Uncle Boy

A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: Poet

Chapter Twenty-Four

[Vachel's insert introducing his self-published Village Magazine (1910)]

by

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[This ongoing biography may be read online at www.VachelLindsayHome.org Choose “Biography” and then “Uncle Boy: A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.” The biography and the website are sponsored by the Vachel Lindsay Association. Please report any errors to VachelLindsay, our account name at Gmail.]
24. Springfield (1911-1912)

“I have been in Nirvana myself—for the last few months . . .”

In early 1911, not everyone in Springfield, Illinois, was looking forward to a change in city government—perhaps not even half the people. In fact, the January 2 referendum revealed just how polarized Vachel’s city had become, especially since the 1908 race riot. The two daily newspapers seemingly made it their business to attack one another’s ideas and interests. The Illinois State Register was openly and unabashedly Democratic; the Illinois State Journal was openly and unabashedly Republican. The Register not only supported commission government but published innumerable articles and editorials touting the benefits. On January 2, the day of the election, the Register’s front page headline urged Springfield citizens to

**VOTE YES TODAY! . . . VOTE YES TODAY!**

Register editorials suggested that adoption of commission-form government could rival the beginning of the Millennium, at least in Springfield, Illinois. “The result of to-day’s election,” the Register editorial warns on the referendum day, “will either mark an epoch in Springfield’s development by adoption of a business-like form of municipal government, or there will be a continuation of the old, indefensible aldermanic system” (January 2, p. 4).

Meanwhile, Vachel’s “Ruskin Revival” lectures received detailed coverage in the Register, partly because the speaker identified civic improvement with an anticipated change to commission government. In the words of an unnamed Register reporter:

The last lecture on the “New Nationalism,” put the “New Localism” in contrast with the “New Materialism” and pleaded for the same interest in the Springfield city hall as in the capitol at Washington. The speaker [Nicholas Vachel Lindsay] outlined the work of the American Civic association just now in session, and prophesied that many of its recommendations would be carried out a little while after the commission government is established in Springfield. He spoke of the Ruskin revival as a sort of preliminary step towards creating the sentiment for a better and more beautiful Springfield, the actual details to be taken up by more practical citizens. But he asserted that without this public sentiment, vague and footless as it may seem some times, no great practical work can be undertaken by the most practical reformer in the world. [Note 1]

Interestingly, the Register reported that, as a business venture, the Ruskin lectures were successful: “The total proceeds of the revival from the sale of course tickets and single admissions at the door were $84.30. The expenses were $10.50 for printing and stationery. The difference, $73.80, will be deposited in the Sangamon Loan and Trust bank under the title of the Ruskin Fund, for the benefit of the new Christian church” (December 14, 1910, p. 16). Springfield citizens, many to their surprise, discovered that Dr. Lindsay’s “shiftless son” could be a moneymaker!
Readers of the *Illinois State Journal*, on the other hand, could be excused if they professed not to know the January 2 referendum was even taking place, let alone that the Ruskin Revival had been a success. The *Journal* did not openly urge its readers to vote no; the paper simply made little or no reference to the upcoming referendum for days prior to the vote. Months earlier, the *Journal’s* editorial page maintained that the “commission idea” law passed by Illinois legislators in March 1910 was a serious error in judgment. Indeed, to view side by side the two Springfield dailies of 3 January 1911 is to realize firsthand the extreme polarization. The *Register’s* front page is an expression of ebullience and self-satisfaction:

**SPRINGFIELD VOTED “YES” AND THE COMMISSION PLAN OF GOVERNMENT WON A SWEEPING MAJORITY AT THE POLLS YESTERDAY; MAJORITY, 670.**

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**DESPITE BLIZZARD NEARLY 7,000 VOTERS WENT TO THE POLLS TO VOTE ON THE COMMISSION FORM**

In stark contrast, the *Journal’s* first mention of the referendum’s passing is on the op-ed page—page six—and it is not the lead article on the page:

**VOTERS WANT A CHANGE**

With less than one-third of the legal voters casting their ballots in favor of the proposition, Springfield has gone on record for adoption of commission government under the faulty act passed by the Forty-sixth general assembly.

Most of the voters who cast favoring ballots did so in the belief that no matter what the consequences might be, they had no reason to anticipate anything worse than conditions which exist at present. They professed no intimate knowledge of the principles involved in the radical change, but they were so anxious for a change that they were willing to try anything which promised something different from the present municipal management.

Whether they have made a mistake will be demonstrated later on.

The editorial writer continues for another two paragraphs, largely deploring the fact that “more than 5,000 voters were unwilling, for various reasons, to cast their ballots… This indicates that the proposition might have been defeated if a full vote had been cast…” The *Journal’s* coverage of the election is delayed until page ten; and, as we may suspect, the “objective” report emphasizes low voter turnout. The opening lines read: “Springfield voted to adopt the commission form of municipal government at yesterday’s special election. Less than two-thirds of the voters participated, but they gave a majority of 650 in favor of the commission government. Returns from the entire 38 precincts show that 3,699 votes were cast in favor of adoption. And 3,049 against. Four of the seven wards show majorities for the commission form.” The *Register*, meanwhile, does comment on low voter turnout, but attributes the weakness, not to lack of interest but to the weather. On 2 January 1911, an extreme cold front blasted through Springfield, Illinois, an extenuating circumstance the *Journal* brushes aside in the reporter’s final paragraph: “The cold wave that raged is held responsible by some for the light vote cast, but the general lack of interest kept many from going to the polls.”
Springfield in 2011, I am amused to note how today’s media lament polarization in United States politics. In 1911, Springfield’s two partisan dailies could not even agree on simple mathematics: was it 670 or 650 that constituted the “sweeping majority” vote for the referendum?

Following the editorial lament, “Voters Want a Change” (January 3, p. 6), the Journal laid the groundwork for the next political battle: NOW, GET THE MEN. “Citizens who conceived and executed the campaign for commission government advocated it particularly as a means of inducing a better class of candidates for nomination to city office,” the skeptical Journal writer challenges: “They promised men of the highest type of ability and integrity, who will devote their entire time to promoting the welfare of the city. It is morally incumbent upon them now to bring about the candidacy of not less than three such men for the coming campaign.” With four commissioners, of course, three would constitute a majority—a simple mathematical fact that soon became obvious to everyone. Both newspapers began promoting preferred candidates, and (as much as libel laws would allow) decried their opposition. The primary election was set for February 28, and the front-page headline of the February 27 Register reads:

**DEFEAT THE CANDIDATES SUPPORTED BY MACHINE POLITICIANS**

**A VOTE AGAINST THE PROFESSIONAL “SLATE” CANDIDATES IS A GENUINE BOOST FOR SPRINGFIELD**

Numerous Register editorials had warned that the same “gangsters” who attempted to defeat the commission referendum were now trying to gain control of the new government and convert it to a political machine: “Shall it be gang rule or government for the people? Smash that ‘slate’!” In the end, the election was a qualified success for Vachel and his friends: two of their favored candidates for commissioners, Willis Spaulding and Joseph Farris, survived the primary, along with a strong showing by the popular sitting mayor: “Honest John” Schnepp. [Note 2]

Any celebration, however, was short-lived. On 1 March 1911, the United States Senate, in Vachel’s words, “declared the election of William Lorimer good and valid, by a vote of forty-six to forty.” One very angry Springfield poet vented his frustrations in a work addressed “To the United States Senate.” He hand-delivered the manuscript to the offices of the Illinois State Register, where it was printed the next day, with an elaborate border (p. 5):

And must the Senator from Illinois  
Be this squat thing, with blinking, half-closed eyes?  
This brazen gutter idol, reared to power  
Upon a leering pyramid of lies?

And must the Senator from Illinois  
Be the world’s proverb of successful shame,  
Dazzling all State house flies that steal and steal,  
Who, when the sad State spares them, count it fame? etc. etc.

(See Poetry 135-136)
Apparently, Vachel’s vitriol echoed the sentiments of other Illinoisans: “To the United States Senate” was reprinted in newspapers across the state, especially papers with a Democratic bias.

Briefly, in 1908, Republican William Lorimer (1861-1934) decided to run for the U.S. Senate and, after a long struggle, he was elected by the Illinois legislature. (Before ratification of the 17th Amendment—8 April 1913—all Senators were elected by their state legislatures, not by popular vote.) Lorimer, though, had no sooner taken his seat—8 June 1909—and rumors began circulating that he had bribed several state legislators. The Chicago Tribune ran a series of articles, quoting a former legislator who confessed to the claim. On 28 May 1910, a defiant Lorimer rose to demand a formal investigation; and three days later the Senate duly instructed the Committee on Privileges and Elections to satisfy Lorimer’s request. The committee worked for more than six months and, on 21 December 1910, the majority report exonerated Lorimer of any and all corrupt practices. One committee member, however—Indiana Republican Albert Beveridge—was outraged and refused to sign the report. Three other Senators joined with him and, in January 1911, the entire United States Senate was forced to take up the debate. January and February 1911 Springfield newspapers are filled with Lorimer news, as well as with the city’s primary-election news; and by 1 March most people, especially Illinoisans, were convinced of Lorimer’s guilt. Thus the 1 March Senate vote was a shock, even more so because Republican Shelby Cullom, Illinois’s senior Senator, voted with the majority. [Note 3]

Finally, to complete the story of Springfield’s city-government election, the Register warned almost daily that “gangsters” were trying to steal the upcoming April 5 election. And for the first two weeks of March, almost daily, the Journal challenged an “unnamed competitor” to name “the gangsters”:

“GANG” CANDIDATES

During the campaign which preceded the primary election, voters of Springfield were told that “the gang” was preparing to nominate a ticket.

Each day there appeared in one or more of the newspapers warnings against “the gang,” and the public was told repeatedly to beware of its efforts to obtain control of the new city government.

Since the primary election, these warnings have been repeated with such emphasis as to indicate “the gang’s” progress was not successfully stayed by the vote of last Tuesday.

. . . it is now time for newspapers which have been referring to “the gang” to identify “the gang” candidates. (Journal, 4 March 1911, p. 6)

LET’S HAVE THE NAMES (9 March, p. 6), the Journal implored—and then an interesting Journal editorial introduced a new tone.

The day was Saturday, 11 March. The area Republican caucus (the group that everybody in Springfield knew was the Register’s “gang”) had endorsed four of the eight candidates for commissioner (not surprisingly all Republicans) and Roy M. Seeley, the Republican candidate for mayor, in spite of the fact that the election was to be “NON-PARTISAN.” (Six of the eight primary survivors were known Republicans; only Spaulding and Farris were known Democrats). With the Lorimer-Cullom scandal in full blaze, March-April 1911 was not a comfortable time to be a mouthpiece for the Republican party—and the Journal began the delicate task of extrication with a “we told you so editorial”:

SPRINGFIELD’S OPPORTUNITY
Springfield’s opportunity for civic advancement is plainly presented in the present contest for control of the first commission to be elected under the new municipal government. It is such an opportunity as knocks but once at the door of any community.

Either the commission to be named next month will elevate this city to a higher plane, or it will fasten around it the shackles of the most irritating and despotic political machine it has ever been the bad fortune of the city to fall into the hands of.

When commission government was first proposed, The State Journal warned Springfield voters that the new change in methods could not be expected to result automatically in radical improvement of municipal conditions. Every other local newspaper immediately began to ridicule The State Journal’s warning and to promise that the mere inauguration of the system would result in the desired improvement, without regard to the personnel of the commission. Even with the same men now holding office installed as officials under the new method, these papers assured voters the maximum degree of improvement would result. It was the system and not the men that was at fault, they declared. All that was needed was a change in system.

All are now agreed that the State Journal was right, and that it is entirely a matter of personality and not a matter of system that must be depended upon to effect improvement in municipal conditions. All now concede that the wrong set of men in control of the commission must be expected to make conditions worse, rather than better, and to fasten upon the city for at least four years to come a most obnoxious and oppressive political machine, from whose disastrous propositions the city might not recover, perhaps, in a decade.

This very long editorial continues and, ironically, comes very close to agreeing with the views of its main competitor, the Register: “In harmonious spirit with the purposes of voters who brought about the adoption of commission government, and who wish an opportunity to develop the best possibilities it presents, The State Journal purposes supporting candidates upon their merits without regard to party, but with particular care to avoid promoting the encouragement of political machine control. . . . The State Journal has no desire to make its own selection of candidates for voters, or to suggest to them what their choice should be. It prefers suggestions from the public upon which to base its activity. . . . If there really is danger of the capture of the Springfield commission government by a political machine, it is time for voters who oppose such an outcome to get busy. It should be remembered that three men will constitute a majority of the commission and control the affairs of this city for the coming four years” (11 March, p. 6).

The very next day, the Journal editorial is entitled NON-PARTISAN COMMISSION, and the paper goes so far as to suggest that Spaulding and Farris “may be assumed to have reasonably bright prospects of election” (12 March, p. 6). Apparently, the Republican machine had reduced its recommended list to three candidates—Roy R. Reece (a former mayor), Frank H. Hamilton, and J. Emil Smith—and then suggested casting a token vote for one “Democrat,” giving at least the illusion of non-partisanship. Soon both the Journal and the Register were referring to the Republican recommendations as “Lorimerism,” machine politics of the worst kind. On 30 March, the Journal even worried that the opposition to the machine may be too divided (“The Local Issue,” p. 6).

Election day, April 4, however, enabled both newspapers to claim victory. Mayor “Honest John” Schnepp was reelected, along with commissioners Willis J. Spaulding, George E. Coe, H. B. Davidson, and (supposed machine candidate) Frank H. Hamilton. The Register’s
editorial is predictable: The Machine Is Smashed (April 5, p. 4). The Journal’s headline, though, includes one fascinating word, the very word the paper had used to berate its opposition for much of the three preceding months:

**LORIMERISM IS BURIED IN CITY WHEN VOTERS SELECT FOR FIRST COMMISSIONERS CITIZENS OPPOSED TO GANG DICTATION.** (April 5, p. 1)

For Vachel and for his friends, there was only one disappointment: Joseph Farris finished a distant seventh in the field of eight. In early April 1911, then, rejoicing for Willis Spaulding and regret for Joseph Farris set the ambivalent tone inside one noteworthy Springfield cottage.

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In the last chapter, we followed Vachel’s struggles with the “cottage” in Evanston, until finally that cottage was closed once and for all. At the same time, and for several years afterward, Springfield boasted, in Vachel’s words, “one cosy Swedenborgian cottage”; and this cottage was open to Uncle Boy and to his liberal friends at all times of day and night. “The cottage that suddenly shone so brightly in our town,” Vachel remembered in 1925, “was the home of George and Maydie Lee” (Poetry 968). George E. Lee, an administrator for the Stacy-Herbst Company, “Wholesale Grocers,” lived at 1405 South 4th Street, some nine or ten blocks from Dr. Lindsay’s home. George’s wife, Mary “Maydie” Thankful Spaulding Lee, was the sister of Willis Spaulding and Frank H. Bode in the Spaulding-Bode Produce Company: “Wholesale Fruits, Produce and Commission Merchants and Market Gardeners” (R. L. Polk & Co.’s 1902 Springfield City Directory, abbreviations spelled out).

It was a “glowing and adventurous time that followed shortly after the period of the [War] bulletins,” Vachel proclaimed in 1925: “. . . for years, no one would have anything to do with me in Springfield, but Willis Spaulding and the Swedenborgians; Frank Bode and the Liberal Democrats; George and Maydie Lee and their daughter Virginia and the Single Taxers; Mr. and Mrs. Duncan MacDonald [Secretary-Treasurer, then President of the United Mine Workers] and the Socialists; Rabbi [Sidney] Tedesche and the Jews; Rachel Hiller and Susan Wilcox and the English teachers; and the Honorable James M. Graham [Illinois Representative] and the Knights of Columbus.” In the same essay, “Adventures While Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons,” Vachel mentions another political figure in Springfield’s 1911 elections: businessman Joseph Farris, operator-owner of the Capitol Foundry: “All things being equal, I get all my national and international views from Joseph Farris, out of pure gratitude. I like every political cartoon that he likes. His views, as man and politician, are close to the hieroglyphic. . . . For years we were the two hottest readers in Springfield, of Reedy’s St. Louis Mirror” (Poetry 968). (Thus, the disappointment when Farris lost in the 1911 general election.)

“Ours was what might be called ‘The Old Court-House America,’” Vachel conjectured in 1925 (referring readers to his drawing of Springfield’s “Old Court House,” Poetry 207), “what might be called: ‘The Old Horse-and-Buggy America,’ the America that first put Woodrow Wilson into the Presidential chair. It was among this circle that I scattered my pen and ink drawings and cartoons and war bulletins with the most welcome. I fought my best to add to
genuine gospels of Democracy, my Gospel of Beauty, gathered in Life Classes and in Art Museums, and among Art Students, for many a day. And I had to fight every inch of the way with very stubborn, very earnest, very admirable minds” (Poetry 969).

Two of those “very admirable minds” were women: Susan Wilcox and Maydie Spaulding Lee. “Susan E. Wilcox is still the head of the very distinguished English Department of the Springfield High School,” Vachel added in 1925: “Half the poems in this book [Collected Poems] show her stern hand. Leaving out the members of my own family, she is, without doubt, both as a person and a teacher the noblest and most faithful friend of my life. She stood by me for years when I went through the usual Middle West crucifixion of the artist” (Poetry 958-959). The heart of the intellectual circle, though, was the woman of the cottage, Maydie Spaulding Lee. “Catholic and Protestant, Jew and Greek were all brought to fine speaking terms by our great hostess. Her consecrated heart was instead the very heart of Springfield. After his obvious victories, she kept her brother Willis Spaulding at the actual battle of bringing her ideals before the folks of the city, in some form that they could understand” (Poetry 969). And Maydie Lee’s ideas and ideals, like many of Vachel Lindsay’s ideas and ideals, were derived from the writers of the Progressive Era, especially from two Progressive Era wellsprings: Henry George and Emanuel Swedenborg.

Indeed, discussion materials for the “very admirable minds” of the Lee circle reads like a who’s who of Progressive Era politics, namely, the politicians and writers who sought to bring social justice and civic improvement to every area of human life. Among his contemporaries, Vachel lists (Poetry 968-969): (1) Joseph Fels, soap manufacturer turned philanthropist in the spirit of Henry George and the “land value tax”; (2) Herbert Quick, Iowa writer dedicated to rural values and democratic reforms; (3) President Woodrow Wilson, an effective and acknowledged leader of the Progressive Movement; (4) Robert “Fighting Bob” La Follette, Wisconsin politician whose name is almost synonymous with Progressive Era politics; (5) Brand Whitlock, progressive mayor of Toledo, Ohio, and a former member of Governor John Peter Altgeld’s Secretary of State office; (6) Frederic C. Howe, lawyer, settlement worker, and author of a “disguised Single Tax” (Vachel’s words) book: The City: The Hope of Democracy (1905); (7) Newton D. Baker, Democratic mayor of Cleveland interested in civic reform, education, and city beautification; (8) Raymond Robins [misspelled “Robbins” in Vachel’s essay], social worker and chair of the Progressive Party’s State Central Committee; (9) Margaret Dreier Robins, labor leader, President of the Women’s Trade Union League, and wife of Raymond; (10) Jane Addams, pioneer settlement worker and founder of Hull House; (11) Dr. Caroline Hedger, personal friend of Maydie Lee and progressive activist in health concerns, especially the food industry (see “The Unhealthfulness of Packingtown” at Google Books); and (12) William Allen White, owner-editor of the Emporia (Kansas) Gazette and acknowledged leader in the Progressive movement (The Old Order Changeth, 1910—also at Google Books). White championed the village as a prototype for civic reform and sense of community, and Vachel claims the editor “was the soul back of the Kansas chapters of Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty” (in spite of the fact that White gained early fame by attacking Vachel’s beloved William Jennings Bryan and the Populists). Herbert Quick would soon publish Vachel’s “Proclamation: Of the Return of the Spirit of Ruskin to the Earth” in Farm and Fireside (29 March 1913).

Among the “recently departed” heroes of Maydie Lee’s circle, Vachel lists (in 1925): (1) Tom L. Johnson, the Democratic mayor of Cleveland (died April 10, 1911), progressive leader
interested in civic improvement, especially public transportation, healthful food and drink, and **an expanded park system**; (2) Samuel M. “Golden Rule” Jones, Republican-Progressive mayor of Toledo, Ohio, a man who labored to improve the living conditions of blue-collar Americans, advocating hard work, honesty, and living according to the “Golden Rule” (an avid “Single Taxer,” Jones died in office on 12 July 1904, and was succeeded by Brand Whitlock); (3) John Peter Altgeld (died 12 March 1902), Democratic-Progressive Governor of Illinois, pardoner of the Haymarket rioters and a strong advocate for workplace safety and child-labor laws. Altgeld, according to Vachel, “was the most fearless user of the privilege of free speech since Jefferson” (*Poetry* 969).

“Among the great further back were Henry George, and, of course, Emanuel Swedenborg,” Vachel adds: “These last two men seem to go together in the minds of many more Americans than our great universities realize. They furnish more austerity, fire, vision and relentless lifetime resolution to those who would make over our cities, than the heathen have ever dreamed” (*Poetry* 969). Henry George (1839-1897), American political economist, is best known as the father of the “single” or the “land value tax.” His most famous work, *Progress and Poverty* (1879), Vachel avers, circulated among Maydie Lee’s group “like a new Bible” (*Poetry* 969). George argued that most taxes are regressive: they are aimed at productivity and thus discourage industrious effort. Income taxes dampen desire to earn income, sales taxes lessen sales, etc. The only fair tax, the only tax that would not deter productive behavior, is a tax on the unimproved value of land, that is, land in its natural state—without consideration of any building or improvement. Levying such taxes would not lessen the amount of land available and would not discourage productivity. Unlike existing systems, the “single tax” would not create poverty, the unfortunate byproduct of present-day progress. All humans, in the spirit of Henry George, would be able to possess:

A Net to Snare the Moonlight

*(What the Man of Faith Said)*

The dew, the rain and moonlight
All prove our Father’s mind.
The dew, the rain and moonlight
Descend to bless mankind.

Come, let us see that all men
Have land to catch the rain,
Have grass to snare the spheres of dew,
And fields spread for the grain.

Yea, we would give to each poor man
Ripe wheat and poppies red, —
A peaceful place at evening
With the stars just overhead:

A net to snare the moonlight,
A sod spread to the sun,
A place of toil by daytime,
Of dreams when toil is done.  (*Poetry* 165)
“I have never been in the least a literal Swedenborgian,” Vachel insisted in 1925, but he knew that “Thousands of folks of our purest, most valuable, oldest stock, go to the Swedenborgian church on Sunday and work steadily and silently for the Single Tax all week” (Poetry 967, 969). Several of these folks were members of Maydie Lee’s circle, including her brother, Willis Spaulding, “the most powerful citizen in the [Springfield] City Hall. He was re-elected many times. He was continually trying to hunch the city nearer to Single Tax. The pleasant things said about him at The Country Club,” Vachel adds with irony, “I will not here put down. I doubt if my tracts won a single vote for Willis. They won for me the opponents that fought him always in vain” (Poetry 967). [Note 4]

Maydie and Willis were both “literal” Swedenborgians, and their close friend Vachel Lindsay absorbed more of Swedenborg’s thought than perhaps he chose to admit. Swedish scientist and Christian mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1782) began to experience dreams and visions in the early 1740s. He began seeing the spiritual world, not unlike Vachel’s vision of Immanuel “singing in the New Heaven” (see Chapter 18, pp. 28-29). Indeed, Vachel shared Swedenborg’s emphasis on vision, but especially on viewing the physical world as the shadow, the clothing of the spiritual world: what is known as the doctrine of correspondences. Most people recognize the beauties of nature: butterflies, flowers, mountain and prairie landscapes, sunsets, etc. Few people see these beauties as reflections of God’s nature and love, few people see “the Gospel of Beauty.” Likewise, most people sense the sinister nature of spiders, snakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, etc. Few people, however, see the wrath of God, that is, see the sinister as God’s early warning system. And since so few envision the spiritual world—the soul—Vachel the visionary-missionary-artist felt compelled to draw pictures (Poetry 48-49):

**Hieroglyphic of the Soul of a Butterfly**

The thing that breaks Hell’s prison bars,
And heals the sea of shame,
Is a fragile butterfly’s great soul
And Beauty is its name.

**Hieroglyphic of the Soul of a Spider**

The thing that eats the rotting stars
On the black sea-beach of shame
Is a giant spider’s deathless soul,
And Mammon is its name.
In brief, Vachel and the Swedenborgians see the physical world as hieroglyphic, as holy writing, as a gospel revealing and corresponding to the spiritual world, the world of the soul.

Swedenborg, moreover, rejected the doctrine of salvation by faith and faith alone. Those who would enter the New Heaven must have faith, yes, but they must also practice charity. God is goodness and all who perform good deeds conjoin themselves with God. Moreover, a person need not be a member of any particular religious sect: all who have faith and practice charity will be accepted in the New Heaven. Faith and charity are the essential requirements for the church universal; and charity, of course, is the very heart of Progressive Era thinking. “I believe in God, the creeping fire, the august and whimsical Creator, maker of all religions, dweller in all clean shrines,” Vachel’s “Creed of a Beggar” begins: “I am convinced that the great religions: Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedism, Confucianism, Buddhism, are absolutely different from one another in core and essence, though God made them all. I choose Christianity.” “I believe in Christ the Socialist, the Beautiful, the personal savior from sin, the singing Immanuel.” Emanuel Swedenborg, like Alexander Campbell and Vachel Lindsay, believed “the New Earth, the New Heaven, the New Universe” would be a church universal, the members of which would be persons who spent their lives doing unto others what they wanted others to do unto them. In fact, Vachel’s “Creed of a Beggar” includes the statement: “I believe in the Sermon on the Mount as the one test of society, though I scarcely expect to live up to it one hour in my life” (see Chapter 22, p. 16). The essence, the very heart of the Sermon on the Mount, is expressed in Matthew 7:12: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,” words described simply as “The Golden Rule.”

Importantly, Emanuel Swedenborg believed that one human race was especially attuned to the world of the spirit. These people “acknowledge our Lord as the Lord of heaven and earth; and laugh at the monks who visit them, and at Christians who talk of a threefold divinity, and of salvation by mere thought; asserting, that there is no man, who worships at all, that does not live according to his religion, and that unless a man so lives, he must needs become stupid and wicked, because in such case he receives nothing from heaven: they likewise give to ingenious wickedness the name of stupidity, because there is no life but death in it. I have heard the angels rejoice at this revelation, because thereby a communication is opened with the rational principle in man, which has heretofore been closed up by a general blindness with respect to matters of faith. I was informed from Heaven, that the things contained in the Doctrine of the new Jerusalem concerning the Lord, concerning the Word, and in the Doctrine of Life for the new Jerusalem, lately published, are now revealed by word of mouth by angelic spirits to the inhabitants of that country.” Who are these inhabitants that comprehend and receive divine truths so easily and so quickly, because “they think more interiorly and spiritually than others”? They are Africans, the inhabitants of the Congo, the progenitors of the citizens that the Springfield mobs, in 1908, set out to lynch. [Note 5]  

At this point, it should be obvious to anyone that Uncle Boy and his friends were immersed in Progressive Era politics and Swedenborgian ministration. Art and education classes for youngsters, Ruskin Revivals for church and city leaders, English lessons for immigrant miners, Sunday sermons for the Anti-Saloon League—all share a common theme, a common purpose. Progressive Era concerns, however, were not entirely aimed at broad social goals:
Progressives also rolled up their sleeves and tackled specific, practical issues, such as unsavory practices in the meat industry. Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906) is the famous work, but Maydie Lee’s friend, Dr. Caroline Hedger, also played an active role in exposing meat-packers’ unhealthy operations. In late 1910, as part of President William Howard Taft’s crack down on trusts (eighty anti-trust law suits mark the Taft administration), United States Attorney General George W. Wickersham asked one of his assistants to travel to the Illinois capital and prepare an indictment against the so-called “Chicago Meat Trust.” On 4 January 1911, the *Illinois State Register* reports (p. 3):

**BARTON CORNEAU WILL PROSECUTE**

*Represents Government in Beef Trust Case Selected by Attorney General Wickersham, Whose Assistant He Is—Born and Reared in Springfield*

The picture of a distinguished young man in a stylish business suit accompanies the article, which reports that Corneau had lived in Springfield “until 12 years ago,” when he moved to Chicago to be in the legal department of the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad. No one in Springfield could know, but in the next year or so, attorney Barton Corneau would begin courting a local socialite, herself a wealthy city native: Octavia Roberts. And, to Uncle Boy’s distress, Octavia would become Mrs. Barton Corneau on 27 December 1913: but now we are ahead of the story. [Note 6]

In Springfield, the meat trust was not the main concern. The Illinois capital city had major difficulties in providing healthy, potable water for its fast-growing citizenry. Few administrators were more aware of this problem than newly elected Commissioner Willis Spaulding and Dr. George Thomas Palmer, the Superintendent of the Springfield Health Department. In his essay “The Diagnosis of the Sick City,” Dr. Palmer analyzes Vachel’s city (and by extension any mid-sized American city) as if it were a sick patient and suggests that “any city which has any considerable typhoid fever mortality, say more than five per 100,000 population, is a sick city; any city in which there is an infant mortality which may be directly or indirectly traced to an imperfect milk supply is a sick city; all those in which tuberculosis continues to reap its customary harvest are sick cities and all those in which preventable sickness and preventable deaths continue to occur are confessedly in need of special examination and medical care. . . . Measured by such a reasonable standard, every city in these United States is a sick city which will be the better for a careful diagnosis of its ills” (p. 648).

In 1910, Dr. Palmer reports, Springfield’s “typhoid fever mortality [was] something over 40 per 100,000 . . . This mortality had been as high as 85 per 100,000 and the last year recorded showed a mortality of 52. That was twice as high as it should have been. Half of our deaths from this disease were apparently unnecessary” (p. 650). Perhaps surprisingly, though, Dr. Palmer’s essay is most supportive of Willis Spaulding and the Springfield city water works: “Four million dollars had been expended by the city for waterworks and sewer system, and the mains extended to all sections of the town. We made repeated analyses of the city water, extending over a long period of time, and found that the public supply was always safe for domestic use.” Unfortunately, before Mayor Schnepp appointed Spaulding superintendent, the public water supply, drawn mainly from the muddy Sangamon River, was not safe and not very pure: many citizens felt compelled to dig private wells. In 1910, Dr. Palmer’s office determined
that, of the 9,000 homes in the city, “6,000 homes had shallow wells, the pollution of which was guaranteed by 7,000 privy vaults. . . . Analyses were made from 150 samples of supposedly good wells. All but three were found to be dangerously polluted. . . . There were 6,000 polluted wells in the city, and the water mains and sewers were convenient to 5,000 of the premises that maintained them. That is, the use of 5,000 of the 6,000 polluted wells in the city was entirely unnecessary. From a sanitary standpoint the city’s expenditure of $4,000,000 was wasted.”

Dr. Palmer’s essay continues and discusses other issues, but he is able to illustrate his survey’s effectiveness: “For twelve years the average mortality from typhoid fever in Springfield had been something over forty per 100,000 population. In 1910, the year our investigation was undertaken, it was fifty-two. In 1911, the year after our agitation of polluted wells and the passage of sanitary ordinances, our typhoid fever mortality was in the twenties.” Meanwhile, in early 1911, commissioner-candidate Willis Spaulding ran the same political newspaper advertisement almost daily. The ad is a picture of Spaulding in a business suit, holding a glass of water at arm’s length and announcing: “Yes, the water is much better, but many improvements are yet to be worked out.” What the ad does not reveal is why the water is “much better.” Instead of relying on the Sangamon River, Spaulding had ordered deep municipal wells to be drilled in the river plain, wells deep enough so that nature provided the necessary sanitation. Digging these wells required manual labor; and, on 15 January 1911, manual laborer Nicholas Vachel Lindsay began his first day at a new job: wheeling bricks, lugging cement, and shoveling coal at the Springfield waterworks site. The new laborer wrote to an unnamed friend that he was earning $2.00 a day, getting much needed exercise, and acquiring self-respect. The main reason, however, was “to kill the worm in my soul, which keeps eating round and round” [that is, pride; see Mark 9:44]. Uncle Boy expected to labor in “the sweet oblivion of persperation!” for at least a year; he lasted two weeks (Poetry 964). [Note 7]

Vachel’s Sunday work for the Anti-Saloon League continued, although with interruptions. Biographer Edgar Lee Masters reduces all of 1911 to two sentences in a single paragraph: “Lindsay’s diary for 1911 was devoted to his itineraries making speeches, to his expense accounts here and there to the nearby towns, to the collections which he received. There are a few scrawls of germinating poems; otherwise the record has no interest” (219). However, when Miss Nellie Vieira graciously invited her former suitor to the 1911 Cumnock graduation ceremony, he was forced to decline: “I am poor at present, not being in the Temperance business, and all I can send by way of a memorial is a little laurel wreath for you. Here it is:

I know you have done nobly, and hope you have been happy in your work—I know you have been, on the whole, you are not the child of ill-fortune. I have been in Nirvana myself—for the last few months—with only occasional interruptions. If my days had been as serene—when you and I first met—we would have had a different style of friendship—a little more pink—not quite so grey, maybe. I must have disturbed you most inconsiderately at times” (May 17, 1911, Fowler 366).

Nirvana, for Uncle Boy (and for most creative artists, not to mention biographers), is the self-satisfaction enjoyed from public approbation, especially approbation manifested in print. Vachel’s list of publications, several in national periodicals of the day, continued to grow throughout 1911. The successes were carefully itemized in notebooks, and then shared with
early evaluator-biographers, such as Peter Clark Macfarlane and George Bicknell: “During the year 1909 Lindsay wrote and published at his own expense a series of pamphlets which he called War Bulletins—five in all—issued July 19th, August 4th, August 30th, September 1st, and the last of these, No. 5, on Thanksgiving day of 1909. In these Lindsay spoke out on a number of questions absolutely as he thought—unhindered. They were sent broadcast over the land—and were commented on by many of the larger cosmopolitan newspapers. In September of 1909 occurred his first book of eighty poems, ‘A Tramp’s Excuse.’ These were sent broadcast without price. Along about this time the magazines began to take notice of Lindsay and the Independent of May 19, 1910, published his poem, ‘Why I Voted the Socialistic Ticket’ [Poetry 64]. The Outlook of May 28, 1910, ‘King Arthur’s Men Have Come Again’ [Poetry 156-157]. Collier’s Weekly, August 13, 1910, a prose Sketch, ‘The Factor in the Village.’ At this time he published, independently, ‘The Village Magazine.’ As was intended, only one issue of seven hundred copies, which he gave away. This was reviewed in March, 1911, issue of Current Literature and later in [the] Chicago Evening Post and The Survey. This was sought after by many villages, public libraries and literary folk. In Collier’s, March 18, 1911, occurred a prose sketch ‘The Education of Aladdin’; ‘Lady Iron Heels,’ prose sketch, Outlook October 7, 1911; poem ‘Incense,’ Outlook, September 23, 1911 [Poetry 152-153]; ‘The Lady Poverty,’ Outlook, November 25, 1911; poem, ‘Honor Among Scamps,’ The American Magazine, January 1, 1912 [Poetry 152]” (Bicknell 806-807).

Buried in Bicknell’s list is perhaps the most meaningful approbation in Uncle Boy’s budding creative life, namely, the review of The Village Magazine in the respected national periodical, Current Literature (March 1911). The review is unsigned, but most readers knew that “An Illinois Art Revivalist” (reproduced at the close of this chapter) was the work of Edward J. Wheeler, the magazine’s editor-in-chief and the newly elected President of The Poetry Society of America. In October 1910, a small group of New York City artists, editors, and poets met and formed what today is the oldest poetry organization in the United States. In addition to Wheeler as President, Jessie Rittenhouse was elected Secretary and Miles Menander Dawson Treasurer. The first meeting, and nearly every meeting since, convened at the prestigious National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park South. Auspiciously, it was about this time that one of the founders, poet Witter Bynner (see the last chapter), insisted that friend Wheeler examine a new publication from—of all unlikely places—Springfield, Illinois. The self-published magazine bore the title: The Village Magazine. [Note 8]

Edward J. Wheeler may well have appreciated more than the poems, drawings, and essays of the “strange portent,” to use his words, that originated in Springfield. Prior to accepting his influential position at Current Literature, Wheeler had been managing editor of The Literary Digest and, before that, editor of The Voice, “a leading prohibitionist organ, and he was prominent in the early prohibitionist movement,” according to his New York Times obituary (16 July 1922). Wheeler’s early work, Prohibition: The Principle, The Policy and the Party (1886, available at Google Books), is a spirited proposal for the formation of the Prohibitionist Party. Editor Wheeler must have recognized a “dry” brother when he examined the creations of Anti-Saloon League preacher Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, and the recognition was propitious. Wheeler was not only editor of a respected national magazine but also literary advisor to Funk and Wagnalls Company, a Governor of the National Arts Club, and an active member in New York City’s Players and MacDowell Clubs. To catch the eye of Edward J. Wheeler, literary people knew, was to have “arrived.”
In Chicago, Illinois, the March 1911 *Current Literature* found two avid readers: one (Floyd Dell) who already knew and one (Hamlin Garland) who experienced for the first time the creative efforts of the “Illinois Art Revivalist.” On 10 March 1911, the *Chicago Evening Post’s Friday Literary Review* called attention to the *Current Literature* article; and the unnamed Review author (Vachel rightly believed it was Dell) expressed hope that the piece would “introduce new readers to the curious genius of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.” The Review then quotes “On the Building of Springfield” (*Poetry* 168-169), and ends with a summative comment: “Mr. Lindsay lives in Springfield, Ill., which he hopes to keep from becoming a big city. He produces pictures and poetry of an unusual and certainly meritorious order, but they are all incidental to his philosophy of Localism” (p. 7, also see Tanselle 373). Two days later, on 12 March, Vachel sent Dell a thank-you note, ending with a proud acknowledgment: “It may interest you to know that Hamlin Garland and the Cliff Dwellers Club are ordering the Village Mag. by the ton!... In a moment of repentance I will say—they have ordered about twenty copies” (Tanselle 373-374). Nirvana!

Meanwhile, in *Companions on the Trail* (Chapter 36), Hamlin Garland relates that he read Wheeler’s article while at the Cliff Dwellers in early March 1911: “The editorials of *Current Literature* had great weight with me, but in this case I found immediate confirmation of the editor’s judgment in the excerpts quoted from the publication before him. First of all, the preaching of this self-confessed art evangelist in Springfield was in harmony with what I had been proclaiming for several years, namely that it was the duty of the American artist and writer to use American material, but young Lindsay had gone beyond me in a passionate plea to the artist and author to remain in the place of their birth and lend the best of their brain and the skill of their hands to the task of making the home town beautiful” (462). Inspired, Garland wrote immediately to “Dear Mr. Lindsay,” and requested not only two copies of the Magazine but also a full account of the author’s “plans and purposes. So far as I can judge from the extracts printed, your call to the village is one that should be given the widest hearing and the deepest consideration” (Virginia).

Vachel immediately responded to Garland’s request, admitting that he had no plans “in especial... ‘Come, eat the bread of Idleness,’ said Mister Moon to me [*Poetry* 45-47]. What I produce, if I may say so, is not a definite plan, but yeast—if it is anything. The other man, once leavened, must produce the plan and do the work. In short, brother Garland, I am an inert gentleman who makes a loud noise. I have a hope that the villages will send for me some day, as an Art Evangelist. In that case I will go to them and conduct Ruskin Revivals, and distribute the tracts of the Massachusetts Civic League (Garland, *Companions* 463; see Note 1). “If I may be said to have a plan it is to stick to this my native village of Springfield, studying the workings of the new Commission Government, especially the Department of Streets and Public Improvements. If I can get into that Department as stamp-licker, so I can have a close view, I will be fairly satisfied. No matter how the work is done in that Department, I will get what I want” (7 March 1911: unpublished close of Vachel’s letter to Garland, Southern California).

Within a few days, “Brother Garland” received his Village Magazine and confessed that he “opened it with more interest than I had ever felt in any previous Mid-Western publication. It was a large, square, paper-bound volume filled with hand-made script which was almost illegible by reason of its minute characters but as beautiful in its way as a medieval manuscript, and the text, both prose and verse, was illustrated by decorative pen drawings of singular remoteness from anything in Springfield. Considered as a piece of book-making it was an amazing
performance. . . . How could such work come out of Springfield?” (463-464). Garland shared his discovery with fellow Cliff Dweller, Henry Blake Fuller, focusing on Vachel’s poem, “The Wizard in the Street” (Poetry 93-94). “How could an unknown youth write with such penetration, such mastery of phrase? Almost any of us can write love poems or nature poems, but which of us can spread a spotted cloak and raise an unaccounted incense smoke? This poem alone justifies Wheeler’s editorial . . . , but it does not stand alone. This astonishing magazine is filled with verses quaintly humorous, exquisitely musical, and at the same time esoteric in concept. His argument against stripping the mid-land of its artists and writers to build up New York’s Bohemia can have no effect, but I honor him for making it.” The next day (March 10 or 11), Vachel received not only Garland’s “honor” but also a request for additional copies of the Magazine—and an invitation to address the Cliff Dwellers concerning the New Localism: “I’ll arrange a special luncheon for you and give you a chance to preach your art theories to an audience of writers, architects, musicians, and painters who are all secretly planning to join the New York colony. I shall be glad to have you stay at my house for the night” (465). More Nirvana!

Vachel’s “jubilant” response (12 March) refers Garland to “The Education of Aladdin,” just published in the Collier’s Weekly for 18 March, and suggests “Tuesday noon” (likely 21 March) for a short address to the Cliff Dwellers: “Subject, ‘The New Localism’ or ‘The Returned Art Student,’ . . . being careful to make it fifteen minutes only.” Importantly, Garland describes Vachel’s physical appearance and manner of delivery, as well as the subject of his address: “On the day appointed he appeared at the club, a quaint, rough-hewn, and highly individualized youth of twenty-six [he was thirty-one!], with sandy hair, blue eyes, slanting brow, high cheek bones, and a freckled skin, much more rural in figure than I had expected to see, but his talk, though unpolished, was ready and forceful. He had ideas and did not hesitate to make them known. . . . The substance of his address to the members was admirable, but his manner of speech was a bit ludicrous. Our dining room was small, and his voice, needlessly sonorous, caused some of his auditors to smile. Nevertheless he had a very real message, and his points were ably presented. He failed in grace rather than in logic. Several of the men came up to congratulate him and he had no sense of failure” (465-467).

Garland also arranged for his “rough-hewn” guest to address the students at the Art Institute; and here, in the host’s opinion, “He redeemed himself. In the larger space of the hall his voice was less strident, and the fact that he had once been a student in the building enabled him to catch and hold the interest of the young artists.” The favorable impression continued that same evening, when Vachel performed for a small number of friends (Henry Blake Fuller and sculptor Lorado Taft are named) at the Garland home: “At my request he recited some of his poems, and when he had finished by saying his lines on Poe [―The Wizard in the Street‖], I was convinced that the Mid-West had at last produced a genuine poet, one whose endowment was so largely subconscious that he himself had no adequate concept of its depth. He did not appear to know the value of his poem on Poe, which had in it something of the quality which Stephen Crane had possessed” (467). Vachel’s thank-you note (26 March, Southern California) expresses his gratitude for the opportunity to “make noises at the cliff Dwellers and the Art Institute,” as well as the opportunity to meet important new friends and to enjoy a sound night’s sleep in Garland’s “little spare room.” More Nirvana!

Four days later, Vachel mailed his Chicago host copies of the War Bulletins and, in turn, requested a copy of The Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly (1895)—an ironic request as Garland’s novel
depicts a young girl who grows dissatisfied with rural life. Vachel goes so far as to indicate that he is ready to send $15 for a non-resident membership in the Cliff Dwellers, although a few days earlier he had been forced to except travel money in order to make the Chicago trip. (He had been paid a small sum for the “Education of Aladdin” piece in Collier’s.) He also asks “brother Garland” to pay close attention to “The Golden-Faced People” in War Bulletin Number One (see Chapter 22, pp. 5-7), claiming that the story was written after he had “attended the Negro celebration of the Lincoln Centennial in the African Methodist Church the night that all the white folks of great wealth in our city celebrated him in a most expensive banquet. In reading the story substitute White-men for Chinamen, mulattoes for Eurasians and Negroes for White-men and the parable untangles itself.” The story is, Vachel added, “intensely condensed” (30 March, Southern California).

5

The members of the Cliff Dwellers may or may not have learned that the “highly individualized youth” from Springfield was already at work on another poem that would soon earn national recognition. Democratic Governor John Peter Altgeld had died on 12 March 1902; and some eight to nine years later, Illinoisans were slowly awakening to Altgeld’s effectiveness as a man and as a political figure. One Illinoisan—Governor Altgeld’s next-door neighbor (1893-1897)—had recognized this greatness almost from the beginning, starting an Altgeld scrapbook while in high school and delivering a pro-Altgeld oration at Hiram College. Belatedly other Illinoisans were slowly beginning to take notice. On Sunday, 4 September 1910, the John P. Altgeld Memorial Association arranged an elaborate dedication of four bronze tablets, tablets with “Selections from [Altgeld’s] Public Utterances,” at Chicago’s Garrick Theatre. And, by early 1911, there was talk in the Illinois legislature concerning one or more Altgeld monuments. [Note 9]

The outrage for Vachel Lindsay resulted from what he believed to be blatant hypocrisy: some of the talkers had been among Altgeld’s fiercer critics—while the Governor was still alive. “The Eagle That Is Forgotten” is both an appreciative and an angry eulogy. The poem was first published in Springfield’s Illinois State Register (15 April 1911, p. 4), and obviously appealed to others who had noticed the same hypocrisy. The work was reprinted in newspapers and periodicals across Illinois, as well as other United States cities and villages, especially in areas with a Democratic bias:

Sleep softly . . . eagle forgotten . . . under the stone . . .
Time has its way with you there, and the clay has its own.

“We have buried him now,” thought your foes, and in secret rejoiced.
They made a brave show of their mourning, their hatred unvoiced.
They had snarled at you, barked at you, foamed at you day after day,
Now you were ended. They praised you . . . and laid you away. (Poetry 136-137)

Coincidence with the time of Altgeld’s death, however, is not the only motivation for “The Eagle Forgotten” poem. The Cliff Dwellers address on the New Localism, along with the continuing focus on local affairs—including Springfield’s Commission-form election—reminded Vachel that the late Illinois Governor had been a fierce champion for local affairs. In the summer, 1894, during the Pullman strike, Altgeld objected strenuously when President Grover Cleveland dispatched federal troops to Chicago to end the strike. A vigorous exchange of letters ensued between the Governor and the President; and although the Supreme Court ultimately
exonerated the President, Governor Altgeld never accepted the constitutionality of Cleveland’s actions. Speaking before the Cooper’s Union, on the night of 17 October 1896, Altgeld proclaimed: “These two principles, i.e. Federal Union and local self-government, have for a century been regarded as the foundation upon which the glory of our whole Governmental fabric rests. One is just as sacred, just as inviolable, just as important as the other. Without federal union there must follow anarchy, and without local self-government there must follow despotism. Both are destructive, not only of the liberties, but of the higher aspirations and possibilities of a people” (*The New York Times*, 18 October 1896). In brief, Altgeld’s actions and thoughts are important influences for anyone attempting to understand the “New Localism.” It was the Governor’s “valor” that, in the words of the poem, incited “a hundred high-valiant ones,”

A hundred white eagles have risen, the sons of your sons,
The zeal in their wings is a zeal that your dreaming began
The valor that wore out your soul in the service of man.

Indeed, affairs of government brought many to the capital city of Illinois. Some, Vachel relates, were welcomed at Maydie Lee’s cottage: “She it was who kept open house for the radical lobby that came down season after season to the State House: Agnes Nestor, Margaret Haley and the rest [union activists—founders of the Women’s Trade Union League]. She was the leading spirit of the local branch of the Woman’s Trade Union League, and Mrs. Robins’ devoted lieutenant [see p. 8 above]. On 27 April 1911, though, one particular “radical lobby” came to Springfield, and a notable participant visited the home of Dr. Vachel Thomas Lindsay, not the cottage of Maydie Spaulding Lee. Several playwrights (Josephine Preston Peabody, Augustus Thomas, Percy MacKaye, Edwin Milton Royle) and one actress-activist (Flora Dodge “Fola” La Follette) joined Hamlin Garland to lobby against Illinois legislation excluding young children from the stage. Surprisingly, Josephine Peabody’s verse drama, *The Piper* (1909), had won the Stratford-on-Avon prize ($1500) for the best English or American drama and had been performed at several English venues. In early 1911, the play was staged successfully at New York City’s New Theatre (*New York Times*, 5 February 1911), but when the acting troop requested permission for a Chicago performance, they ran afoul of Illinois’s child labor laws (some of which, ironically, the results of John Peter Altgeld’s progressive efforts).  

“Our party occupied a private car, and while it was lying on the side-track, young Nicholas Lindsay called and asked me to visit his home,” Garland relates: “‘I want my father and mother to meet you.’ I consented to go with him, for I was curious to know the kind of family life from which he came.” Visitor Garland soon understood that Papa and Mama “were troubled by their son’s literary activities,” and he decided to exploit guest privileges and “set about instructing them. ‘I think I understand your anxiety about Nicholas,’ I began. ‘It does seem, at times, as if he were wasting his days, but let me assure you,’ here I became very positive, ‘any youth who can write such a poem as that which your son has written on Edgar Allan Poe is certain of recognition. I know of no other tribute to Poe of equal grace and power. It is impossible that a writer of such skill and judgment should remain unknown. It is not a question of quantity but of quality. Your son is a genius. Be patient with him a little longer. Give him time to find his place. Loan him money, if necessary. His Village Magazine has aroused the interest of Eastern editors and it will not be long before his work will be in demand’” (*Companions* 467-469). Nirvana? Perhaps not entirely at this particular time.
Garland likely walked into a family confrontation. In his words: “Dr. Lindsay, a bearded man of sixty or thereabouts, met me coldly and remained absolutely silent. He did not utter a single sentence during my stay.” Mama did most of the talking, not about her literary son but about her missionary daughter in China. Finally, understanding the situation, Garland decided to “set about instructing” his hosts. Many years later (4 October 1925), Vachel advised his visitor: “My dear friend when you came down in a Special Car . . . to lobby to make it possible for Josephine Preston Peabody’s play to be put on in Chicago, I remember you sending for me in one of the darkest hours of my life” (Chénetier 362). Papa and Mama’s immediate conclusions in regard to their visitor’s instructions have not survived, but Garland’s own assessment is in print: “[Vachel] spoke as a citizen of Springfield, but he wrote like a cosmopolite. Beneath all his localism he was a genius; that is to say, he was unaccountable” (470). He was also deadbeat broke and living under his parents’ roof—with little or no prospect for a full-time job. Not an ideal situation for Nirvana uninterrupted.

Three weeks after Hamlin Garland and his fellow lobbyists departed Springfield for Chicago, Vachel’s good humor once again was evident—and Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay themselves may have felt some of their distinguished visitor’s confidence. “The Wizard in the Street” appeared in the Chicago Evening Post’s Friday Literary Review for 19 May 1911 (p. 7); and although the subtitle reads “Concerning Edgar Allan Poe,” perhaps Floyd Dell recognized the generic theme of the sadly neglected, totally misunderstood artist. One such artist, though—the author of the poem—was (at least temporarily) exuberant. “Please extend to all persons responsible, my hearty thanks for the publication of ‘The Wizard in the Street,’” Vachel gushed to “My Dear Dell” (21 May): “It added good cheer to a happy day” (Tanselle 374). The “happy day” had been spent working on an editorial concerning Poe. Adding to the elation was Vachel’s confidence that “The Eagle That Is Forgotten” would soon be published in Louis F. Post’s Public magazine. (It was, but not until a year later—on 24 May 1912.)

With Uncle Boy, though, nothing inspired like success. “Writing to you [Dell] makes me really feel like coming to Chicago. The spring is in the air and the Red Gods call me to wild adventures this morning. . . . Anyhow I haven’t the least expectation of being in Chicago for an age. I am writing hard, and enjoying it” (21 May 1911, Tanselle 375). By September, the hard writing paid dividends. Over the summer, The Outlook, one of the nation’s foremost weekly magazines, had accepted three Lindsay manuscripts: “Incense” (23 September 1911), a poem on religious brotherhood; “Lady Iron-Heels” (7 October 1911), a sketch from the Southern tramp finally published in A Handy Guide for Beggars; and “The Lady Poverty” (25 November 1911), “the first story I ever wrote—all too fantastic to be taken quite seriously,” Vachel confessed to Floyd Dell. “Incense” [Poetry 152-153] was especially thrilling, as it embodies “some ideas on the Church Universal and having a direct relation to some of the Propositions in the Creed of a Beggar. To carry that creed up into the Outlook is indeed a joy” (Tanselle 375-376). Nirvana once more. [Note 11]

With these successes, hard writing, as we may suspect, continued through autumn and winter, 1911-1912: “For almost a year now I have for the first time been writing in a steady professional way,” Vachel related to Witter Bynner. “It is the first time in my life—and I feel I can keep it up indefinitely and forego all drawing and speaking—and be a penman only—if it is best.” Auspiciously, he added: “But I am always haunted by the call of the road” (18 February 1912, Chénetier 53). Magazine publishers also seemed “haunted by the call of the road,” so
Vachel focused on tramp sketches and on road poems. “I am busy writing ‘Vignettes by a Mendicant,’ these being prose sketches of begging experiences I have had—only shorter and more condensed than any heretofore.” He suggested to Bynner (who was an editor for publisher Small, Maynard & Co.) that the travel sketches could be collected in a book, with the title “A Handy Guide for Beggars,” and with a companion volume: “Rhymes that Were Traded for Bread” (Chénetier 49). Good ideas, as it turned out, but several years early: A Handy Guide for Beggars, published by Macmillan, appeared in 1916. Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread was published in early 1912—as a private printing paid for by the author and his family. Fortunately, Uncle Boy, although perhaps not his family, was gaining more and more satisfaction: “It isn’t money I want, but an audience” (51).

In addition to hard writing during fall and winter 1911-12, Vachel was doing some hard reading, especially the works of John Ruskin and Lev Nikolayevich “Leo” Tolstoi. “I think I shall specialize on those gentlemen. I would like to lay hold on the immortal essence of those gentlemen—by some sort of transfusion of blood. I know the limitations of both pretty well—nevertheless they are in a particular way my masters: I should say—that if I chose three literary masters today—they would be the incongruous seeming three—Ruskin—Tolstoi and Edgar Poe. Ruskin—because he helps me to feel it is worth while to dream of future America—the Aesthetic Commonwealth—the Ripe Civilization—full of Happy Healthy Beauty Producing human Beings. I would write, if I could, a different Utopia than any ever written and it should be much Ruskinized—in the broadest sense—that is—Art is a Public matter—a Religious matter—a Socialistic matter if you please” (letter to Witter Bynner, 18 February 1912, Chénetier 51).

“But after all Ruskin is Unhuman,” Vachel continued, “and Tolstoi sees men plain. I would like to be as clear-visioned as Tolstoi in looking at the individual man or woman and his spiritual estate. I would like to understand as he understood the heart-break of religion and the dream of brotherhood. I envy him his world-strength—the terrible grip with which he laid hold on bleeding life. And Tolstoi symbolizes to me one more thing—he was almost an avowed Buddhist in his ‘great going forth from home,’ his perpetual struggle toward renunciation and spiritual peace and self-mastery. I think I know a great deal more about Nirvana than Tolstoi still Tolstoi is nearer to Buddha than any great international 19th century character—and to Christ as well. If I put him in a sentence I should call him a literal and realistic and eminently successful Christian striving unsuccessfully for the Buddhistic self-mastery” (51-52).

The third “master” Vachel disclosed to Bynner, Edgar Allan Poe, had been an important influence for many years. In the afterglow of the success of “The Wizard in the Street,” however, Vachel offered several new insights: “Then as to Edgar Poe. Another stung creature—who knew not Peace. But Edgar had the Yeast-Phosphorus^-Radium in him—to produce the eminently original thing, the new Creation—and I envy him above all other mortals when I think about writing. It is just as natural for me to want to write as new unexpected and vital a surprise as Poe wrote—as it is for some young men to want as good an Automobile as their neighbors. It is a carnal passion with me to want to carve a jewel like Ulalume or Ligeia. I will never escape him. I read him at thirteen—and even then I knew all his limitations—and envied him his tremendous power to make the new thing. It seems to me aesthetically—that electrical power of his is more needed in America than any other. When I write my book on Utopia—every Artist shall be a half brother to Poe—every Politician a Ruskinian—every Preacher and Novelist a follower of Tolstoi. The Sermon on the Mount shall be the social standard—but the lotus shall bloom in the parks” (52).
With the reference to the lotus, we should remember that Uncle Boy’s hard writing this winter produced one of his more lasting poems: “The Wedding of the Rose and the Lotus” (Poetry 153-156). The author’s hand-lettered headnote explains: “A POEM WRITTEN ON THE NEAR-COMPLETION OF THE PANAMA CANAL, SHOWING HOW THE GENIUS OF THE WEST, HERE TYPIFIED BY THE ROSE, AND THE GENIUS OF THE EAST, HERE TYPIFIED BY THE LOTUS, ARE TO BE MERGED AND MINGLED IN ONE.” An early version of the poem was sent to Witter Bynner in February 1912, with the comment: “It seems to me that this poem, deftly handled—has publicity possibilities” (Chénetier 50-51). And with the benefit of hindsight we know the poem was printed as a broadside (1913) and distributed to members of Congress to mark the opening of the canal. But now we are ahead of the story.

What audiences sometimes miss when they approach “The Wedding of the Rose and the Lotus” is that the poem and related drawings concern more than international geography. Like earth itself, human beings are blended creatures, composed of east and west. Vachel offers Tolstoi as an example: “Living as he did—between Asia and Europe—the Rose and the Lotus were both in his heart—though the thorns of the rose prevailed. I think I know more about Peace than Ruskin or Tolstoi—but I know infinitely less about life and Civilization. I want to know as much of Life through them as I can—without surrendering the jewel in the Lotus” (Chénetier 52):

The lotus speaks of slumber:
The rose is as a dart.

**The lotus is Nirvana:**
The rose is Mary’s heart.  (ll. 17-20)

Happy human beings, human beings enjoying Nirvana, are human beings whose two natural sides, their east and their west, are at peace with one another, are melded in healthy, creative marriage. The Panama Canal is, like all physical objects in Vachel’s world, a gospel of beauty, a hieroglyphic, an opportunity for anyone to see the spiritual world, an opportunity for anyone to experience Nirvana.  [Note 12]

7

In 1911 and early 1912, Uncle Boy had a much better chance for Nirvana with his creative writing than he did with his personal life. In addition to sharing a house with two displeased parents, he was attempting to spend quality time with a woman whose best friends caroused with the country club set—golfing, dancing, card playing, and imbibing demon liquor. “Did you ever read any stories by Octavia Roberts?” Vachel inquired of his old friend, George Mather Richards: “Well, remember the name. Print it on the wall—and watch. She lives in Springfield—and as my fellow citizen I take a great fraternal interest in her literary^ success” (2 June 1911, Richards, emphasis added). Octavia was several years older than her would-be suitor, and a published author, so that the “Uncle” approach must have been overly challenging. Octavia had a “brother.” In addition, Octavia was not overly impressed. When friends asked if she could “make anything out of [Vachel],” she explained: “I was not sure that I could, and I have to acknowledge that at this period I had no great faith in his genius. His mind, although fertile and original seemed wild and undisciplined. Then, too, he seemed younger than he was with his childish love of candy, soda water and the moving-pictures, which were in their crude infancy” (Chapter 23, p. 44).
The two writers did share a few interesting times, such as the day they journeyed to a nearby farm, likely the farm “south of Springfield,” where Vachel spent three days “cutting corn for a silo” at a dollar a day (see Poetry 964). “He was never happier than when he was in the open country and he exulted here in rare hospitality, stimulating conversation and the sight of the acres of waving corn and wheat,” Octavia recalled. “One day we watched with our hostess the men loading the hay wagons. I said impulsively that I ‘d always longed to pitch hay. He was so utterly indifferent to convention or ridicule that he immediately ran and brought two pitchforks, giving me the smaller one. The farm hands were grinning in derision of such folly but we pitched with the best of them, then climbing up on the toppling load we rode back to the farm house. I never see a load of hay to this day without thinking, ‘I wanted to pitch hay and I’ve done so; I wanted to ride on a hay wagon, and I have.’” It was not entirely a happy experience: hardly Nirvana, and not romantic: “—only nobody had told me that hay was always full of the many insects of the fields disturbed so rudely by the mowing, and that they would sting and bite the romantic passengers at every vulnerable and exposed spot. Alas, for romance!” (45).

Octavia admitted to finding Vachel “far from dull company.” She especially enjoyed “hearing him read the poems he was writing and sending forth with so little success. I liked even better listening to those strange stories of his long walks across the country when he had subsisted by trading his poems for bread. Sometimes his adventures, as he related them, struck me as so strange and grotesque that I could scarcely believe that he was in earnest, though his serious manner convinced me that he was not jesting. . . . Sometimes I found the stories amusing and when I could persuade him to take a humorous angle his strange cackling laugh burst forth in recognition of the fact that there was something odd in an able bodied young man attempting to trade a thin pamphlet of verse for a clean collar, or a lift over a river. . . . He always left me with innumerable pictures of those amazing experiences – his appearance in mountain villages in the south where he could hardly convince the inhabitants that he was not a revenue officer; the day he bathed stark naked in seven waterfalls; the night he had recited Swinburne to the farm hands gathered about him in the hay. His adventures were so naïve and extraordinary that if the young man by my side had suddenly shown me the ears and hoofs of a faun I should not have been surprised”(44).

With a desirable girlfriend and with magazine editors showing interest in tramping stories, we can well imagine Uncle Boy writing hard. In fact, it would be easy to conclude that Vachel’s increasing talk of a third tramp was because, in his words, “I am always haunted by the call of the road.” We have already noted, however, that the haunting call sometimes surfaced when the courtship of a woman was not progressing according to plans, as in the courtship of Nellie Vieira (see Chapter 22, p. 12). The threat to run away, as we will see, continued in Uncle Boy’s life, surfacing in the courtships of Sara Teasdale and Elizabeth Mann Wills, but becoming most intense during some of the difficult days in his final years. Indeed, the older Uncle Boy grew, the more likely the runaway theme would emerge. But, again, we are ahead of the story.

Although there is no specific evidence that Vachel left Springfield in late May 1912, in hopes that Octavia Roberts would miss and feel sorry for him, we do know that the courtship was seldom smooth, seldom Nirvana. Biographer Eleanor Ruggles interviewed Octavia (then Mrs. Barton Corneau) in later years; and Ruggles outlines the couples’ incompatibility, especially at country-club parties (174-175). After one particularly difficult evening, Octavia awakened to find two poems “slipped under [her] door.” It was Easter Sunday morning (7 April 1912); and
her disturbed, disconsolate suitor was in church, trying to forget the present and praying for a reversal of fortune in the distant future:

Our love is slain, and love and you were one.  
You are the first, you I have known so long,  
Whose death was deadly, a tremendous wrong.  
Therefore I seek the faith that sets it right  
Amid the lilies and the candle-light.  
I think on Heaven, for in that air so clear  
We two may meet, confused and parted here.

Such was “The Hope of the Resurrection,” the first of “Two Easter Stanzas” (Poetry 215-216). The second poem, “We Meet at the Judgment and I Fear It Not,” echoes a Swedenborgian belief, namely, that there will be relationships and even marriage in “Heaven”:

I meet you, lady, on the Judgment morning,  
With golden hope my spirit still adorning.

The concluding lines of this second poem, however, reflect a present-day hope, and suggest Vachel’s reason for leaving town: “I dream that in her deeply hidden heart / Hurt love lived on, though we were far apart.”

One woman’s heart did suffer in anticipation of Vachel’s absence. Just three days prior to Easter Sunday, 1912, Octavia Roberts telephoned Dr. Lindsay’s home to announce that the American Magazine had accepted “some remarkable articles from Nicholas Vachel Lindsay; that he was of her town: would she investigate him and write up a sketch of him for their department ‘Interesting People.’” Kate Lindsay was writing a letter to her daughter Olive in China, and Kate could not resist irony: “Nicholas Vachel Lindsay written up in the American by Octavia Roberts! (If the article ever appears, several people will sit up and take notice!) Besides, if they accept the ‘canticles’ [Vachel’s suggested title word for his articles] they will pay Vachel quite a sum—for him—and Papa, who is half beside himself because he lacks $300 of paying his taxes, will get some of it, and every little helps.” Mama Kate tried to remain hopeful: “Vachel seems to me to be passing through a period of preparation. . . . I believe he will come up sometime, in some way, somewhere, but the waiting is very discouraging” (Ruggles 175-176). (Papa’s letter to Olive about her brother’s plans was revealingly terse: “Vachel is getting ready to make another of his foolish tramps.”) [Note 13]

“Darling Daughter of Babylon,” a leading figure in “Belshazzar’s chattering court,” Vachel described his heart interest; and his feelings were not entirely loving during fall-winter-spring, 1911-1912:

Pardon, daughter of Babylon,  
If, on this night remembering  
Our lover walks under the walls  
Of hanging gardens in the spring,  
A venom comes from broken hope,  
From memories of your comrade-song  
Until I curse your painted eyes  
And do your flower-mouth too much wrong. (Poetry 213-214)
“The wicked daughter of Babylon” is reflected in the early poems of *The Congo and Other Poems* (1914), Vachel confessed to Harriet Moody a couple years later (December 1914, Dunbar 117). Wicked or darling, the daughter of Babylon was a thorn in Vachel’s emotional side and, therefore, a thorn in the side of Mama Kate Lindsay. In her decisive way, Kate took the initiative and invited Octavia to join the family in their summer Colorado camp. Mama could not stop her son from running away—or, more accurately, walking away from town—but perhaps she could curtail his pilgrimage and give him something to anticipate. Likely to Kate’s surprise, aristocratic Octavia accepted the invitation. She wanted a new experience; and, as we will see, she would learn quickly that the Lindsay Colorado camp was anything but a country club.

Finally, to close out the winter of 1911-1912, we will give Octavia the last word. In her memoir, she offers an overall assessment of her boyish suitor, an important assessment that we will have occasion to return to on more than one occasion in future chapters. “[Vachel] had been bred as a lone wolf and if he was not the center of every group he was unhappy and apt to speak slightingly of its members. He was at this time a paid speaker for the Anti-Saloon League. I had been accustomed to seeing wine served freely, and could not believe it led to perdition. If it had not been for a mutual interest in literature we should have had slight grounds for intimacy” (Chapter 23, p. 44). Most boys, after all, desire to be “the center of every group,” the center of attention; and some do not behave well when denied their desired role. A few even threaten to leave town.

**Notes for Chapter 24**

[Note 1] Readers of Chapter 24 will soon learn that Vachel and his friends were steeped in Progressive Era politics; and although many source materials are available, I found the most informative to be Catherine Cocks, Peter C. Holloran, and Alan Lessoff, *Historical Dictionary of the Progressive Era* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009), part of the Scarecrow series on U.S. political eras. From the early 1890s until about 1920, the Progressive Era focused on bringing “improvement” and reform to nearly every area of American life, but especially to political systems, to civic well-being, and to gender and racial equality. The American Civic Association (ACA), a voluntary organization established in Washington D.C. in June 1904, is an excellent example. Under the leadership of J. Horace McFarland, the ACA “promoted City Beautiful planning and wilderness preservation.” The group lobbied for the establishment of the National Park Service and for the preservation of natural settings, such as Niagara Falls and the Everglades (Cocks 12). For years McFarland authored the “Beautiful America” column in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. See especially “City Beautiful” (Cocks 79).

The Massachusetts Civic League, mentioned by Vachel later in this chapter (p. 15), was incorporated in Boston in 1898—for typical Progressive Era purposes. In the words of the League’s “Constitution”: “The object of the association is to inform and organize public sentiment in matters pertaining to the charitable and reformatory interests and institutions of the Commonwealth, and to promote the study, careful framing, and systematic agitation of measures of social improvement.” A full statement of the League’s focus may be read online: Edward T. Hartman (Secretary of the League), “What a State Civic League May Do,” *The American City* 9 (December 1913): 530-533. Vachel likely did not know about the League’s antipathy toward tramps. In a 1901 League pamphlet entitled “Suggestions for Attacking the Tramp Problem,” the author proposes “The Work Test,” because “tramps do not care so much about good food and
lodging as they do for avoiding work. Experience has shown that where the two go together the tramps do not go.” See:


[Note 2] According to Pete Sherman, reporter for Springfield’s Illinois State Journal-Register, Mayor Schneppe did little to retain his reputation after he left office: “Schneppe was mayor for one-year terms in 1909 and 1910 before being elected to a four-year term in 1911. A real estate developer, businessman, and lawyer, Schneppe developed the ‘Schneppe Block’ at 314 E. Adams St. while mayor.

“He was a respected leader during his time as mayor. The ‘Honest John’ nickname was sincere. His trouble didn’t begin until after he was long gone from office, when he went missing in 1932 shortly before it was discovered money from people who had invested with him also was missing. Among the funds he took was roughly $20,000 from an estate of a Mary Ettinger, for whom he had been conservator.

In 1935, Schneppe was discovered living under an assumed name (“John Mason”) in Los Angeles. He was arrested and returned to Springfield, found guilty in a jury trial, and sentenced to ten years in prison. “Even after getting out of jail, Schneppe apparently never acknowledged doing anything wrong. He even tried to solicit funds from his victims to pay for a book he wanted to publish. He promised them a copy.” (“‘Honest John’ Turned Out to Be a Fraud,” 15 December 2010).

[Note 3] Senator Lorimer’s triumph was short lived, according to the United States Senate’s website: “The resulting storm of public outrage, combined with an infusion of recently elected progressive-minded members, led the Senate on June 12, 1911, to approve a long-pending constitutional amendment providing for direct popular election of senators.

“A week before the Senate vote on the constitutional amendment, additional public charges against Lorimer led the upper body to reopen his case. After hearing from 180 witnesses over the following year, a committee majority again found no clear trail of corruption. The full Senate, however, decided differently. On July 13, 1912, with the direct election amendment on its way to state ratification, the Senate declared Lorimer's 1909 election invalid. This action closed a major chapter in Senate history and accorded Lorimer the dubious distinction of being the last senator to be deprived of office for corrupting a state legislature.” The Seventeenth Amendment, establishing direct popular election of United States Senators, was adopted on 8 April 1913; it is generally considered one of the many improvements resulting from the Progressive Era agenda.

[Note 4] For additional information on Willis Spaulding and his struggles with and service to the citizens and politicians of Springfield, see the City Water, Light & Power (CWLP) website:

http://www.cwlp.com/index.htm

The booklet Getting Here (2011), documenting one hundred years of CWLP, is available online. See also “Lake Springfield Turns 75!” at the site.

[Note 5] Emanuel Swedenborg “Of the Africans and the Gentiles in the Spiritual World,” A Treatise Concerning the Last Judgment: and the Destruction of Babylon . . ., also, A

[Note 6] Under “News of the Profession,” the monthly journal Law Notes (Volume 16, February 1913) reports: “SPECIAL TRUST PROSECUTOR RESIGNS.—Barton Corneau, special trust prosecutor for the United States government for four years, has announced his retirement from the staff of Attorney-general Wickersham to engage in the practice of law in Boston, Mass. He took an active part in the prosecution of the government’s suit against the Chicago meat packers and the United States steel corporation” (214). Online at Google Books.

[Note 7] Dated 15 January 1911, Vachel’s letter is at Harvard’s Houghton Library and addressed simply to “Dear Sir,” likely Witter Bynner (see Chénetier, letters 16, 18, 19, 21, 23—all to Bynner and all at the Houghton). Eleanor Ruggles interviewed many of Vachel’s friends, one of whom related an incident at George and Maydie Lee’s cottage: “‘They say—’ cried Vachel, overheard in the sanctum of the Lees’ living room, ‘these They that discuss me, these great overwhelming invisible They—THEY say Why don’t Vachel Lindsay go to work?’ . . . Then he burst into disconcerting laughter. . . . Yet the pressure of a disapproval he pretended to despise,” Ruggles concludes (and I agree), “drove him early in 1911 to look for a job” (166).

[Note 8] “This was still the period when one had to be apologetic about poetry, when the poet was considered a variant from the normal, while there was still a subconscious feeling in the public mind that he [the poet] was a weakling.” These words were not written by a reporter for an Illinois newspaper. These words were written by Jessie B. Rittenhouse, the first secretary of the Poetry Society of America. These words were not written in Springfield: they were written in New York City and they concerned the founding of the Poetry Society (October 1910). “The Society was the subject of all sorts of good-humored bantering and was the target of many gibes from facetious young reporters who were sent to write up ‘The Poets’ Union’. . . . Even the poets themselves were afraid of drawing attention to their art by an organization in its interest, though such organizations existed for all other arts. . . .” Rittenhouse relates that one poet, Ridgely Torrence (who in time would become one of Vachel’s stronger backers), “labored with me not to become secretary of the Poetry Society of America and to jeopardize my standing as a critic by alliance with a body sure to be ridiculed. It was a sound argument, I knew it, and . . . almost he persuaded me to abandon all official connection with it” (225). “Ridiculous Rachel” was not the only American poet to face derision and disdain in the early years of the twentieth century. In fact, poet Witter Bynner, who had shared The Village Magazine with Society President Edward J. Wheeler, attempted to persuade St. Louis’s William Marian Reedy to review the Magazine and its author as well. “‘What does he do and how does he do it?’ Reedy had replied indifferently, adding that poetry was a luxury he could not just then afford. ‘Times are so hard out here I find it rather difficult to raise money to buy beer’” (Putzel 177).

[Note 9] For pictures of the bronze tablets; a brief Altgeld biography and a “Character Study”; examples of Altgeld’s wisdom; and several essays, addresses, and orations delivered at the Garrick Theatre dedication, see: http://www.archive.org/details/dedicatoryexerci01john

The play’s focus on idealism versus materialism and on educating children so that they will not grow up to be like their parents would especially have appealed to Uncle Boy.

[Note 11] *The Outlook* had published Vachel’s tramp stories as early as 1907 (see Chapter 19, p. 21), as well as one temperance poem, “King Arthur’s Men Have Come Again,” 28 May 1910 (*Poetry* 156; also see Tanselle 376). The publication of “Incense,” however, was exciting because the periodical introduced a national audience to several concepts of “The Creed of a Beggar” (see Chapter 22, p. 16). Line nine of “Incense” echoes the poet’s usual description of the Sangamon River as a “muddy stream.” “The Lady Poverty” is Vachel’s first short story, and it is therefore included in the Appendix to this chapter. The story’s references to artistic beauty and to Franciscan poverty reflect key ideas of the author’s early years.

[Note 12] During the autumn-winter-spring months of 1910-11 and 1911-12, Uncle Boy pursued the avuncular side of his nature with renewed passion. Years later, in 1929, he published a tribute to Franz Lee Rickaby and, in the text of the article, described how young high school students regularly visited his home for evening discussions: “Franz was the leader of my gang and the real shepherd. A group of boys and girls who gathered at my home in Springfield, 603 South Fifth street, including John Gehlmann, George Nelch, Donald Shumway Rockwell and David Shand were there every two weeks for two years. And often, after the manner of other manly clubs, they had a ladies’ evening, when they brought their favorites among the fair. We read everything from Shaw to Pshaw, and shouted until midnight, being some of us still high school sophomores and very smart-alecky, all but the gigantic and magnificent musician, Franz, who dominated the scene. There was just enough German in his blood, I think, to give him the German student’s gravity; and he was a little older than the others. Two winters of this sort of thing!” [“Vachel Lindsay Writes Beautiful Story About Life of Franz Rickaby,” *Illinois State Register* (4 August 1929, Section II, p. 1)]. On a related avuncular note, Uncle Boy opened a letter to Witter Bynner (18 February 1912) with a request that the Eastern writer evaluate “the enclosed book” by Franz Rickaby: likely *A Set of Sonnets* (1912), published by the Pax Printery (see Chénetier 48-49). Importantly, Vachel’s effort for Rickaby foreshadows future efforts for Langston Hughes and Robert Fitzgerald.

[Note 13] There seems to be confusion on either Kate or Octavia’s part as to which “articles” were accepted by which periodicals. *The American Magazine* had accepted Vachel’s essay, “Rules of the Road,” published in volume 74 (May 1912, pp. 54-59), and two of Vachel’s poems: “The Knight in Disguise” (June 1912, p. 216) and “The Grave of the Proud Farmer” (September 1912, p. 639) [see *Poetry* 157-158, 166-167]. Octavia’s essay, “Nicholas Vachel Lindsay,” was published in the *American* (August 1912, pp. 422-424). Volume 74 of *The American Magazine* is online at Google Books.

Meanwhile, Charles Zueblin’s *Twentieth Century Magazine* had accepted four Lindsay stories that were later reprinted—with variations—in *A Handy Guide for Beggars* (1916). Under the overall title *A Religious Mendicant*, and subtitled: “The Vagabond Preacher of the ‘Church of the Open Sky,’ with his Gospel of the Religion of Beauty, makes a Pilgrimage through New Jersey and Pennsylvania,” the stories are (with *Twentieth Century* titles): “A Shrine Made with Hands” (June 1912, pp. 45-51); “King Coal. The Son of King Coal. The Daughter of the King. The Grandsons of the King. On to Shickshinny!” (July 1912, pp. 66-72); “The Undertaker. The Trap Without the Bait. A Mysterious Driver. The Allegory Breaks Down: My Friend with the Green Galluses” (August 1912, pp. 11-16); “The OLD GENTLEMAN with the LANTERN”
An Illinois Art Revivalist

Edward J. Wheeler (1859-1922)

[Dr. Edward J(ewitt) Wheeler was editor of *The Literary Digest* from 1895 to 1905, before becoming editor and then editor-publisher of the magazine *Current Literature*, changing its title to *Current Opinion* (1913). A poet in his own right, Wheeler was one of the founders of the Poetry Society of America (October 1910), serving as President for ten years while Jessie B. Rittenhouse was secretary. In November 1912, Wheeler assisted William Stanley Braithwaite and wealthy sponsor Ferdinand Phinny Earle in judging the best poem in Earle’s *Lyric Year*, published by Mitchell Kennerley (who would also publish VL’s first commercial book of poetry, *General William booth Enters into Heaven and Other Poems*, 1913). Wheeler’s review of VL’s - *Village Magazine* (1910)—“Illinois Art Revivalist,” *Current Literature* (March 1911, pp. 320-323)—helped to bring national attention to VL, who dedicated the second edition of the *Magazine* (1920) to Wheeler, thanking him for “giving me the courage to fight on in the face of a village that wanted me banished for boring them” (p. 3). Soon after 1917, when Sara Teasdale’s *Love Songs* won the initial Columbia University prize for the best book of poems published in the United States, Wheeler was instrumental in the move to transform the Columbia prize into the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Administered by Columbia University, the first Pulitzer Prize for Poetry (1922) was awarded to Edwin Arlington Robinson for his *Collected Poems*. Dennis Camp, Ed.]

Out of Springfield, Illinois, has come a strange portent bearing the name *The Village Magazine*. It is printed, decorated and illustrated throughout by one man, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, who tells us that this is a first and last number, and that after the edition of seven hundred copies is distributed no more copies will be printed. The object of the publication, it seems, is to induce each village to get out its own magazine. “It is intended,” Mr. Lindsay says, “to be a firebrand for village improvement, an intoxicating liquor, an explosive!” The burden of its message is principally esthetic, and the texts on which it is based are, “Seek ye first the kingdom of beauty,” and “Where there is loveliness there is God.”

No mere words can convey the quaintness of Mr. Lindsay’s chirography and drawing. They need to be seen for themselves. All through the text he scatters acorns and little branches. There is a section devoted to the moon; there are verses on potatoes and beetles, sketches of dryads and hobgoblins. The breath of imagination, he would have us feel, is independent of time or place; it bloweth where it listeth [John 3:8].

The first paragraph in the magazine is devoted to the subject of conversion. Mr. Lindsay speaks of the “priceless ecstasy” through which so many pass in some great religious experience. “I have gone through this convulsion,” he remarks, “as have many of my friends, and it counts as a milestone on the journey; but there are other conversions. In America the repentance the
Christian most needs is least mentioned in his hour of prayer. If he could truly be reconciled to God he must be rid of his sins against loveliness.” The argument proceeds:

“Villages as a whole are thus converted when they go dry. Church bells are rung, the children march, the women pray. The boozers are black with wrath, but the place is inevitably converted from the stupidity and ugliness of the saloon. The citizens would stare if you told them they had been converted to the god of beauty, yet they have taken the first great step in his praise. The parsonages are repainted, more children’s shoes are sold by the store around the corner, the Fourth of July procession is nearer to a pageant. There is increasing of laughter in the fields, less heartbreak in the dark. The village belles become sacred vestals. More good hats and dresses are seen, more flower gardens are planted. No man has read Shelley’s ‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,’ no man has purchased a history of painting, a history of architecture, a text-book on landscape gardening or village improvement; yet instinctively they build their altars to the Unknown God, the Radiant One.”

This puts the reader in the right frame of mind for “An Editorial on the Holiness of Beauty for the Village Pastor”:

“Some men think when they have said ‘Consider the lilies’ [Matthew 6:28] they have used the only proof-text that will establish the rights of the esthetic in theology. That text they take in a weak way. The reason can be found by studying their parlors, where the idea of that which is fine has never stepped beyond some sugary Easter-card. They are ignorant of the rainbow color, the dignity, the sculptural line, of The Book. The Gospels begin with the heavenly hosts singing of glory, with the Magnificat of Mary, with the gold, frankincense and myrrh of the wise, and end with a blaze of resurrection light. There is hardly a parable but is passionate with that adoration of nature which is the beginning of art. ‘Behold, a sower went forth to sow’ [Matthew 13:3]. ‘I am the vine and ye are the branches’ [John 15:5]. Such phrases build cathedrals.”
SOME OF NICHOLAS VACHEL LINDSAY’S SPIRITUAL DYNAMITE
A picture and poem taken from The Village Magazine, which Mr. Lindsay intends as “a firebrand for village improvement, an intoxicating liquor, an explosive.”

But the keynote of the message of this esthetic evangelist is struck in “An Editorial for the Art Student Who Has Returned to the Village.” Mr. Lindsay addresses himself to the problem of developing true art-culture in our teeming democracy. The average American, he cannot help conceding, knows little or nothing of art: “He is clipped to a terrible uniformity by the sharp edges of life. He knows who won the last baseball game, and who may be the next President. He knows the names of the grand opera singers he has heard on the phonograph. He turns over luxuriously in his sub-conscious soul the tunes he has heard on the self-playing piano in front of the vaudeville theater. He will read a poem if it is telegraphed across the county with a good newspaper story to start it. All of his thinking is done by telegraph, and fancies that are too delicate to be expressed by the comic supplement seldom reach him. Dominated by a switchboard civilization, he moves in grooves from one clockwork splendor to another.” [Note 1]

What a task, then, Mr. Lindsay exclaims, has the conscientious art-democrat, to find the individual, delicate, immortal soul of “this creature, dressed in a Hart, Schaffner and Marx suit and trying to look just like a Hart, Schaffner and Marx advertisement!” For the most part, the writer continues, the really trained man can find little in common with the man on the street. When Poe’s poems went the rounds of the newspapers; when the World’s Fair stirred the land
for a season; when “The Servant in the House” had his triumph; when Markham for a moment was heard, democracy and art seemed to meet.

“But think,” says Mr. Lindsay, “of the thousands of enterprises just as fine, but lacking advertising value, or mere size, that have been scornfully ignored by Mister Hart, Schaffner-Marx!” They were poured forth with joy; by the European standard they would have been immortal. By our relentless standard, which we can never escape, they are valueless as the dollar bills of the Southern Confederacy. Mr. Lindsay goes on to say:

“The city craftsmen who have really embraced the problem of the mob, determined to be masters whether they are orthodox or not, are to be commended. They are on the whole as well placed as the village designer, but no more so. It is a noble thing to build a successful skyscraper. But there will be the same art laughter in your heart if you give some grace to the wheat elevator at the way-station. Once in a while an O. Henry becomes a story writer, still remaining a journalist, exquisitely combining the two. But it is just as exquisite and meritorious a thing to edit the Fulton County Democrat at Lewistown. Our most conspicuous advertising and magazine artists, men of immense ingenuity, turn out a sort of cover design that could be stepped on by a fire-engine horse, shot through by currents from an electric chair, run through a rolling mill, pushed off a tower or baked in a pie, and come out still singing, like the four and twenty blackbirds. And in all seriousness this work has chances to survive the centuries, along with the pyramids, because it expresses precisely the mood of high-class-ready-made-clothing-democracy. It is just like Chicago, where Adams meets Randolph street. It is as near to history as anything written by Ida Tarbell. We who want to be democrats, yet avoid these phases, have an opportunity in the cross-roads that gave us birth. There we can be true to grandfather’s log
cabin and at the same time remember the Erechtheum and the Temple of Nikko. There we meet the real citizen, three generations before he is ironed out into a mechanical toy. *His crudity is plain, but his delicacy is apparent also. His sound culture-tendencies and false tendencies can be sorted out.* At home we encounter institutions just beginning to bloom, absolutely democratic, yet silken and rich; no two villages quite alike, all with chances of developing intense uniqueness, *while all the rest of America speaks one iron speech.* Of course staying at home has its drawbacks: your work goes down, technically, through lack of the skilled criticism you once knew. You lose some chances of recognition from the growing art circles of the metropolis. *But your life is now thoroughly dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal in taste. You are engaged in a joyous civil war testing whether your work, or any work so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. Just as much real civilization hangs upon your success as hung upon the fighting of the private soldier at Gettysburg.* Oh, all you students that I have loved, whose work I have enviously admired, who are now back home grubbing at portraits, tho they are not your specialty; or designing billboards, tho they are not your divine call; or acting on the committee to paper the church and buying bad paper to please them; or back on the home newspaper that will not often print your short novels; or singing in the old choir for no salary at all; or composing advertisements in the real estate office and neglecting your lyrics; or taking charge of the Sunday school orchestra and curing them of the Moody-Sankey habit—Greeting, and God-speed to you! If you have any cherished beauty-enterprise, undertake it where you are. *You will find no better place in all America.*” [Note 2]

The same lesson is reinforced in several of Mr. Lindsay’s poems. We select for quotation the following, with its quaint commingling of homely phrasing and fine idealism:
THE ILLINOIS VILLAGE

By Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

Oh you who lose the art of hope,
Whose temples seem to shrine a lie,
Whose sidewalks are but stones of fear,
Who weep that liberty must die: —
Turn to the little prairie towns
Your higher hope shall yet begin.
On every side awaits you there
Some gate where glory enters in.

Yet when I see the flocks of girls
Watching the Sunday train go through
(As tho the whole wide world went by)
With eyes that long to travel too;
I sigh, despite my soul made glad
By cloudy dresses and brown hair,
Sigh for the sweet life wrenched and torn
By thundering commerce, fierce and bare.
Nymphs of the wheat these girls should be;
Kings of the grove their lovers strong.
Why are they not creative men?
This beauty calls for valiant song,—
For men to carve these fairy forms
And faces in a fountain frieze;
Dancers that own immortal hours;
Painters that work upon their knees,
Maids, lovers, friends, so deep in life,
So deep in love and poet’s deeds
The railroad is a thing disowned,
The city but a field of weeds.

Who can pass a village church
By night in these clean prairie lands
Without a gush of spirit power?
So white and fixed and cool it stands—
A thing from some strange fairy town,
A pious amaranthine flower,
Unsullied by the winds, as pure
As jade or marble, wrought this hour.
Rural in form, foursquare and plain
And yet our sister, the new moon
Makes it a praying wizard’s dream:
The trees that watch at dusty noon
Breaking its sharpest lines, veil not
The whiteness it reflects from God,
Flashing like spring on many an eye,
Making clean flesh, that once was clod.

Who can pass a district school
Without the hope that there may wait
Some baby heart the books shall flame
With zeal to make his playmates great,
To make the whole wide village gleam,
A strangely carved, celestial gem
Eternal in its beauty light
The artists’ town of Bethlehem.

Notes

[Note 1] The Village Magazine (1910) is online at: www.VachelLindsayHome.org
Choose “Biography” and then “Works on Line.” Because of its historical significance and relative difficulty to obtain, this Wheeler essay is also online and reproduced as close to the original format as possible. Many first-time readers of Vachel’s work were guided by Wheeler’s review.

American manufacturer of tailored men’s clothing, Hart Schaffner & Marx, was founded in 1887, and published advertisements in most newspapers and periodicals for many years. The company’s 1910 Stylebook is available online at:

http://www.tweedcowboy.com/?p=147

In the next paragraph, “The Servant in the House” is a reference to the very popular play (1908) by Charles Rann Kennedy (1871-1950). The servant Manson (played by Walter Hampton), an obvious Jesus figure, is the new butler at the home of the Reverend William Smythe. The morality play is online at Project Gutenberg. Poet [Charles] Edwin [Anson] Markham (1852-1940) is well known for his defense of ordinary working people, especially in his first two books: The Man with the Hoe and Other Poems (1899) and Lincoln and Other Poems (1901).

[Note 2] Baritone singer song-writer Ira David Sankey (1840-1908) and preacher Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-1899) teamed up to offer popular revival meetings at home and in England. See

http://www.wolfkiller.net/Moody_Shankey/index.htm

The Lady Poverty
A Christmas Story

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931)

[Published in The Outlook 99 (November 25, 1911): 734-742, with illustrations by Thomas Fogarty. In his letters, Lindsay claimed that Clara March is based on his Chicago Art School friend, Alice Cleaver, and John S. Adam, a.k.a. Scraggly-Beard, is based on his New

I—The Golden Room

Christmas Eve, when things are permitted to happen, when just men in love with the God of Life are apt to meet with marvelous doings, five people were booked for a smiling adventure destined to be accomplished before sunrise.

It all began three months before with John S. Adam, the Man with the Scraggly Beard. Too often without food, thinner every day, he toiled at his masterpiece. He climbed the stair with pots of common brown paint, gray paint, green paint. A little later he carried to his room ordinary fabrics of a saffron hue. Various other simple things he carried there, and the afternoon before Christmas he was adding the last little touch which completed the glorious design of a most uncommon room. He was putting gold leaf here and there. Such was his skill that one could not tell where the luster ended and paint and fabric began.

He had organized the place into a sort of shrine. In the heart of the arrangement, where one’s eyes first rested, he fixed an empty picture frame. The painting for this frame was in his closet. Every day he would take it out and retouch it.

On the far side of the room was a couch—strange sleeping-place for a man with famished jaws. Coverlid and tassel and framework were golden gray, and seemed embroidered with jewels. One would not have known the place or century except for the variety of squalor outside.

Scraggly-Beard had just pawned his watch. He owed a month’s room-rent. In his pocket rattled thirty-five cents, not his.

Why should a man with holes in his shoes secure the unstable consent of an irritable landlord to make his dwelling like this?

The solution of the mystery comes not in one sentence, but the whole tale.

II—“The Little Flowers of St. Francis”

Late in the afternoon Scraggly-Beard locked his room and descended to the street door. He looked out. It was a mild Christmas, with one or two snowflakes every half-hour.

Scraggly-Beard took from his pocket a crackling document. It was pocket-worn, evidently consulted many times. He scrutinized it as a mariner might a chart. Seemingly advised by this instrument, he steered his course north by northwest. He had intended to stop at a butcher-shop, but was seduced by a second-hand book-store. He found a good-as-new copy of “The Little Flowers of St. Francis” for thirty-five cents. It was not his thirty-five cents, but he bought the book.

He reached a quarter of town even ranker than his own. He mounted four flights of stairs.

At the top of the fourth flight sat a girl enveloped in an Indian blanket. Her curling hair hung over her breast half braided. Every strand thereof was magnetic. In the midst of its soft blackness her face was a pale, starved flower.
There were the rattle and glint of spangles somewhere. He put his hat on her head, pulled half the blanket over him, and gave her a brotherly sort of an embrace.

She no more than endured his kindness. She asked: “Where is the beefsteak? I want my thirty-five-cent beefsteak.” He produced “The Little Flowers,” saying: “I bring you spiritual meat. This is Christmas Eve.”

They were in her room by now. On his knees, where he looked as much at home as in a chair, he begged her to read a certain delectable chapter. It is the one that tells “How St. Francis and Friar Masseo placed the bread which they had begged upon a stone hard by a fountain, and St. Francis praised Poverty much. Thereafter he prayed God and St. Peter and St. Paul to cause him to be enamored of Holy Poverty; and how St. Peter and St. Paul appeared to him.” [Note 1]

She spoke with a mixture of grandeur and exasperation, “Do you think I can eat a book?”

“A prophet did once.”

“I am not a prophet.”

“No; but you are Clara March, the prophetess.”

For this flattery she forgave him. She read the chapter with luxurious sweetness. The latter half of the extract begins in this wise:

“St. Francis said, ‘Companion mine, let us go to St. Peter and St. Paul and pray them that they will teach us and aid us to possess the immeasurable treasure of Most Holy Poverty. For she is a treasure so surpassing and so divine that we are not worthy to possess it in our most vile vessels: For this is that celestial virtue whereby all earthly things and transitory are trodden underfoot, and every barrier is removed which might hinder the soul from freely uniting itself with the eternal God. This is that virtue which enableth the soul, while yet on earth, to hold converse in heaven with the angels; this is she who bare Christ company on the cross, with Christ was buried, with Christ was raised again, and with Christ ascended into heaven; who even in this life grants to the souls which are enamored of her nimbleness to fly to heaven, seeing it is she who guards the weapons of true humility and charity. Therefore pray we the most holy Apostles of Christ, who were perfect lovers of this evangelical pearl, that they may beg this grace for us . . . to be true lovers, observers, and humble disciples of Most Precious, Most Beloved, and Evangelical Poverty.’”

III—Modern Franciscans

After this she spread a red tablecloth on a box that was turned over on its side and jammed with paints and canvas. She opened the door of her cooking-closet, that kept the room from being too close quarters. High on the shelf, above the big gas stove, were her books. She put “St. Francis” between [George Eliot’s] “Romola” and [Charles Kingsley’s] “Hypatia.”

She fried potatoes, made toast, and then found crackers and dates. They ate, and pretended to reasonable contentment. Yet they both thought of that lost beefsteak with a touch of human longing.

The girl curled up on the window-sill. It was a kind of playhouse for her, it was so broad and big. Here she slept in her blanket at night, and here looking out by day was her chief cure for hunger.
She said, without glancing round: “I was glad when you turned up yesterday. Do you realize that you had not been here since you painted my portrait three months ago? I was afraid you were tired of climbing the stairway of the Lady of Shalott.”

He had always called her “the Lady of Shalott” [the title of a Tennyson poem].

“I have a new name for you—pray consider it your Christmas gift—‘the Lady Poverty.’”

He looked upon her for the second time in his life with eyes of complete and perfect desire. The first time was the day he began her portrait.

On the street, in the art school, with her hair properly coiled and her spangles under a black shawl, she was dingy but respectable. Now all her glory shone. One necklace was of beads like giant gooseberries. She used to say for a solemn joke that they were a sign that she was a goose for not going back to Arizona. There was a lucky penny, a gold watch, and a wilderness of spangles. And, oh, the gypsy embroideries on skirt and waist!

Half a dozen years had passed since she came to the city, a premature soul of seventeen. After a long time she learned to draw well enough to make a basis for her always successful color schemes. She became an art school prize-winner just often enough to keep her at the top of the magic stair and to harden her heart against Arizona.

All her circle brought her beefsteaks to cook, coats to mend, pictures to criticise. She was Queen of a serious Bohemia. Some of her allies had married recently, three or four had become plain business men, and she was getting a little lonely. She and Scraggly-Beard had not so much as whispered a word of desire to each other in their lives. He neglected her for long periods, yet once in a season he had stolen a few kisses on the stair, and no other in her circle had ever so ventured on her augustness. She was cold to him, and merely allowed it.

The girl had made it her ruling passion to collect the earliest works of those for whom she prophesied glory. Her walls were covered by brilliant color-compositions of beginners. They called her dwelling the Rainbow Room. Several artists, so great that they are famous in Paris and forgotten in America, count it the first day of their lives when their work was tacked to her wall.

The Man with the Scraggly Beard had nothing there. He had never produced work quite good enough. He was an unsuccessful novelist also.

This fall he had landed a prize at last—at the National Exhibition. It was painted in this attic, a portrait of this girl in her window, with these glowing compositions around her and the stars outside. It was good in character and color. In a technical way it was a little shaky. She spoke of it patronizingly.

To-night Adam said: “I am hungry for three things.” She sat very straight, and looked at him with solemn roguery. “First, I am hungry to have you think I am a great painter.”

“No, Adam, do not force me to be unkind.”

“Secondly, I am hungry to have you approve of a sort of Chart of Life I have—a symbolical drawing; I will bring it as soon as you conclude I am an artist.”

“Bring it, anyway.” She spoke with ardent, well-meant condescension.

“Why didn’t you bring it to-day?”

(He did not say it was now crackling in his pocket.)
“Thirdly, I want a beefsteak for you; for I see you are very hungry, and I know I am.”

She tried to be stern. “Adam, I think you are the most unstable character in the United States. After all the ‘St. Francis’ we have read this evening—“But her voice trembled a little.

He rose. He shook his finger at her, as a teacher might at a child. “It’s no use for you to try to act. The mask of years has fallen. When I said beefsteak, you looked a mile happier in spite of yourself.”

She bent humbly. “Yes, I was greedy for it when you came to-night. I feel as though I never wanted to be hungry again. I don’t understand myself giving up so.”

“I swear, by all the gods of Egypt,” said Scraggly-Beard, bowing with ostentation in the door, “I will bring you a beefsteak before midnight.”

“Very well,” said the sibyl. “Mrs. Sniff has one virtue as a landlady. She is always up at that hour.”

IV—The Quest of the Beefsteak

He dashed down the street. In an hour he was walking back and forth in front of his own stair. He took out the crisp document which he had consulted in that place before. It did not seem to get him anywhere.

His jaunty air had evaporated. He said: “I don’t blame her. I’m just beast-hungry myself. I feel as though I am about to steal.”

Aforetime he had found in his soul many humorous tricks to get something to eat which comported with honesty. But he was exhausted from the long decorating of his room.

Later, he might as well have been anywhere else—it was just a happy Christmas chance—but he was across from St. Patrick’s Cathedral. He had a vague notion of interesting one of the passing Fifth Avenue citizens.

“What is the big card on the cathedral door?” he asked himself. He ambled across. Almost over, he was really obliged to dodge an automobile. He stumbled down to hands and knees on the sidewalk, barking his shins on the curb. The machine stopped.

The unsuccessful novelist rose mightier than he fell, for somewhere between the auto and the sidewalk he found the beefsteak idea. He hobbled elaborately, as he had seen a tramp do under similar circumstances in a moving-picture show. The automobilist followed with the usual apologies. Scraggly-Beard went on reading the sign out loud, “‘No midnight mass. First mass at 4:30, Christmas morning.’” Then he turned to the automobilist with wide-eyed indifference. That gentleman had been saying: “I’ll make it all right. Get in. Are you much hurt?”

“You have wrecked my train of thought.”

They introduced themselves. The automobilist was named Frank Van Zandt. Neither supposed the other a person of consequence, though on the same day last fall one had appeared in the financial columns of a great daily, the other held considerable space in the art section.

Young Van Zandt introduced the occupants of the car—his father and sister. Miss Van Zandt did not catch Adam’s name, but did not ask for it again.

“Sister, what does one give an utter stranger whose train of thought has been wrecked?”
“A jolly evening, I should say.” Christmas was in her voice.

Well under the fur robes, the weak, shivering John S. Adam should have led the conversation directly to the steak. How could he have forgotten?

He knew he looked like a cat pulled out of an ash-barrel. Yet he presumed to turn his back upon his past and aspire to the hand of this beautiful and conventional woman.

Her father was a minister of the Gospel, he observed. The sooner, then, the knot was tied the better. Novelists are quick for plots.

Some folk have native dignity written on their brows. She was the type of whom a young reporter would write with bated breath in his first society novel. Her father had the condescending Christianity of Fifth Avenue.

Adam with the Scraggly Beard spoke to the company as a whole: “You can square yourselves by entertaining me in such a way that I shall be in a mood for mass at 4:30. Then bring me back to the cathedral door.”

“You are a Catholic?” she asked.

If Adam wanted to go courting, he took a strange path.

“Lady,” said he, “I will tell you the story of my life. In my twentieth year I was sent out to seek my fortune. Bidding my parents tenderly good-by, I came to New York. They had early impressed upon me the necessity of sound business habits. I began by sleeping on park benches at night, with newspapers wrapped round me for blankets. Getting bread is a mere detail when one has lodging. I will skip the summer and autumn. In winter one cannot sleep on park benches. Then one learns to walk the streets all night, and in the early morning go into the cathedral and sleep in an attitude of devotion. One must wake up every so often and read the prayer-book that one finds in the pew.”

Scraggly-Beard grew graver. “When good fortune comes, as it has come to me of late, one remembers the cathedral door as a sign of welcome and rest, and one learns in happy hours to enter and meditate. The mystery of the Host and the glory of the mass become a habit, then a delight; and the habit of reading Franciscan literature, contracted during the hours of poverty, keeps one a sort of devotee from another standpoint.”

The eager girl could hardly wait for him to close. “Brother and I are out for our Christmas adventures. You are our first. How do you like being an adventure?”

Scraggly-Beard thought her rather frivolous, and decided he would not marry her, after all.

The minister asked, “Then you are practically a Romanist?”

“I have never had a religious conversation with a priest in my life. I have two religions. The most important is the worship of Beauty, the other is the worship of Lady Poverty.”

“Excuse my curiosity,” said young Van Zandt, “what are your recent good fortunes?”

“To be frank,” said Scraggly-Beard, completely in his element, for, after all, he loved to astound strangers, “I am a great painter. If you will come to my studio—as a Christmas adventure, we will say—you shall see my latest triumph.”
So he took the three to his lair. They sat on the edge of the gold couch, breathless with climbing, and more breathless with astonishment.

“Well,” said the young woman, “it is a triumph. I respect you very much, Mr.—er— But does your landlord pay you for fixing things up like this?”

“I don’t mean the room,” said Scraggly-Beard. “I mean this portrait. It has already won a prize, but I doubt if I will ever get through retouching it.” He put it into the frame, in the heart of the shrine. “This,” said he, “is Lady Poverty. I learned to paint her while I was lodging in the park and the cathedral.”

The minister wanted to know the amount of the prize, but hesitated to ask.

“Poverty doesn’t wear spangles,” said young Van Zandt.

“This is a portrait of a real person,” answered Scraggly-Beard.

While the minister asked fool questions about the color scheme Miss Van Zandt whispered to her brother: “I am trying to think who she is. It seems to me I ought to know about this picture.”

The minister thought he would take a liberty and venture a joke.

“Isn’t your true Franciscan wedded to poverty?”

It was a light question, but it has an extraordinary influence upon this story. The novelist resumed the main thread of his plot, and the crisis of his romance came upon him, as it were.

He sat down, as though overwhelmed by the issue. He said:

“I am not even engaged to her. If you will come with me and cheer me along, I will do what I can to persuade her to marry me to-night. You must do me the Christmas favor to perform the ceremony at once, and without a fee.”

“I should think,” said the minister, “that you would prefer your preliminary consultation alone.”

“I will risk the embarrassment,” said Adam. “It’s now or never.”

Young Van Zandt put his hat on his head at a rakish angle, and said: “I am curious to see this man, who has persuaded us to risk our necks in an ungodly lodging-house, persuade a lady to a little thing like marriage.”

“The art of this enterprise,” said Adam, as he led the bewildered company downstairs, “is to propose to the lady before witnesses, courageously, yet in such a way as not to violate her susceptibilities.”

“And at the same time get her,” said young Van Zandt.

“I think,” said Miss Van Zandt, as they climbed into the machine, “there must be some trick. Hasn’t she given you a tacit promise?”

“I will commission you to find that out before I begin,” said their guide.

Half-way there, Scraggly-Beard stood up in the auto and unnecessarily shook his fist at the stars. “The beefsteak, the beefsteak!” he squealed. “I have clean forgotten the beefsteak.”
Young Van Zandt laughed like a man drunk. “Here you have been preaching poverty,” he said, “and now you yell for meat.”

“Man, do you want me to propose to a hungry girl? She must be cheerful if I am to have any chance.”

So they found a raw beefsteak for him by paying two prices at a fashionable restaurant. “She will prove she is Lady Poverty by the fastidious way she cooks it,” said Scraggly-Beard.

Miss Van Zandt insisted on bread, butter, and a few other non-essentials. “Ah,” she gurgled, “to think we are going to have another adventure!”

Scraggly-Beard directed them to the exceedingly dubious barracks where the muse from Arizona lived. The landlady swore at them in a good-humored way as she opened the street door. She was clutching a bottle.

The Van Zandts followed Scraggly-Beard up the stairs with shaking confidence. The girl crept under her brother’s arm. He put his hand on his hip pocket. The minister’s nerve was breaking. “This is criminal folly,” he was saying, when the lady from Arizona opened her door. She was not astonished. She had made welcome many and various pilgrims in her day. Young Van Zandt completely lost himself. Her curls made him into a fool before a word was said. And Miss Van Zandt fluttered around her before the introductions were over, saying: “Why, now I know who you are! You are Clara March. Papa, the picture was not Lady Poverty at all. It is that one Macbeth tried to buy, ‘The Girl in the Rainbow Room.’”

“Yes,” said Scraggly-Beard. “I have been trying half the evening to induce you to guess that I am John S. Adam, and she is Clara March.”

The Van Zandts’ attitude changed from Christmas license to all-the-year-round respect. I have called Adam unsuccessful. But the Van Zandts were conceited enough to suppose that any artist their friends talked about had arrived.

Scraggly-Beard thrust the beefsteak into the hands of the sibyl. It was a quarter of an hour before midnight.

V—The Proposal of Marriage

The sibyl took on an exhilaration that carried all before it. Not many can cook an enormous beefsteak, entertain three strangers, and lay a tiny table with exquisite hospitality. But the sibyl had done this many times in her life. She was a little weak in body, but an adept. She put lawlessness and fantasy into the air.

After an ornate grace by the clergyman, they wished each other “Merry Christmas.” As the meal went on a dozen mutual acquaintances were discovered. They grew extraordinarily intimate in the way in which they discussed the absent. It was rash, of course, but people are not responsible for their tongues after midnight at a feast. Miss Van Zandt was gathering courage for her part of the preposterous bargain with Adam. It seemed almost reasonable now. Could she discover how Miss March stood toward him?

Young Van Zandt cut the Gordian knot. In the midst of a lull he said: “Isn’t this a sort of—er—“he tried to draw back, then plunged forward—“isn’t this a sort of—er—announcement supper?”
Scraggly-Beard held up his hands in a humorous attempt to shield himself as Miss March rose in her place, utterly astonished. All her gentle intimacy dropped from her like a cloak. She looked very much the Stranger from Arizona, and spoke in that tongue, pointing her wrathful finger straight at Adam, “Did he tell you that I was engaged to him?”

They heard a noise in the hall, and blessed their stars. Then the door flew open. The landlady stood there cursing and blinking, but in a fair good humor. She shook her bottle at them.

“I s’pose,” she said, “that you will be quiet about six o’clock in the morning.”

Adam spoke with serious dignity. “I am sorry we are all so drunk to-night.” He said it more to the sibyl than to the landlady. Then he added to the landlady, most resolutely, “Will you lend us your parlor for half an hour?”

“Certainly, if I can come too.”

Meanwhile Miss Van Zandt drew the sibyl into the deep window, kissed her, and whispered again Adam’s mysterious apology, “I am sorry we are all so drunk to-night.” Miss Van Zandt was in a tremble of delight. Women are always foolish about weddings. And she felt that Clara March was not staying as angry as she wanted to stay. While they both looked at the stars, Miss Van Zandt said:

“This morning you are going from the Rainbow Room to the Golden Room.”

“What is the Golden Room?” asked the sibyl. She tried to speak coldly.

“Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard of the Golden Room Mr. Adam made, where your picture hangs?”

“Mr. Adam!” the sibyl called.

Adam was explaining the compositions on the walls, in a tense way, to the landlady and the men.

“Mr. Adam, what have you been doing with my portrait? What is your Golden Room? What do you mean by these secrets? Tell me instantly.” She stamped her foot.

“Now,” said Adam, “if you gentlemen will explain to Miss Van Zandt the names of the artists and their works, I will retire into the window with this lady and answer her questions. I have in my pocket a plan of the Golden Room which she may like to see.”

The Van Zandts, in an agony of self-consciousness, pretended to go through the pictures while the resolute Adam took from his pocket the worn and crackling document he had consulted through various parts of this tale. He spread it before the sibyl. Her dark hair fell all about it. There was a two-minute silence.

The sibyl spoke in a non-committal voice: “Is this the Diagram of Life you spoke of this afternoon?”

“Yes,” said Adam.

Then there was a longer pause.

Something finally happened, for Scraggly-Beard said, “Turn around, everybody. Come and see the plan.” He spread it proudly on the table.

“Why, it’s a marriage license!” said Miss Van Zandt, utterly surprised.
“To be sure,” said the landlady.

The sibyl’s eyes grew wider and wider. She sat alone on her window-sill, looking silently at the whole company a long time. Then she rose.

“These are my bridesmaids,” she said, as she put her arms around the two women and went downstairs with them, all three sniffling a little.

The landlady hid her bottle in the hall.

What is a man at a wedding? A mere nuisance. Miss Van Zandt carried herself grandly in that dim parlor. The landlady wiped her mouth on her apron and stood pretty straight. As for the bride, she was glowing. All brides are. That is part of the ceremony.

The preacher is, of course, to be mentioned in the report. He was one of the most fashionable in New York.

“You must have a wedding trip,” said young Van Zandt. So the party made a tour of Manhattan.

“Where is this Golden Room?” asked the bride. “What is this Golden Room?”

“We must go to church first,” said Adam.

Van Zandt steered for Fifth Avenue, and to St. Patrick’s Cathedral. It was 4:40 a.m. Here Scraggly-Beard wished his friends a merry Christmas and bade them an emphatic good-morning.

And the two went in to mass.

Note