlantic:

...I read a good many magazines having discovered that newspapers do not dare discuss questions....The only hope of improving our morals, literature, art, is to somehow induce the newspaper men to better appreciate the importance of modesty, truth, and the possibility of improvement in human life by simple methods;

I have often suggested that the makers of newspapers meet in convention, and solemnly discuss their great responsibility with a view of doing better work without the loss of circulation, profit or influence; and at the same time do more toward properly educating their readers.³⁷

So it was with real enthusiasm that Howe entitled a column in his Monthly, "The Battle of the Ink Horns," in praise of Mencken:

I confess to admiration for the writing of H. L. Mencken, editor of The American Mercury. Of all our radical writers he is the only one who attacks with real gusto, and believes his charges are approved by the intelligence, propriety and the saints....

I dislike Bishop Cannon (of the Methodist Church) and do not admire him. Mr. Mencken has no uneasy conscience; he is as bold in assailing the Bishop as the Bishop is in assailing Mencken and other sinners;

³⁶Ibid., XII (September, 1929), p. 3.

³⁷Ibid., XII (January, 1930), p. 2.

if Mencken could he would burn the Bishop at the stake for the common good.³⁸

This attack on Bishop Cannon was over prohibition, which Mencken said was detrimental to the nation. Bishop Cannon upheld the view that prohibition was good, so in a column entitled, "Another Plea for Justice" Howe quoted from The American Mercury again:

H. L. Mencken, said by many to be our best writer, delightfully abuses Bishop Cannon in the American Mercury, of which he is editor.

By his fanatical and unfair advocacy of prohibition, Bishop Cannon has caused millions to cordially dislike him. Are such not entitled to the joy of fanatical abuse of him? Mr. Mencken is unfair, but no more so than the Bishop has always been. I oppose prohibition for no other reason than that I believe it to be a poor temperance measure, and that we are almost bankrupting the nation in ineffective attempts to enforce it.³⁹

These were the days of "speakeasies," "rum runners," and "moonshine liquor," when there was illegal transportation and consumption of intoxicants by the American people.

Howe delighted in quoting Mencken at almost every opportunity, so wrote

Some years ago a bright magazine editor named H. L. Mencken, started a department called "Americana," devoted to the absurdities of Americans. I was ashamed to read it, it so faithfully recorded American actions lacking in intelligence. Since Mencken established "Americana," a smart weekly called Time has become a success, and prints the American record boldly, truthfully and fairly, and I'll be cursed if it doesn't remind me of "Americana" in Mencken's old and worst Smart Set days.⁴⁰

³⁸Ibid., XII (March, 1930), p. 1.

³⁹Ibid., XII (January, 1931), p. 3.

⁴⁰Ibid., XII (February, 1931), p. 3.

Howe also reported that a piece written by Mencken suggested getting rid of farmers, in order to reduce the cost of living, improve politics of the country, and have a good effect upon religion. Howe wrote that "He took no part in the controversy or any other silly one now going on."⁴¹

Having written previously about Mencken's bachelorhood, distrust, distaste, and hatred of women, Howe published this:

I have heard that Mr. Mencken, long a bachelor is now very happily married, and have it on good authority from a mutual friend that Mencken is now the politest and most cheerful man in America. His informer was quoted as saying: "I have never seen a greater change in a man." Howe asked his informer what Mrs. Mencken did to please her husband? It seems that his secret of happiness was due in part to Mrs. Mencken's old-fashioned art of baking home-made bread, and other old-fashioned qualities.⁴²

It was quite ironic that Howe did not find out about the marriage until the Menckens celebrated their second wedding anniversary.

When the retirement of Mr. Mencken was announced, Howe had two different articles in the same issue of his Monthly in defense of his prejudices:

I know it is a sin to admire the vigorous writing of Mr. Mencken, but I confess to rather liking him, and deeply regret his retirement as editor of The American Mercury.

He it was who clearly pointed out the danger of prohibition...and its certainty to result in moral deterioration....Thirty-three states have already voted on the question of getting rid of prohibition....

⁴¹Ibid., XII (April, 1932), p. 3.

⁴²Ibid., XII (October, 1932), p. 3.

Mr. Mencken was also early in pointing out that such political saints as William Jennings Bryan were actually mischievous men, and would finally wreck the country....So I regret the passing of Mr. Mencken as editor.⁴³

These were Howe's final words about Mencken, and as he was soon to retire also, it might seem that he kept on publishing the Monthly in order to prove that he was as astute an editor in his field as Mencken was in his New York circle of literary criticism.

Another literary friendship of Howe's was that of Mark Twain's. They corresponded for an undetermined number of years and Howe kept Twain's letters. He found one of them in his attic forty years after it was originally written, and said that Twain wrote: "This part is for the public and the last six pages are for your eye only."⁴⁴ Then Howe said that the private opinions of Mark Twain as expressed in the letter were different from his public ones and posed the question as to why Mark Twain had the two sets of opinions. Howe claimed that a man owed to posterity his honest opinions for the guidance of others.

Mencken's quotation about Twain was dear to Howe's heart. He printed it in the Monthly while his friendship with Mencken was flourishing. "Mark Twain is the largest figure that ever reared himself out of the flat damp prairie of American literature."⁴⁵

⁴³Ibid., XII (October, 1933), pp. 1; 3.

⁴⁴Ibid., XII (August, 1923), p. 3.

⁴⁵Ibid., VIII (September, 1919), p. 2.

Howe loved praise of himself and his Monthly, so called to the attention of his readers this tribute to all the Howe writing family by William A. White, of the Emporia Gazette, which he reprinted in his magazine. White first told about Howe's children, Jim (famous war correspondent), who was in many strategic news spots all over the world when momentous events took place; Gene, famous editor of the Amarillo (Texas) Globe; and Mateel Howe Farnham, "a novelist of distinction," all three first class writing people. Then he wrote this praise of Howe:

Ed Howe has been the most important literary figure in the western Mississippi Valley for fifty years....Ed Howe was in revolt before H. L. Mencken went to kindergarten. He was a realist in the days of W. D. Howells. He wrote mercilessly but beautifully in Atchison when the great Russians were his contemporaries in the latter quarter of the last century.

But that isn't the point. The point is that the old bull begot his kind. Jim, Gene, and Mateel. He has put his mark on them. He has given them his brains and his distinction. He has proved the worth of heredity.

What an old bull he is!⁴⁶

Just below White's quotation, the "old bull" made these comments:

It has been said I have been a revolutionist fifty years. I have never been in revolt against anything accepted by reasonably intelligent and decent people as common sense or good morals. I have displayed no radicalism except in begging the people to remember the good lessons taught them as children by parents: the good lessons taught them in their reading, in their attendance on schools and churches. I have never uttered a word against industry, fairness, temperance, good citizenship, or education. I believe in civilization, and that reasonably good citizens (always in the

⁴⁶Ibid., XII (October, 1932), p. 3.

majority in the total population), should maintain it over a minority now exhibiting the worst case of wrong thinking and wrong acting in the long history of the human race.⁴⁷

The Monthly was published only about one year after this effusive, but well meant and well deserved tribute to Howe and his children by William A. White, who was the "dean" of Kansas editors at that time.

These many years of intensive reading after his retirement from the newspaper permitted Howe to read many books. From this reading he wrote reviews and criticisms for his Monthly and endeavored to enlighten his readers. He also had the inner satisfaction of finally achieved another life-long ambition, to read books of his choice.

Howe had many literary acquaintances and friendships and had sent out his indignations and thoughts for twenty-three years, a remarkable feat for any person. Besides writing the Monthly, he also wrote for several national magazines, produced his autobiography, and traveled to Florida every winter.

Perhaps his final conclusion on literature was written some time before the last edition of the Monthly: "Everything worth saying has been said; the only hope of literature is saying old worth-while things in a different way."⁴⁸

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., XII (May, 1926), p. 1.

CHAPTER IV

HOWE'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS MARRIAGE AND WOMEN

Edgar Watson Howe and Clara L. Frank were married in 1875 while Howe was part-owner of the Golden Globe in Golden, Colorado. He had met Miss Frank while working on the Falls City, (Nebraska) Press, but had left for Golden after becoming engaged to her. They had met at some of the church and musical entertainments in the small town of Falls City. He had to borrow money to return for the wedding.

Clara Frank had come west with her parents from Philadelphia, where she had had a musical education and attended an eastern girls' school. She was six years older than Howe, and quite refined and very religious.

Howe was one of what he claimed were the "plain people" descended from a long line of them and cared nothing for his ancestry. His religious experiences were gained from traveling with his father who was a "circuit-rider," but he never joined any church, because he was never asked. His father was a widower with two children before he married Howe's mother, Elizabeth Irwin Howe. Howe's formal education ended at the country school when he was put into his father's print shop when he was about twelve, where he learned to spell correctly setting type.¹

¹Howe, Plain People, op. cit., pp. 1-18.

In his autobiography, Plain People, Howe frankly admitted that he had left his heart in Falls City when he went to Golden. He knew he could afford the intended marriage because he was not earning enough money, but the date was set. The wedding was a success, complete with all the details of any romantic setting, nothing was omitted. Howe invited his father, and to his surprise, Henry Howe was present.

After a three-day honeymoon in Atchison, the Howes returned to Golden and lived at the hotel. He worked nights at job printing to earn enough to buy a home where their first child was born. Then he lost the house when he sold his partnership to his half-brother, Jim, and went back to Falls City.

After a second stretch of employment as printer with his former editor at Falls City, there was a disagreement, so he took the stage to Atchison and started his paper there in 1877. Mrs. Howe and the family remained behind with her parents until Howe was financially able to support them in Atchison. He had had a bitter taste of financial troubles so he economized until he could send for his family, which by this time included two more children.²

Less than a year after Mrs. Howe and the family moved to Atchison, the two oldest children died within one week of diphtheria. The rival publishers of the two small papers were

²Ibid., pp. 120-132.

very kind to the Howes and he recalled, "One of the editors calling and offering to assist in burying my children....We had been bitter enemies, but he forgot it in his desire to be of assistance in a time of trouble."³

Howe's first real taste of success came in Atchison, where his Globe was well received. He soon became friends with everybody in town, especially after one rival paper failed, and he bought the other one out. Two more children were born to help fill the void in their hearts left by the deaths. They were able to move to a larger home, had four servants and were considered a quite prosperous family.

Everything was not as serene and peaceful as it appeared, however. Mrs. Howe became more and more involved with the children, neglecting Ed. He was thoroughly engrossed with his writing, editing, publishing, job printing, and the children irritated him. Howe's son Gene, wrote this about the home situation: "My boyhood was a nightmare. Father was upbraiding mother most of the time. She was often crying openly or trying to hide her tears."⁴

The parents had their religious differences also. Howe was an atheist, while Mrs. Howe was very religious. Gene recalled that the question of Sunday School for the children

³E. W. Howe, "What Life Has Taught Me," Collier's, LXXV (January 10, 1925), 25.

⁴Gene A. Howe, op. cit., p. 25.

always provoked his father's wrath which increased with the years. He also believed that a child should be quiet and not expect anything more than the necessities of life. Mrs. Howe, whose ideas were more modern, believed that a child should be encouraged to develop in a free, uninhibited manner. The children became increasingly annoying as they grew older and displayed the independence of spirit that he had bred into them.⁵

Ruth Brune, in her study, interviewed relatives, friends, and neighbors of the Howes in Atchison. The general consensus of opinion was that there were differences between the Howes resulting from the children, religion, housekeeping, entertaining, and his personal literary ambitions.⁶

Because of these dissensions, the relationship between the parents became so estranged that Howe did not speak to his wife in the home. It was then that he and Gene moved to a small house on the back of the lot and Mrs. Howe filed suit for divorce on grounds of abandonment.

Howe wrote in his autobiography that "A gentleman in good society might not tell his side of a controversy with a lady....Our divorce was a success....There was no scandal and our separation improved our lives."⁷ He had agreed upon an amount that he would pay and performed his part of the

⁵Brune, op. cit., p. 422.

⁶Ibid., pp. 427-433.

⁷Howe, Plain People, op. cit., p. 278.

contract punctually. His relationship with his father-in-law continued so friendly that it was noted in the Kansas press.⁸

Howe's attitude in his autobiography was that his divorce caused him his greatest regret, but was the best for both of them. He wrote that he was actually a sentimental man, although he had been accused of being a woman hater, and had always been able to get along with women except as a husband. At the time he wrote Plain People, he stated that they had not seen each other for twenty-five years, and that their relationship had been very genteel; all bitterness had disappeared.⁹

At the time of the divorce Howe was prosperous enough to support his family well, but seemed to resent these additional financial burdens. Brune says that, "Out of Ed. Howe's frustration as a result of his home situation came his literary success...the disillusioned husband and father decided to unburden his heart in fiction."¹⁰

Despite the fact that Howe prospered, he resented some of the family responsibilities he had acquired. This is reflected in these words on marriage:

Marriage is undoubtedly good for the average man, not because marriage helps him, but because it enables

⁸Ibid., p. 279.

⁹Ibid., pp. 279-280.

¹⁰Brune, op. cit., p. 452.

him to help others; including a wife and children, and his wife's kin. Marriage steadies a man; gives him so much to do that he begins to realize the meaning of the word hustle....He is benefited...by responsibilities, by punishment; by giving aid; by having so much to do that he has little time for devilment.¹¹

The situation in which Howe lost those people most dear to him left him a most unhappy man, according to Gene. Life changed for all the Howes. About two years after the separation, Mrs. Howe moved to a smaller home (1903), and Gene and his father returned to the large one. It was at this time that Adelaide, the daughter of his brother Bruce, who lived next door, took over the housekeeping duties for her uncle. She not only made her home with Howe, but was his traveling companion on his trips to Florida, and he took her on a trip around the world after her graduation.¹²

It would seem to this writer that the loss of his family did embitter Howe, although he was too proud to admit it. The fact that he had never been able to bend and sway his wife and children to his will made him feel like he was defeated in being the master of his household. Through all this turmoil and upset, he often had fits of depression and sleepless nights. "At work he had to be civil to all...at home he relaxed his politeness and never spoke to anyone except when necessary,"¹³ according to Gene.

¹¹Monthly., IV (September, 1914), p. 2.

¹²Howe, Plain People, op. cit., pp. 271-277.

¹³Gene Howe, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

When Howe began his Monthly one of his most controversial subjects was women, how they influenced politics, religion, country gossip, prohibition, and suffrage. Writing about Carry Nation and the prohibition movement, he said:

The late Carry Nation, a world heroine in the estimate of some, was no more than a vulgar female rowdy. Her record as a woman, citizen, was low. She was big, raw-boned, unlovely, a poor housekeeper, and disliked by most of her neighbors. In marrying she was compelled to take a drunkard; the sober, promising men wouldn't have her. The world makes many ridiculous blunders in choosing its heroines and heroes.¹⁴

The Suffrage Movement was in full swing after World War I when he began the early years of the Monthly. It was at this time that demonstrators, agitators, and pickets descended on Washington. The result was that the Congress enacted the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1919, and the next year it was accepted by a majority of the states. Expressing himself about suffrage, he said that "Women lose some of their womanly charms in business and public life and the Suffrage agitator loses most, and most rapidly."¹⁵ After the women actually had the vote, Howe declared that he "believed it to be one of the most glaring mistakes in our progressive world."¹⁶

Howe was so opposed to women in public office that he suggested that there should be a committee appointed to

¹⁴Monthly, XII (July, 1933), p. 2.

¹⁵Ibid., IV (November, 1914), p. 4.

¹⁶Ibid., X (July, 1921), p. 3.

investigate the kitchens of suffragettes, especially those who urged cleanup campaigns in dairies, creameries, and grocery stores.¹⁷ He also wrote that he opposed everything advocated by women's clubs and found that he was right more than two-thirds of the time.¹⁸

Howe's son Gene also wrote: "The other weakness in his philosophy was women. He believed that men and women had become enemies...he believed a girl should have but one engagement and one marriage...no 'pawing over.'"¹⁹

Since Howe almost always had some column, quip, saying, or aphorism about women in the Monthly, these are typical quotations:

Women are gentler than men; they are more patient, but not so fair. The fairest human is an old man, who beginning with good intelligence, has fortified it with experience, education and age....

Women have more prejudices than men, they cannot see the truth quickly....

If women ruled the world as unquestionably as do the men, I very much doubt that they would be as fair to men as the men are to women. The men have always controlled the courts, the armies, and every other element of strength; yet women have every right they should have. Men have made severe laws punishing themselves for offenses against women, and enforce them.²⁰

I do not recall seeing in print a candid, fair, discussion of women: always they are abused or praised more than they deserve.²¹

¹⁷Ibid., IV (February, 1915), p. 4.

¹⁸Ibid., XI (February, 1923), p. 2.

¹⁹Gene Howe, op. cit., p. 45.

²⁰Monthly, V (February, 1915), p. 1.

²¹Ibid., XII (September, 1923), p. 3.

Perhaps Howe's heart softened when he said: "When I find fault with women, it isn't abuse, but analysis. Women have a right to fight the men; I even sympathize with them in fighting my sex....Every man feels he has wronged women more than they have wronged him."²² These same types of quotes continued throughout the life of the Monthly, and usually were to the effect that he did not understand women, and thought men never would be able to understand them. Later he defended his contentions about women this way: "A reader says he doesn't believe I know anything about women....If I should write all I know about them, I would be arrested."²³

Howe evidently felt that a wife and mother had no right to any diversion, but should put in every minute taking care of her family, because he expressed himself in one issue about women who wasted their time playing cards, thus neglecting their husbands and children. This was a new slant on his attitude toward women.

He recanted some, perhaps because he had a change of mind or perhaps because he grew mellowed with age and wrote this: "I am often ashamed of my attitude toward women, but have never known one to admit she was ashamed of her attitude toward me; women always seem to feel it is the business of men to apologize."²⁴

²²Ibid., XII (December, 1924), p. 1.

²³Ibid., XII (February, 1924), p. 4.

²⁴Ibid., XII (March, 1925), p. 1.

More of Howe's attitudes toward women are reflected in several of his famous aphorisms, taken at random from the Monthly:

A woman who refuses to be a woman, and can't be a man, is the most useless of her sex.

Women are always shocked at misconduct; but a thin, elderly spinster is shocked a little more than anyone else.

I admit women have the worst of it; but nature did it.

A Suffragette is never much good in a love affair.

The prettiest woman in the United States many men say, has her picture on the silver dollar.

At once time Howe confessed: "The strongest suggestions of heaven in my life have come from the tenderness and love of women,"²⁵ as he grew older. Without much question he was referring to Adelaide, his niece, who had been his housekeeper and companion for so many years and to the mother of his children.

In one issue he wrote that:

I have long been a slave to women, but in old age, confess my chains have not always been heavy. Frequently they have been light, and of gold. Altogether I've had a rather good time in jail. My keepers have usually been gracious as well as good looking, and while I have been threatened some I've survived my disasters rather comfortably.²⁶

So as Edgar Watson Howe concluded his writing, he had lost some of his bitterness toward women. He had admitted that

²⁵Howe, "What Life Has Taught Me," op. cit., p. 25.

²⁶Monthly., XII (October, 1933), p. 3.

all ill feeling toward his wife had long since disappeared. Ironically he survived her by a few months, after having been divorced from her for thirty-five years. To Adelaide he was indebted for her household management and companionship for almost an equal length of time. She cared for him in his last illness and has survived him a number of years.

London, N. Y. August, 1914.

CHAPTER V

HOWE'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND VIEWS ON RELIGION

In considering all of the aspects of the life of Edgar Watson Howe, one must remember he was the product of another generation when there was a much greater stress on all Christian principles taught to children. He was the son of a minister and raised in a Christian home, by a mother who had both financial and emotional problems after his father left. Without admitting it, Howe had absorbed a great deal of Christian teaching as a boy from both parents. All his life, he believed in doing the right and honorable thing in all situations. This is an example of his thinking on the subject of morality:

I am contending for a morality that is simple, easy and effective. Be polite, fair and industrious, and use the experiences of others so abundantly available, and you will at once be benefitted without waiting for the success of any particular movement which will probably be long delayed; no waiting for others to be converted.¹

Howe told his readers that he conformed to every true, fair, sensible, decent principle of life and realized that he did not live up to all of them. But he accepted and respected these principles and earnestly tried to conform. He admitted to being just one of the "Plain People" and if

¹Monthly, V (August, 1915), p. 4.

he was prejudiced or ill-informed, that fact should attract no great attention. In a paragraph entitled "Simplicity of Thinking," he wrote that "It is also important that you be polite and fair in your thoughts....If you do not know this, learn it from me."²

Howe editorialized and advised his readers continually on good behavior, industry, thrift, and morals. Some of his homely philosophies were really not original, but handed down through the years from Proverbs, Poor Richard's Almanac, and the many philosophic treatises which he read. Most of his admonitions to his fellow men were time-worn sayings, re-worded and stated with a slightly different twist. They were pithy and succinct, however, and showed much thought on his part.

He praised every thing and everybody of whom he approved: writers, people in the news, successful enterprises, and political figures. At the same time he railed constantly against impudences, voodooism, raffles, insults, airplanes, failures of common sense, half-wits, dishonesty, the Stillman case, barbarism, women, religion, the Lindbergh kidnapping, Congress, foreign intrigues, and politicians who did not uphold his ideas of sound government. He expressed the idea that "Men have lived a long time, and acquired about all the knowledge that is possible. The really discreditable thing in their history is that they have not reached the age

²Ibid.

of reason."³

From the beginning of his Monthly he actually ran the gamut of everything published in newspapers, magazines and periodicals, and books and made comments on or about them in writing copy for his magazine. He strove to impress the truths of life upon his readers repeated in various forms in many different ways. These words sum up his personal attitude toward life: "The greatest thing in the world: a little common sense, combined with a little politeness, a little fairness, and a little industry. A little of each will carry a man a long way in the right direction."⁴

Howe also expressed himself volubly against practices of which he did not approve. For years he was against the Boy Scouts and Y. M. C. A., mainly because they existed on charitable funds provided by others. He always believed that people should work for their privileges and pleasures. He was particularly explosive in his writings against the women who solicited for "The Poor," in general and corner grocery stores in the name of organized charities, which was in direct opposition to his theories on thrift and industry. He wrote this: "The greatest fallacy of all time is that the poor man need do nothing to help himself; that the reformers will take care of him by means of resolutions and conventions....I know the poor from the inside, having been one of

³Ibid., XII (August, 1925), p. 1.

⁴Ibid., IV (September, 1914), p. 4.

them.⁵

He philosophized and partially explained his actions in giving so much advice and said he lived in the hopes of becoming a gentleman and give none at all. He said that in his own affairs he tried to back up his bets with all available experience and judgment and would thereafter hold his peace until there was another occasion for mental exercise.⁶

The Monthly was continued with a great deal of the same form of writing, namely, personal essays, editorials, book reviews, history, and his views on politics. His personal views on news events were always a few weeks late because of the publication dates.

Throughout all the years Howe used as fillers, many short one-, two-, or three-line sayings, or aphorisms, and occasionally a short article upon good behavior, fair dealing, thrift, industry, and all the principles of life that he felt like keeping in the minds of his readers which every man must practice in order to become a success. A great many of these were short and pithy sayings, succinct and clever. Editors of other newspapers, national as well as regional, quoted Howe freely in their daily and weekly newspapers.

These examples, chosen at random, follow:

People are already too shiftless: it is a crime to further encourage them.

⁵Ibid., VII (November, 1918), p. 3.

⁶Ibid., XII (February, 1925), p. 1.

A man will give himself more good advice than he will take.

Socialism is the world's greatest demand for special privilege.

The world has stopped work to discuss things and fight about them. (In September, 1918)

The first step to being wise is to know that you are ignorant.

The only gambling tip which amounts to anything is to keep out of the game.

Every man has a weak side he should watch with particular care: his strong side will take care of itself.

Freight cars have capacity marked on each. What is your capacity?

A man is not only sensitive about his age; he nearly always lies about it.

The good things in life are never as good as you expect them to be but they are a whole lot better than the bad things.

When you put your foot in it, take it out as soon as possible, and keep very quiet a long time.

Every man throws a rock now and then that he would like to have back in his hand.

One reason young people think they have so many friends is that they never need them.

Mankind makes no mistake more serious than his disposition to exaggerate the power of the mind over the power of the body.

Blind worship of any old myth or hero is a bad habit modern men should avoid.

You are probably here because of the bad luck of your parents; the chances are seven in ten they didn't want you.

If you are determined to go to the Devil, reach him as soon as possible, and cease to be a problem to your relatives and your neighborhood.

We are a great people to lock the door after the horse is stolen.

Everyone creeps up to the edge of hell occasionally and looks over; but fortunately most people stay on the safe side. Playing around the edges results in what we call gossip. Be extremely cautious in playing around the edges. Frequently an unfortunate falls into the cauldron because of bad luck.

Howe became in his time and age the master aphorist of the Mid-West and perhaps of the nation. He was not entirely original in all of his wise sayings, but the majority reflect principles of thrift, industry, and good behavior.

The journalistic art of creating aphorisms is to condense into a few selected words a wise or witty phrase or sentence that becomes similar to a proverb, a maxim, an adage, or more familiarly, an old "saw," and is considered a talent. Benjamin Franklin was a master of the aphorists in his time. He garnered some of his store from the Bible, some French philosophers, and coined some of his own, which he published in Poor Richard's Almanac.

Other writers who have used the aphorism to record some of their wise thoughts were Emerson (of whom Howe was a student), Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Henry Wheeler Shaw, and Charles Farrar Brown. Some of these men were public speakers who used the aphorism as a witty saying to catch the attention of their audiences, or to quote as a parting phrase, in the hopes of stimulating thought on the part of their listeners.

Howe's aphorisms belong to his later writings. He came

into literary prominence early in the 1880's with his first novel, The Story of a Country Town, so different in type at the time of its inception no New York publisher would accept it. Determined to see his work in print, Howe helped his printer Kelley, set the type and together they printed it on a hand press. Later it was published in New York and through the years ran into dozens of editions. Howe also had other novels published, travel books, a series of pamphlets and Little Blue Books. His aphorisms were collected and published in two books, Ventures in Common Sense and Country Town Sayings and they were quoted from coast to coast by American editors.⁷

When Howe retired from newspaper work he had the opportunity to satisfy his desire for reading the many, many books he had never had time for previously. He selected literally all kinds of books and treatises on philosophy and world-wide religions were included.

In one issue he discussed India and the Hindu religion and admired the brown men for their architecture, letters, mathematics, and their creed. In another issue he discussed the Mohammedan religion and wrote this: "No man could investigate the Mohammedan religion without at once realizing its absurdity."⁸

⁷Cargill, op. cit., p. 411.

⁸Monthly, IV (May, 1914), pp. 2-3.

As to Howe's personal religion, it remains an enigma, because he disputed himself in his writings on his personal faith. Since he was noted for his outspoken expressions he wrote these about Christianity and religion in several issues:

Whatever respect I have for the Church is for the Catholic Church; and I am a Protestant. If the Christian religion is true, it is the Catholic Church that is making a tremendous effort to save it from destruction. The Catholics are in dead earnest; the Protestants are religious politicians.⁹

What we actually need is more simple, common sense, and that isn't taught by religion. Religion's first mission is to make a fool of a man; the first duty of a religious man is to believe something he knows is not true if he has ordinary common sense.¹⁰

Such power as God has is due to fear. I never knew anyone who loved God, or one who did not fear him. Religion isn't a love proposition; its groundwork is fear. Millions of rogues are honest because honesty pays.¹¹

Howe's continual tirade against religion was noted by other editors and Howe published in the Monthly that the Century Magazine (which sold for fifty cents), devoted six pages in its May issue to E. W. Howe's Monthly (selling price two cents). Carl Van Doren was the editor at the time, and Howe printed this quotation: "Van Doren speaks of my habit of making confessions--of frankly speaking--so I will further engage in it."¹² Then he wrote that he was grateful that Van

⁹Ibid., IV (November, 1914), p. 3.

¹⁰Ibid., V (March, 1915), p. 1.

¹¹Ibid., XII (December, 1924), p. 2.

¹²Ibid., XII (April, 1923), p. 2.

Doren understood what he was trying to do. "Van Doren is kind enough to say that while I do not believe in the dogmas of religion, I acknowledge the good the church accomplishes."¹³

Howe wrote that he admired the Roman Catholic priests for controlling their people better than the Protestants. He also commended the Catholics for being opposed to anarchy and socialism. He showed his respect for the Catholic Church and some of his plain common sense, when he wrote:

Catholicism is no religion for a free country. Note how Catholics mind their priests! Protestantism is the true religion in a free country! Protestants pay little attention to pastors, sheriffs, policemen and judges.¹⁴

Every now and then he had to get down to his own personal religion. He asserted his Protestant belief and his lack of church membership when he wrote:

I am frequently found fault with because I am not a Christian.

What do my critics recommend? I have examined the evidence and cannot accept it. If I cannot find salvation shall I be content with hypocrisy?

Quarreling about religion is human vanity. Hell persists largely because men wish such torment for their enemies.

Religion adds a touch of hypocrisy to births, deaths, marriages, christenings; and we love hypocrisy devotedly.¹⁵

In an article in another magazine, Howe expounded his religious confessions which help explain the otherwise

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., XII (September, 1923), p. 3.

¹⁵Ibid., XII (December, 1924), p. 2.

irreligious attitudes he professed:

I have long believed it is a very rare man who is entirely irreligious....Men do not accept the current religious faith, but they have faiths of their own....Almost every man has a Deity of some kind; possibly it is himself.

I would have no thought of the future whatever; such a thing is not in my mind, and therefore not possible with me....I have come to the conclusion...that death ends all, and the subject has been dismissed from my mind....

When I die I suppose I shall be buried with religious services, I shall leave no request on the subject. If the clergyman should say over my dead body, "This man lived without us; let him be buried without us," I should admire him for it.¹⁶

Then he added the old Socratic idea that after death, the good will be treated better than the bad, and said that he sincerely believed in that theory.

Howe's son Gene, presented a different outlook on his father's attitude toward religion and women in his article, when he wrote about his unhappiness:

Why was he unhappy? Because my father was a reformer: the call to save mankind was in him so strong that it was irresistible...he hated religion as a result of his father's abandonment of his wife and a handful of small children, so crusaded all his life against women and religion.

He was the only editor in the United States who blasted religion year in and year out, and survived the opposition he created. Father never backed up an inch. There were periods when he would subside, but he never retracted or apologized, and when he had accumulated fresh energy and hopes he would renew the combat.... Some who knew my father believed he attacked religion because of the sheer joy of battle...the biggest and most powerful opponent in sight because he wanted a fight worthy of his mettle.¹⁷

¹⁶E. W. Howe, "Ed. Howe's Religious Confessions," Literary Digest, LXIII (December 6, 1919), 35.

¹⁷Gene Howe, op. cit., pp. 25; 47.

The rest of Gene's article told of their life together, how his father was depressed the most of the time, and recounted their few happy days when they would go swimming and picnicking together.

In much of Howe's writings he recalled childhood incidents on their westward trip on the wagon train, which he remembered. He had observed these sincere, honest people and participated each evening with them in prayer services. Their personal appearance impressed him and from those memories he wrote these lines:

I see no people now who look as did those I saw then. The nearest I ever came to it was a dozen years ago, when visiting Jerusalem, and attending a service in the great Russian church. The poor people I saw there somehow reminded me of those I accompanied to the settlement on Big Creek....The intense religious enthusiasm was the same, and everywhere around the Holy City, I saw scenes read about in the Bible, the only book we knew.

As time goes, my camp in the wilderness was but a few days, as our old song went, for I left home when twelve years old, gradually to find a different world; but in Jerusalem my ancestral wagons seemed to have emptied into that vast congregation.¹⁸

His son Gene, had more to describe about his father's very personal thoughts:

My father called himself a materialist...insisted that sentimentalism and emotionalism and Socialism were menaces to progress and better living...that religion was the embodiment of the three of these. He didn't believe in any Supreme Being (an atheist).... Never weakened in his last illness.¹⁹

¹⁸E. W. Howe, "The Wagon and the West, Saturday Evening Post, CXCVII (November 15, 1924), 125.

¹⁹Gene Howe, op. cit., p. 45.

Gene went on to say that his father "did not seem to know that his onslaughts against religion were a millstone around his neck, that he was creating for himself handicaps that had wrecked every other editor who had bucked them."²⁰

Howe had this to say in defense of himself when he was accused of being irreligious:

A writer once referred to me as a skeptic. I am not a skeptic, but a believer. Evidently the confusion arose because this critic does not know his dictionary, which says a skeptic is one who "questions or denies the possibility of real knowledge." The first principle in my life is that real knowledge is so simple that anyone may know the essentials. I have been a student in the school of experience more than half a century, and deny nothing I have found to be true.²¹

Another time he asserted his theories of life and religion in these lines:

I have not, I never have had, and cannot have, a theory of life transcending death. Such a theory is an absurdity to me, and always has been....My religion is to refine materialism, as the race has been doing for thousands of years....None of us make as much of life as we might....We hamper ourselves in looking for impossible good times.²²

Howe pointed out frequently to the readers of his Monthly that he was a student of the philosopher Frederick Nietzsche, whose main idea expressed in two words, was self-perfection. Howe observed finally that "My only religion is that the better I behave, the better I get along."²³

²⁰Ibid.

²¹E. W. Howe, "Confessions of a Common Man," American Magazine, XCV (June, 1923), 92-94.

²²Monthly., XII (January, 1926), p. 3.

²³Ibid., XII (November, 1928), p. 1.

In conclusion, one may make his choice from Howe's writings as to whether he was an agnostic who believes that it is impossible to know God and all human knowledge is limited to experience, or an atheist who denies the existence of a Supreme Being. He claimed to be a Protestant but held no membership in a church, nor did he attend church services except on an extremely rare occasion.

It should be remembered that Howe lived in a generation when Christian teaching was a part of daily training in his home and that influence should not be discounted. In Howe's own home, however, religion was one of the main points of contention between the Howes.

CHAPTER VI

HOWE'S SELF APPRAISAL AND ANALYSIS

Howe anticipated his readers' requests as to why he wrote the Monthly so told them that he issued it "for mental exercise, as I frequently cut wood for physical exercise."¹ He also explained that while running his newspaper he had had very little leisure, fretted about his health, been critical of impolite people and believed that "a man of my age can not afford to ruffle his temper by frequent encounters with fools, to say nothing of the danger of being whipped, so I have run away from them."²

He theorized that after quitting business any irritable man became polite and agreeable. He believed that if a person were to accomplish any good in this world, one must quit talking, get away by himself and work without interruption. Then a man was able to meet strangers with ease and politeness, which was a commendable art.

As previously noted, the sub-heading on E. W. Howe's Monthly was "Devoted to Indignation and Information." One September he informed his readers that "There is so much to be indignant about this month that the information department has been suspended until next month."³ He had proposed

¹Monthly, IV (June, 1914), p. 1.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., IV (September, 1914), p. 4.

previously to "dig out information by patient reading of books, condense and write it more forcibly to impress it on my own mind, as well as the minds of my readers."⁴

Howe wrote that he was free and independent to write what he pleased, yet did not wish to write anything untrue or foolish or offend good manners. "I should be ashamed to have it said that women and children may not properly read what I write."⁵

Some of his readers wrote him and objected to the way he expressed some of his opinions. To many of those he replied openly in the Monthly thereby producing copy and expounding further on a favorite or personal subject. To one of those he answered: "I cannot send a paper for one year and submit to abuse for 10 cents, so whoever writes me a grumbling letter gets his money back and I do not see his letter."⁶ He also informed his readers that his country-girl secretaries kept the most disturbing letters from him, and that he had so many subscribers that he did not hesitate to return their money.⁷ He also said that he "did not believe in attracting attention by fine writing, did not care to fool or rob any man, and coveted no more pennies from the poor than from the rich."⁸

⁴Ibid., IV (March, 1914), p. 1.

⁵Ibid., IV (November, 1914), p. 3.

⁶Ibid., IV (October, 1914), p. 2.

⁷Ibid., p. 3.

⁸Ibid., IV (July, 1914), p. 1.

In another issue he told his readers that he received many letters of approval of his publication and added that "no man deserves all the compliments he received about his Monthly."⁹ He printed the letters of commendation, however, partly for his own satisfaction and to bolster his ego, and partly to counteract the complaints he received. He also needed to show his readers that he did receive some compliments too, and never omitted any of the flowery phrases his correspondents used in his praise.

Howe also delighted in complimenting himself on occasion and wrote that when his stomach and the roads were good, he lectured for the benefit of libraries and churches at nearby towns. One article told about his recent visit to a community so he quoted their clipping in his paper; giving credit to the Sabetha (Kansas) Herald:

We were delighted with him and enjoyed every minute of his visit. This Howe man has neglected the greatest opportunities for good of any of our acquaintances. If he would unload his overstocked garret which contains more good grey matter than any of my knowledge, and make Potato Hill the rallying ground for all those reforms that hope for a betterment of mankind, his name would become a by-word of good and a blessing.¹⁰

Periodically Howe announced that there was so much to be indignant about that he would suspend his information department another month, probably in view of the fact he kept getting disturbing letters. He answered them this way:

⁹Ibid., V (August, 1915), p. 2.

¹⁰Ibid., IV (November, 1914), p. 3.

I am a good natured man....I cannot afford to engage in a useless controversy which would irritate me and others. Therefore, if you want your dime back, say so; but please say it politely. I will return your dime cheerfully and will not send an insult with it. No subscriber need fear I am not properly punished for all my transgressions.¹¹

A man who thinks he is always right, and others always wrong is apt to be a very industrious and offensive critic....Critics are rarely better than those they criticize. A man who is noted for fairness in his own affairs will demand perfection from others, particularly from those who succeed better than he is succeeding.¹²

He requested his subscribers not to point out new things to become indignant about, that he already had such a long list that he could not attend to half of them.

Evidently he felt that he had praised himself too much so he again became humble and wrote: "I am one of the Plain People and if I am prejudiced or ill informed, the fact should attract no great attention, what I say is what I have been thinking in the backwoods, where truth does not reach me in a copious stream."¹³ He accepted his share of blame in these lines: "Most people find a great deal of fault with others, but none with themselves. I have always been disposed to take my share of the general blame....It doesn't satisfy me to complain about the conduct of others: I know I should improve my own."¹⁴

¹¹Ibid., IV (October, 1914), p. 3.

¹²Ibid., IV (December, 1914), p. 1.

¹³Ibid., V (September, 1915), p. 4.

¹⁴Ibid., XII (February, 1925), p. 1.

Under the title, "The Sage of Potato Hill," Howe again expounded his personal theories:

I am neither sage nor philosopher; I know only simple things and in a long and active life have encountered nothing else....I know of no wonderful thing except that so many refuse to punish themselves unnecessarily: that so many fail when they might more easily succeed....I know nothing anyone may not know who keeps his eyes open, and accepts the results of simple experience.

I know a man cannot advance far with uprightness and politeness unless he mixes with it as much clear common sense as he can accumulate; but everyone knows that, so I am no Sage.¹⁵

By this time, his Monthly was really the foremost publication in his mind, as he continued writing for it in much the same manner that he had previously.

In one issue he had a column on "Purchased Friends," and wrote to his subscribers quite frankly:

My little publication does not amount to much, but it is absolutely on the dead square. I am in the pay of no one, and I am not looking for a purchaser. I have no other ambition than the printing of the simple, decent truth, I have no masters, nor will have any.

I desire nothing beyond the privilege of being as fair as an honest man should be, and opportunity to express my opinions without asking the consent of any master....

I hew to the line between the contending factions. I am not an Iconoclast. I should be ashamed to be one. I should be ashamed to rant in a way so absurd and untruthful as to cause the suspicion to enter the minds of honest men that some paymaster is doling out dollars to me. And I wish to say again that I have no desire, and never will have, to exaggerate any thing up because it is popular or exaggerate it down because it is unpopular.¹⁶

¹⁵Ibid., V (April, 1916), p. 3.

¹⁶Ibid., V (September, 1915), p. 2.

He continued to answer letters from his critics in the Monthly and each fall informed his readers of his Miami, Florida, address where he would spend the winter. While there he would apologize occasionally: "I advise you not to read this issue. It is a very poor one. I have not been 'at' myself during the past month and the disability may be permanent."¹⁷

At one time Howe announced that "There has been considerable mean talk about me; but I thank the Lord I have made it difficult for my enemies to prove the worst of it."¹⁸ He was accused in 1914 of having thousands of dollars in steel bonds, an accusation which he denied emphatically. He said his present dividends were from life insurance policies which he had slaved to pay premiums on for twenty years.¹⁹

Subsequent issues contained very much of the same kind of articles. His items were the current news, politics, religion, and autobiographical sources. His indignations and observations on life filled many pages. Howe often expressed the wish that people would always agree with him. He had letters from his readers which said, "I sometimes agree with you." He wrote this in reply:

My ideas seem so much at variance with those of the majority that I sometimes think I am not fit to write for print.

But in criticizing my work, I beg of you to remember that most writing is poor stuff....A certain New York

¹⁷Ibid., XII (February, 1924), p. 1.

¹⁸Ibid., XII (June, 1923), p. 3.

¹⁹Ibid., IV (August, 1914), p. 1.

weekly lately came into my hands....I looked over this weekly rather thoroughly without finding anything of interest....So don't be too hard on me because my writing is dull and ineffective.²⁰

Howe was critical of his literary efforts and said this in one issue: "I am a good writer (in my mind). I think of a piece to write, and like it, in fact, I am enthusiastic, but by the time I get it on paper, I begin to have my doubts. By the time it is ready for the printer, I am disgusted."²¹ Still being self-critical he wrote this: "Speaking of writing. I have never in my life written anything that suited me. I have in mind a simple form of expression, but before I get around to it, I am disturbed by the appearance of a dust rag."²² Whether this was in jest at the cleaning woman or an actual admittance that he was apologizing is guess work.

Referring to his indignation department much later, he wrote that he had been indignant for a long time without accomplishing much, and would quit easily if a considerable number of his readers agreed that he was tiresome.²³ He kept up his usual preaching for good conduct, industry and thrift, simple rules of life, self-help, and respect for the rights of others. Each month he said that he resolved to get out an issue that would be a wonder and then found that he could not do it.

²⁰Ibid., XI (April, 1920), p. 1.

²¹Ibid., XII (June, 1924), p. 2.

²²Ibid., XII (August, 1924), p. 1.

²³Ibid., XII (November, 1927), p. 1.

Howe received many cancellations of subscriptions and the commercial advertising almost disappeared from the Monthly, but he published it regularly and attempted to make it interesting. He quoted from other magazines, reviewed books, and expressed his controversial views on a hundred and one subjects. He answered more and more of his "grumbling" mail in his magazine.

His son Gene, wrote in his article that the Monthly subscribers grew fewer, and that his father's scoldings and protests did not sell the magazine. He did feel that his father never wrote a dishonest word in his life, that he "believed implicitly and wholly in every public and personal article he ever penned....He dedicated his life trying to be helpful to his fellow man."²⁴

Howe admitted to his readers that the large portrait of him published in the December 1926 issue was a good one. He was then seventy-four years old. When he went to New York the next year an honorary dinner was given for him. He published a long list of the notables who attended, including: Bruce Barton, Bernard Baruch, Arthur Capper, Irvin S. Cobb, Homer Croy, Cyrus H. K. Curtis, Rube Goldberg, Ring Lardner, Fontaine Fox, Rupert Hughes, Fannie Hurst, Grantland Rice, Hendrick Van Loon and many others.²⁵

²⁴Gene Howe, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁵Monthly, XII (April, 1927), p. 2.

Edgar Watson Howe was honored by Washburn University,²⁶ Topeka, Kansas, in May, 1927, and the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred on him at that time. A large picture of Howe in cap and gown was in the May issue. Other pictures of Howe and Adelaide in New York followed the account of the banquet. Still another portrait appeared in 1929.

Howe's autobiography Plain People ran as a serial in the Saturday Evening Post and he published in the Monthly comments from various reviewers about it. Howe also expressed himself this way:

Since this publication does not pay expenses, I today examined myself as to why I fool with it....I suppose I neglected the Monthly while writing my autobiography....I shall try in the next two or three months to do better: If I fail, I will consider quitting. I have no wish to make myself specially tiresome or ridiculous in amusing myself....When I quit....the publication will cease appearing, and that will end it.²⁷

After so many years of publishing the Monthly, it must have become tiresome, yet he probably hated to admit defeat.

In September 1932, he wrote: "I do not know how much longer I will be here," and commented that "the news of the day was not fit to print now."²⁸ Since he was then in his eightieth year, he felt that his life preachings against all

²⁶Ibid., XII (May, 1927), p. 2.

²⁷Ibid., XII (September, 1928), p. 1.

²⁸Ibid., XII (September, 1932), p. 1.

the things he had campaigned against had had no effect upon his readers or the human race, so he ceased to rant and rave as much, but wrote his Monthly as a matter of habit.

Some time previously, he had written and published what he said was his only prayer: "Give me health, and the power to be reasonably fair, sensible and useful. Grant me appreciation of everything worthy and at the last day, an easy death and oblivion."²⁹ Ironically, he suffered a lingering illness and was unable to write anything. The oblivion he prayed for has come true, insofar as few people today have ever heard of Edgar Watson Howe.

In the final issue of the Monthly, Howe "confesses to 80 years of idleness, work, observation, mischief, wisdom, folly. What have I found my most important job? To constantly strive to better manage myself, that I may increase in efficiency in mind and body."³⁰ Then he admitted he was weak and needed help from the wise and ended his Monthly after twenty-three years of publication. This constant and persistent writing after his retirement from newspaper work was accomplished partly as an outlet for his own personality and as a dedication to writing. Moreover, he had an inner desire to give his readers information on what he felt was the important issues of the day, and to crusade in his own way to make the world a better place.

²⁹Ibid., VII (March, 1917), p. 1.

³⁰Ibid., XII (November, 1933), p. 1.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The writings of Edgar Watson Howe should never be minimized for the age in which he lived. At a time when the newspaper was the backbone of the literature of the growing American nation, the editors of local newspapers often controlled the thinking of the people. True, there were differences of opinion in many respects. As a leading newspaper editor how much influence he had will never actually be known but his editorial writings were widely read. He achieved great success in the art of writing aphorisms and at one time was the most widely quoted editor in the nation.

Howe admired famous writers of stories, plays, and novels and was lavish in praise of Shaw, Mencken, Hearst and Twain. He never imitated anyone; he had his own style of writing. He gave advice, preached in his own "horse sense" way or admonished his readers to do better, think more for themselves and live better lives.

Howe was dedicated to one major endeavor in his life, writing. Another researcher who interviewed Howe's relatives in Atchison reported that he actually neglected his family to write. He admitted that in his first years of marriage he wrote every evening at the kitchen table after his day's work on the newspaper.

Early in Howe's marriage, two of their children died quite suddenly within one week. At that time, there were two rival newspapers in Atchison, and the Howes were accorded sympathy from these editors. The feud of the newspaper world was forgotten for a few days but the editorial battle was resumed afterwards.

Howe's marital difficulties and divorce had a great influence on his whole life. From other sources it seems that the Howes lived an abnormal married life for some time. Brune's study pointed out a lack of cooperation of both. Mrs. Howe centered her attention on the children, possibly neglecting her husband.

The divided family life created comment in Atchison. While no character sketch was available on Mrs. Howe, one could only venture that her strong Christian influence was too much for the religion-hating Howe. The children were also a source of contention, asserting their own independence which they inherited from their father.

So with this unhappy family situation, Howe still sought recognition from the world through his literary efforts. In drawing attention to his advice, admonitions, opinions, and editorials, he begged for the attention of the nation to his teachings.

In later life, he was given honorary dinners and feted in New York and Chicago and fulfilled speaking engagements. He was awarded the Doctor of Laws degree at Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, in recognition of his contribution to

journalism in Kansas.

Howe's companion and housekeeper was his niece, Adelaide, who accompanied him on many trips in the United States and on his trip around the world. He always spoke of Adelaide in a kindly, affectionate, fatherly manner.

William Allen White paid tribute to Howe and his three children who also entered the field of journalism: Jim, an Associated Press correspondent, Gene, newspaper editor, and Mateel Howe Farnham, novelist. Gene's article about his father was not well received in Atchison, because it was still "Ed. Howe's Town."

Edgar Watson Howe dedicated himself to informing the Atchisonians, Kansans, and the nation during his lifetime of writing. He did not say in the Monthly anything about what he tried to accomplish except to write about his indignations and inform his readers.

Howe exercised great care and thought in all of his writing in order not to offend the women and children who might read his publication. However, he was indignant about many things and spared no one's feelings in criticizing thousands of events, people, customs, elections, and circumstances of which he did not approve. Atchisonians sometimes did not agree with the opinions of their outspoken editor.

Perhaps no one of his age was more dedicated to the written word than Howe and he must be admired for this perseverance against many odds. His ideas were not always

accepted however. His persistent admonition of the American public about their faults fell by the wayside and he finally admitted he had been unable to change his readers for the better. His indignations sometimes became wearisome, because the reader would expect him to express his same opinions over and over. He knew that he did not please all his readers but hoped that the majority would agree with him in his opinions.

His patience must have been unbounding as evidenced by his dogged determination to keep his writing before the public, although he never really made any money at it. He seemed enthusiastic about his Monthly until nearly the end, when he wrote that if he quit, the magazine would also stop. It is believed by this writer, that Howe never voiced any drastic opinion which he had to retract; at least he created no major journalistic quarrel with any editor.

Howe was also a product of his age, time and chosen occupation. Certainly not all itinerant printers, who began setting type at the early age of eleven, ever rose to the heights of being a newspaper owner and editor, novelist, short story writer, world traveler, author of numerous articles, and producer of a "little" magazine for twenty-three years, and acquired as many friends in his small town of Atchison and the nation, as Edgar Watson Howe.

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