IN 1919, AS HE SURVEYED HIS WORK, Robert Herrick asserted, “The one subject always to be found in my books is the competitive system—its influences upon men and women. Whenever I look back into these books, I find the one insistent question implied in almost every chapter, ‘What is success?’” Through most of his career, Herrick assured himself that he answered this question and in the process pointed up the pernicious folly of the “competitive system.” Real success, he preached, resided in giving up the feverish pursuit of wealth and position in which so many Americans were caught up and in accepting the “common lot” of honest toil and warm human relations. He emphasized further, in several of his most significant novels, that a chief means, perhaps a crucial one, of bringing his countrymen to this more rewarding vision of success is the good marriage, one in which husband and wife continually reinforce each other’s best impulses, thereby fostering generosity, honesty, industry—all, in short, that makes for contentment in people and health in nations. In espousing this doctrine, Herrick had one major problem, however, one that damaged his books both as literature and message: try as he might, he could not believe fully in what he was saying. The simple pleasures of the “common lot,” the role of marriage in bringing about contentment, might all be very attractive to William Dean Howells; but ultimately they were far less enticing to Herrick, who once noted of himself, perceptively, “There was something within me, as in every pure-blooded New Englander, of the mystic, the transcendentalist, the idealist.” Though characterized by Larzer Ziff as one who “rose to continue the Howellsian grind” and by Alfred Kazin as “one of the most serious and neglected pioneer realists of the Progressive era,” Herrick was as much the roman-
tic as the realist, yearning for a "success" that was, in fact, ineffable and transcendental, one that could never be found within the ostensibly realistic context in which his stories and themes were most often delineated. Nonetheless, he long persisted in his halfhearted insistence that happiness could be found most readily in the Howellsian commonplace, never entirely convincing himself or the reader of the validity of what he was saying. That he did continue in this line results, one suspects, from an uneasy, incompletely understood concession on his part to the literary temper of his day. A novelist interested in the moral improvement of his or her compatriots, it was clear to Herrick's contemporaries, must, virtually by definition, focus on social issues and offer socially oriented theories of how improvement might be achieved, a judgment that Herrick, who must have felt in any case that his visions had to be grounded somewhere on the real American scene, found difficult to quarrel with if not entirely convincing. Whatever the cause, though, Herrick's continuing effort to deny his deepest impulses in order to promote what he conceived to be the good of society imparts to his work a peculiar poignance; and nowhere, perhaps, is that poignance more apparent than in his portrayal of marriage, an institution about which he had grave personal misgivings, but which, until his last major novel, he forced himself to see as the cornerstone of the doctrine he espoused.

It may be that it was only to be expected that Herrick would have misgivings about American marriage. Certainly, neither the intellectual tradition from which he sprang in New England nor his own experiences with the institution were likely to imbue him with much faith in the redemptive power of matrimony. Indeed, only the opposite could have resulted from his extended exposure to the traditional New England imperatives that personal growth is more significant than social accommodation and that such growth depends less on relationships with others than on an individual quest for a spiritual fulfillment that cannot be attained in society or shared with others. Moreover, the influence on Herrick of this regional emphasis on going it alone in the search for spiritual values was doubtless reinforced by what he himself saw
of his parents' marriage and went through in his own. His parents' union was a terribly unhappy one that blighted his childhood. As Blake Nevius notes, Herrick's father, "like the husbands in so many of Herrick's novels, . . . sacrificed himself, almost meekly, to his wife's ambitions" and allowed himself to be drained of money and health by the "countless . . . modes of conspicuous consumption that his wife adopted." The unhappiness of Herrick's own marriage, which ended in divorce, was manifested in his extramarital relationships and in his grim comment after the divorce that his former wife "would be really happier" if "she could only be convinced that she had done me all the harm possible—that mine is an _oeuvre_ completed and finished." There was little in either marriage, clearly, that would not join with the New England background in leading Herrick to suspicion of the institution he attempted to promote through most of his career.

Indications of Herrick's lack of an abiding faith in marriage as a means to both individual salvation and national spiritual recovery are as apparent in his works advocating matrimony as they are in _Waste_ (1924), the late novel in which he implicitly disavows his longtime advocacy of the institution. One obvious sign, of course, is the preponderance of dismal marriages he presents in these works. However, the mass of unhappy husbands and wives is as much a sign of Herrick's belief that the competitive pursuit of wealth blights all aspects of American life, including marriage, as it is an indicant of his lack of faith in matrimony itself. More revelatory is the manner in which the good marriages in Herrick's work are presented. They are rarely seen from the inside, rarely shown, that is, with the wealth of particularizing detail that makes a number of the marriages, both good and bad, delineated by a Howells or a Wharton seem fully realized ones. Instead, Herrick usually presents his happy marriages in such vague, idealized terms as to remove them from any recognizable social context—not, ultimately, to create a compelling Jamesian romantic vision of marriage as a realm of tragedy that spurs painful growth nor to establish a no less compelling romantic vision, such as Wharton's, of a society tied to eternal princi-
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pies of civility and order, but simply to blunder into vapid roman-ticizings that are not compelling, only implausible. Further, Herrick's presentation of his good marriages in idealized terms is part of a general tendency in his presentation of virtually all marriages toward such undue simplification of the makeups of his marrieds, the conflicts that embroil them, and the moral issues involved and toward a prose style so portentous in tone, inflated, and, at times, even feverish as to impart to his marriage novels qualities of both the crudely melodramatic and the crudely allegorical. Though melodrama and allegory are not out of place in such visionary, nonrealist novels as The Healer (1911) and A Life for a Life (1910), which Herrick described as "idealistic romances so-called . . . where I deal with large spiritual themes, and the characters are types, the action almost always symbolical, etc.,"11 they are greatly at odds in the marriage novels with his insistence that happiness resides in accepting the "common lot."12 For one to embrace this "common lot," he must, of course, dispense with the impulse toward ideality, which involves transcending or ignoring the actual social context, and which for Herrick typically manifests itself in the allegorical and melodramatic modes, which can only seem clumsy, blatant, and crude when imposed on novels ostensibly celebrating the commonplace. Unable, in fact, to find value in restricting himself to the commonplace realm in which marriage typically operates, Herrick is inadvertently arguing against himself in his novels espousing marriage, for the lessons he is supposedly asserting are undercut by the very manner in which he asserts them. Not surprisingly, the result is invariably to make these works something less than convincing.

Herrick's uneasy avowals of faith in marriage and his long-withheld subsequent disavowal can best be explored by focusing on four novels that mark clearly delineated stages in his thinking on the subject. In The Gospel of Freedom (1898), Herrick's first extended treatment of marriage, he explores at length two factors that make so many American marriages unhappy ones and offers a glimpse of an idealized marriage that is meant to serve as an alternative to what he saw ac-
tually taking place between most American husbands and wives. In *The Common Lot* (1904), Herrick attempts to show how an unhappily married pair can fight off the corrupting influences of the American competitive system and turn their marriage into a perfect amalgam of virtue and contentment. *Together* (1908), Herrick’s major marriage novel, presents both his most vehement indictment of marriage as it exists in modern America and his fervent vision of how it might be. Finally, in *Waste* (1924), Herrick’s last significant novel, there is no longer evident even a pretense of faith in marriage as a means of offering a sensitive person or, ultimately, a troubled nation an opportunity for fulfillment. All marriages he now regards as either inextricably bound up in corruption or, at the very least, as a hindrance to the development of all that is best in the individual.

The major theme in *The Gospel of Freedom*, Herrick’s first novel, is one that would be central to his career, intimately tied to his attempt to define real “success.” It is, essentially, the struggle between the individual’s desire for personal liberty and the “conditions of life.” Herrick seeks, in other terms, “the new religion which could touch the spirit of modern man” and resolve the question of whether man ought to “retreat from the world into the self . . . or to accept the world as it comes to hand.” This “new religion” or resolution of the conflict between commitment to self and commitment to others is embodied in Adela Anthon’s long-delayed realization that true freedom consists not in striving egotistically for some personal attainment of transcendent and ineffable beauty, grandeur, and achievement that are inherently unrealizable but, instead, in an immersion of oneself into the commonplace and in a willing acceptance of responsibilities and commitments to others. Crucial in bringing Adela to this realization are the failure of her own marriage and the contentment that she knows is inevitably to be achieved in the marriage of her friends Thornton Jennings and Molly Parker. Had Herrick been able to make the success of the latter marriage as convincing as the failure of the former, *The Gospel of Freedom* would not only be a far more effective statement
of where happiness is to be found and of how a good marriage is central to such happiness but it would have been, as well, a far better novel than it is.

The fundamental weakness of this novel lies, then, in Herrick's inability to make its affirmation, based largely on marriage, either believable or compelling. This, as I noted, would be a problem too with Herrick's subsequent marriage novels, deriving from a basic lack of faith in the institution he was attempting to promote. In this novel the affirmation not only fails to convince but its impact on what is effective in the book is harmful. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Herrick's portrayal of Adela's marriage with John Wilbur. In delineating the background of the marriage, John and Adela's unhappiness together, and their breakup, Herrick makes the Anthon-Wilbur union a telling example of all too many American marriages of his day as he sees them, marriages that are at once the result and perpetuators of the corruption pervading the national scene. Unfortunately, much of the power of this portrayal is diminished by the vapidity of the moralizing strain that runs through the work in the pious speeches of Jennings and Molly and that culminates in their marriage, a union that ostensibly drives their lessons home to Adela, thereby providing the story with its affirmative conclusion. The one-dimensional nature of Herrick's portrayal of this relentlessly virtuous pair and the cloying vision he implicitly conveys of what their marriage will entail ultimately force the novel into a context of ideality in which the salience of the unpleasant facts of American life revealed through the Wilbur marriage is eroded. If such unpleasantness can be dispelled so easily by leaping into ideality, one wonders why it ought to be presented extensively or taken seriously in the first place. Thus does Herrick's predilection for an idealized vision of marriage detract from the authority of what is best in *The Gospel of Freedom*, which is his skillful presentation of an unhappy marriage as what Howells would have called a "modern instance"—a symptom, that is, of a malaise afflicting a great many American marriages.

Much of Herrick's success in portraying the unhappy marriage of Adela and John as both a reflection of their personal
failures and of national shortcomings resides in the care with which he establishes that their reasons for marrying each other are not only all wrong but wrong, in large measure, because of the influence on them of the national outlook. Both Adela and Wilbur are presented as typical of a sort of young American prevalent in their era. The obvious similarities of each to James's Isabel Archer and Caspar Goodwood, respectively, are symptomatic less of imitativeness on Herrick's part than of the prevalence in late-nineteenth-century America of highly promising yet uneasy and dissatisfied young men and women. Like Caspar and like Isabel before she marries Osmond, Adela and Wilbur are intelligent, aggressive, and exceedingly restless, as their relentless egotism, perhaps prodded by the seeming limitlessness of American possibility itself, forces them to resist confinement in the commonplace. Again, as with James's pair, the provoking egotism is manifested in different ways by men and women. Wilbur, like Caspar, throws himself into business competition. Adela, like Isabel lacking such ready outlet, is, like her, led by her egotism into more subtle combats. The main difference, of course, between Herrick's pair and James's is that Herrick's young couple marry each other. This is far more usual than what befalls Isabel and Caspar; and in his account of the disastrous results of this typically American mating, Herrick presents a provocative indictment of the national scene.

If the egotism of Adela and Wilbur makes the failure of their marriage an inevitability, it also makes virtually inevitable their decision to marry each other, since each is unhealthily attracted to the other's aggressive self-assertiveness. Adela is wealthy, pretty, and the "impulse of life" is "throb-bing in her generously"; but as the product of an unhappy marriage between a power-hungry tycoon and a querulous snob, she is flawed by her legacy of "intolerance," an "iron will," and an insatiable thirst for "practical power," an inheritance that has been sublimated into a fitful quest after surpassing beauty and freedom. More, this legacy has made her so dissatisfied with her prospects as a woman that she is capable of declaring, giving "her egotism rein recklessly," that
she, like all women, has only two bleak opportunities before her—“a husband, or a vocation badly filled” (p. 40). In John Wilbur, however, she sees another alternative, a means of satisfying her egotism by entering a relationship that will combine marriage and vocation. Wilbur, a rugged young inventor-businessman, seems to Adela not only to embody all the romance and procreative power of the American West itself but to offer her a chance to partake of this romance and power. A loan Adela advances him helps him complete his “Water-Hoister,” an irrigation device that, according to one newspaper account, will “open up an era . . . when the desolate plains of the mighty Rockies shall flow with milk and honey, and the seat of the national capital shall be moved westward to the centre of a new civilization” (pp. 78-79). Convinced that her restless energy can find direction in prodding him to new achievement, the now-successful Wilbur asks Adela to marry him, assuring her that their marriage will be constructed along the most approved modern lines as a “partnership”; he asserts, in fact, “We have worked along shoulder to shoulder, like real partners, through the first big crisis I have had [and] marriage would be a closer partnership, longer . . . and more intimate” (p. 89). Not surprisingly, Adela finds this a most attractive offer. Though it entails marriage, about which she is, as we have seen, dubious, it is a marriage that is perceived by both as a pleasant businesslike arrangement, with room for affection, certainly, but devoid of the necessity for emotional commitment or for giving of oneself. As such, this marriage strikes her as not too large a price to pay for the chance to exercise power. Thus, Herrick reveals how the American identification of success with commercial and social force leads to the distortion of personal relations, with the effects nowhere more damaging than in marriage.

By establishing his newlyweds in Chicago, a city that, for Herrick, presents a landscape of unrestrained voracity and vulgarity, epitomizing all that is destructive in the headlong pursuit of worldly success, Herrick further makes them seem national types. Significantly, too, it is Chicago, embodying in extreme form the lust for power that brought Adela and Wil-
bur together, that most effectually drives the pair apart. For Wilbur, “Chicago was like a congenial Alpine air, which stimulated his appetites. From the very first the strife for advancement summoned all his virility. . . .” Adela, “on the other hand, remembered for many a day the sudden depression the fierce city had given her spirits that first March morning of their arrival” (p. 104). Herrick’s point here, clearly, is not that Adela is somehow too morally fine to be at home in Chicago. Rather, it is that Chicago typifies egotism stripped bare of all the ideality with which Adela invested it by linking it in her own case with a vague longing for transcendence or in John’s with the glory and romance of the fertile American West. Therefore, Chicago cannot be pleasant for her. As Herrick notes pointedly, Chicago is indeed “the first fact she had ever known” (p. 104); and this fact, that the lust for personal power is in its essence crude, ungovernable, and ruthless, is one from which Adela instinctively recoils, for it brings the insight that a marriage such as her own, founded on the ostensible partnership of powerful egos, is a very vulnerable relationship.

Any lingering illusion Adela may have after seeing Chicago and, worse, her husband’s admiration of it, that her marriage to Wilbur is to be a lasting partnership is dispelled with crushing swiftness when Wilbur sells out his holdings in the “Water-Hoister” business, undercutting his associates in the struggling enterprise, and enters the world of Chicago high finance. The significance of this is not lost on Adela, who recalls that “their partnership was based upon faith in the idea of the “Water-Hoister” (p. 120), a device that by very virtue of its procreative function seemed to symbolize for her the promise she has imagined to be closely tied to power. Soon, the whole notion of partnership goes the way of the “Water-Hoister.” Instead of being Wilbur’s confidante and cohort, Adela finds, as she declares, that she is simply a wife whom he regards as having a “fine presence in dress” and as a singularly “clever woman” (p. 183) whose assignment is to “make the home, cultivate persons whom it is well to know; even entertain horrid, stupid people because her husband’s interests are involved” (p. 108). Try as she will to “invest her
new home, her clubs, and acquaintances with importance" (p. 120), she is unable to do so, and the birth of her child only makes her feel farther apart from her husband and the “partnership” she envisioned. Though Herrick believes it incumbent on a wife to struggle to improve even such a marriage as this, finding joy with her child and home until she can perhaps bring her husband to a humbler and more humane vision of success, this course is not one Adela is able to follow. Instead, she can only wail bitterly to Molly, “No! there is no freedom for women: they are marked incapable from their birth and are supported by men for some obvious and necessary services. Between times they have a few indifferent joys dealt out to them” (p. 110). With this realization comes a longing only for freedom and a fear that no commitment to another can be anything but imprisoning.

Accentuating Adela’s disgust with her situation is Wilbur’s increasing corruption. If Chicago strips the egotistical of what genteel restraints they may maintain, it also strips the greedy of any lingering ethical misgivings about their avarice and the ways they seek to appease it. Adela is revolted to find that Wilbur has participated in a deal that is little more than “a common swindle on the public brought about by a dicker between a knave and a gang of venal county legislators” (p. 125). Even more repellent to her is Wilbur’s shamelessness about what he has done. Confronted by her on the issue, he airily replies that “a woman can’t understand [that] business is like life” and one must “play hard all the time” rather than be “dainty” (p. 126). With her abhorrence of Wilbur’s business chicanery, though, comes Adela’s first perception that he alone is not to blame either for his own shortcomings or those of the marriage. Though she is not yet able to see that the fundamental difficulty confronting both herself and Wilbur is their egotism, she does at least perceive that they have both been shaped by a corrupt culture that led them into an idea of marriage that was all wrong. More, the source of the difficulty between her and her husband, she now sees, “dated some generations back, and it mattered little when the breach declared itself” (p. 165). Thus, Adela now views Wilbur as “not a bad man” (p. 126) but one “merely heartily of his times,” to whom commercial scruples were “unintelli-
gible” (p. 126). He is, in short, “the American peasant,” a man whose quick rise to wealth “suddenly placed him in a world for which he had no traditions ready to assist him” (p. 180). Most significantly, she admits to Wilbur and to herself that she too is not blameless in the wreck of their marriage (which, with the death of their child through illness, now has nothing at all left holding it together). Trying loftily to lecture Wilbur on what marriage entails, she suddenly confesses, “I don’t know. I have done you a wrong somehow” (p. 184).

Despite this awareness of her own share in the failure of the marriage and of the limits of Wilbur’s culpability, Adela is still incapable of breaking out of her thralldom to egotism, still unable to see the truth of Molly’s assertion to her that she is foolish to take her life and marriage as “a thorough course in self-development” (p. 99). Still desperate for perfect freedom and the attainment of some imperfectly conceived transcendent beauty, Adela goes to Europe and enters the tutelage of Simeon Erard, a Gilbert Osmond-like sterile dilettante whose appreciation of art is little more than a cover for his adoration of himself. Only the examples set by Molly and Jennings’s selflessness and their marriage keep Adela from succumbing to Erard’s subtle blandishments and entering into an affair or, perhaps worse, a marriage with this man whose interest in her resides chiefly in the opportunity he perceives for gaining not only a good deal of money but control over a beautiful woman whom he regards as little more than an objet d’art to be collected for his personal gratification. With her escape from Erard, who lures her with a vision of a life free of responsibility and commitment spent solely in the pursuit of pleasure and beauty and who seems virtually an allegorical representation of pure selfishness, Adela achieves her final growth in the novel. She is at last capable of realizing, through the influence of Jennings and Molly, that real freedom and beauty consist in overcoming egotism and are most fully manifested in forging lasting commitments to others.

Thematically apposite as it may be, the account of Adela’s relationship with Erard severely diminishes the impact of The Gospel of Freedom. Though the decline of the Wilbur
marriage is for the most part described in general terms rather than enacted, it is nonetheless a relatively convincing account of the increasing unhappiness of two misguided people, one made all the more compelling by the aura of inevitability surrounding their descent into misery, as the culture of which they are such consummate products channels them to a “success” that is terribly akin to the most painful of failures. From the recognizable social context in which the Wilbur marriage is depicted, however, Herrick veers into a framework of clumsy, unconvincing melodrama when Adela comes under the influence of Erard, a man who lacks even the veneer of social grace that makes an Osmond such a plausible villain. Shameless, blatantly vulgar for all his ostensible taste in art, Erard, unconcerned even with appearances, blithely roams through Europe while his long-suffering brother literally works himself to death supporting their indigent parents (and even sending Simeon money now and again to help finance his museum-hopping). Moreover, apart from his longing for power over Adela and her money, he seems incapable of passion. In essence, then, Herrick’s characterization of Erard and his portrayal of Erard’s dealings with Adela turn *The Gospel of Freedom* into the clumsiest of melodramas, reducing, unavoidably, the credibility of the depiction of the Wilbur marriage to which Herrick incongruously ties them.

The Erard characterization is unfortunately of a piece with those of Molly and Jennings, who do little more than deliver themselves of homely platitudes. The most telling of these in Adela’s quest for fulfillment comes near the conclusion of the novel with Jennings’s assertion that “there is no freedom and everyone is free. It is all a matter of feeling. And that feeling you cannot command” (p. 268). With this, Adela realizes that freedom is, “like love” (p. 268), not a matter of striving but of receptivity. From this time on, she will no longer grope for the unattainable but accept life as it comes, acknowledging the beauty of the commonplace. There is obviously nothing wrong with Jennings’s notion here, or with anything else he and Molly declaim through the novel. The problem is, quite simply, that their moral maxims divorced from believable
characters become mere saccharine commonplaces. Similarly, their marriage, meant to symbolize vividly the homespun joys available to those who give up the ego-driven quest for transcendence, seems little more than a vapid contrivance because this pair has never been depicted in believable terms. Their marriage, then, smacks of the very ideality against which Herrick warns in his account of Adela.

Thus, the cumulative impact of Erard, Molly, and Jennings on *The Gospel of Freedom* is to render it a novel that fails to compel belief. The relatively interesting account of a failed modern American marriage is smothered by an overlay of ideality and heavy-handed melodrama. One senses that Herrick, no less than Adela, is grasping for a beauty that is ineffable and unattainable, one that he knows, whether he will admit it to himself or not, cannot be found in marriage. This conflict between what Herrick wants to believe is possible in marriage and what he actually knows to be the facts recurs in subsequent works, never failing to mar, as it does here, what is good in them.

Neither *The Web of Life* (1900) nor *The Real World* (1901), Herrick's next works of any note in which marriage figures significantly, breaks any new ground. In each a dissatisfied quester (Howard Summers and Jack Pemberton, respectively) finally finds happiness by giving up his grandiose aspirations and entering into a marriage that brings him into closer and more comfortable relations with the commonplace than he has heretofore known. *The Real World* also portrays a marriage (that of Elsie Mason) that is destroyed by the aggressive egotism of both husband and wife. There is little in either novel that is not seen with Adela, Wilbur, Jennings, and Molly. Moreover, as with *The Gospel of Freedom*, the aura of ideality Herrick establishes in both of these novels detracts from the credibility of the characterizations of marriages that are depicted in only relatively scant detail to begin with. In *The Common Lot*, however, Herrick, though unwilling to dispense with his penchant for ideality, attempts to provide a more extensive presentation of marriage than is evident in any of the previous novels. Almost by its very na-
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ture, however, the attempt fails, for marriage and ideality make an uneasy mix unless handled by one with the genius of a James for grounding the ideal (and the melodramatic mode through which it is often conveyed) in the real. Nonetheless, it is an interesting novel because it is Herrick's most extended effort up to this time to explore the commonplace in detail and a further revelation of his continuing lack of real faith in marriage as a means of ameliorating shortcomings in either individuals or society. The latter, of course, grows out of his underlying lack of faith in the value of the very commonplace about which he is so prone to wax eloquent and vitiates inevitably the effectiveness of any such exploration of the "common lot" as he attempts here.

Indeed, if Herrick had been able to dispense with the context of ideality in which he sets it, his account of the vicissitudes of the Hart marriage would not seem terribly out of place in a Howells novel, so close to Howells's views on marriage are the ones to which Herrick is ostensibly committed here. In *The Common Lot*, for example, Herrick for the first time shows, as Howells did, that marriage itself can change the people in it. Thus, unlike Adela and Wilbur, whose flaws remain constant and wreck their marriage, and unlike Molly and Jennings, whose unfailing virtue will surely make their marriage a good one, Jackson Hart in this novel finally becomes a better person because of the influences exerted on him through his marriage. Further, in *The Common Lot*, Herrick, again like Howells, attempts to show in far more detail than he did in *The Gospel of Freedom* the reciprocal effects exerted between a given marriage and its social context.

Nor is it merely in terms of Herrick's views on marriage that *The Common Lot* strikes a Howellsian note. The overtones of *A Modern Instance* and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* are unmistakable in Herrick's account of Jackson Hart's internal conflict and its impact on his relations with his wife. Hart, a promising young architect, must choose between prostituting his abilities in pursuit of a rapid rise in social status and wealth and developing them slowly in order to become a genuine creator and a benefactor thereby of society. At first he follows the path of corruption, doing showy and shoddy but
highly remunerative work in which he often departs from agreed-upon specifications in order to increase the profit margin. However, the fire that destroys one of Hart’s cheaply built hotels, killing many of the guests, destroys as well his greed and egotism. Shattered by what he has wrought, he turns, finally, to his wife, whom he has long neglected and who has left him on learning of the corrupt practices in which he has been engaging. Under the aegis of her integrity and healing love, Hart expiates his guilt and returns to humble work for the honest architect with whom his career had begun. He accepts now the “common lot” of devotion to home and craft that will make him a happier man and a better citizen. Thus through the fruition of marriage’s potential for good does a Bartley Hubbard type assume the moral grandeur that a Silas Lapham finally attains—a Howellsian consummation the validity of which Herrick devoutly wished to assert.

But, as I noted, Herrick is ultimately not writing Howellsian novels or, whatever his intentions may have been, maintaining faith in a Howellsian vision of matrimony. Every aspect of his depiction of marriage that might seem reminiscent of Howells’s work is undercut, as The Gospel of Freedom was, by ideality and one of its major manifestations in Herrick’s marriage novels, as we have seen, crude melodrama. Clearly Herrick is trying to make a good marriage seem all the more attractive by presenting it in idealized terms and a bad one all the more appalling by setting it in the context of melodrama, but nevertheless the result is to make the vision of marriage he seeks to present here less convincing than it might otherwise have been. Marriage, he wants us to believe, is preeminently of this world, a means to fuller participation in the nourishing communion of ordinary folk. However, the vapory ideality and blatant melodrama into which his romantic impulses propel him deal in broad, even lurid, colorings and, hence, distortions of the world we know, unlike the subtly internalized melodrama one finds in James, which heightens and intensifies our perception of the world about us although seemingly departing it and rarely professing explicitly devotion to it. Consequently, although Herrick
goes to some lengths in *The Common Lot* to provide a more "realistic" and affirmative vision of matrimony than he offers in *The Gospel of Freedom,* the very fact that he feels he must depart from commonplace reality to do so limits the effectiveness of his effort.

Hence, as a result of Herrick's one-dimensional, melodramatic rendering of it solely as a means to the ultimate avowal of an idealistic vision, Hart's decline into moral degradation is a bit too redolent of the *Ten Nights in a Barroom* school of writing. The evil tempting Hart is too crudely portrayed, too devoid of complexity and subtlety, even too obviously unappealing to convince one that a man like Hart, who is intelligent and who can love such a virtuous woman as the transplanted New Englander, Helen Spellman, could so readily succumb to it. Unconvinced by this, the reader is unable to believe that Herrick is indeed presenting the real world as he purports to be doing, and as a result finds Hart's subsequent redemption, involving as it does his resolve to accept the commonplace lot we know, difficult to credit. By this late stage of the novel, one can no longer quite bring oneself to believe that either Hart or Herrick knows what the "common lot" entails—knows, in short, that it is not without its failings just as the lives of the wicked who lust after mere self-gratification are not entirely without attractiveness and at rare times, perhaps, even value. Certainly, one becomes dubious about Herrick's gifts for observation after seeing him present Hart as drawn to a way of life embodied most sharply and typically in the vicious, social-climbing widow, Mrs. Phillips, who drove her decent husband to drink and an early grave, who coldly ignores her troubled, sensitive daughter, and who desires nothing more from her flirtations with Hart than to pull him down because "she considered all men base,—emotionally treacherous and false-hearted, and would take her amusement wherever she could get it." Similarly, Hart's partner, the heavy-handedly named, dishonest contractor, Mr. Graves, has no existence save as an unremittingly corrupt money-grubber. Presented even in that role in the palest of terms by Herrick, he, like Mrs. Phillips, fails to be believable, therefore, either as a lure for Hart or as a character
drawn from actual observation, such actual observation, that is, as would lead one to believe Herrick knows full well what he is speaking of when he lauds the virtues of the "common lot." Even Chicago, here as in _The Gospel of Freedom_ virtually a metaphor for unrestrained egotism, is presented one-dimensionally and, consequently, uncompellingly and unconvincingly. The city, Herrick declares febrilely, has a "titanic, heartless embrace" (p. 189). Those trapped in its grip alternately drive themselves at "top speed" or, in rare interludes of quiet, fall together, "worried, fagged, preoccupied" (p. 52), often in fashionable restaurants "smutched" with a "soot" and "a thick sediment of ashes and coal dust" (p. 191) that are all too clearly symbolic of the moral filth of the city. Still, we are to believe that "the noise, the smell, the reek of the city, touched [Hart], folded him in, swayed him like a subtle opiate" (p. 63). What is wrong with all this, of course, is not the notion that men can be attracted to what is life-denying. We all know that they can be. The difficulty here is that Herrick's rendering of this one instance of this attraction is lacking in what James characterized as "felt life," lacking, that is, in vivifying detail derived from sensitive observation, in credibility, and, thus, in interest—lacking in all, really, save the moral outrage of one who is more the unremitting idealist than the artist. As such, as I have noted, none of this establishes a context in which Hart's triumphant self-immersion into the commonplace can be taken seriously.

Unconvincing for much the same reasons is Herrick's depiction of the Hart marriage. Both the decline of the marriage, as Hart falls headlong into corruption, and its subsequent renewal, as Helen helps him to expiation and regeneration, are rendered in the most monolithic terms. In neither phase of the marriage does anything occur that brakes either Hart's descent into the nadir of degradation or his rapid acceleration to the peaks of moral affirmation. Nor are there any moments in either phase in which Hart, like most people, manifests any real doubts about the course he is pursuing or even in which he sits down and talks in human terms to himself, his wife, or to anyone else about his motivations. With none of the psychological and emotional complexity of
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a real human being, he simply moves too rapidly from consummate despicableness to unadulterated virtue—neither of which is convincing in this context in the first place. Herrick, once again then, is sacrificing the credibility of both his characterizations and his portrayal of marriage as he resorts to the unabashed melodrama that is his invariable mode of conveying his idealized vision of reality in the marriage novels.

Consequently, from Herrick’s portentous question at the time of the Hart wedding, “Did the woman know now that the man who stood there face to face with her, her husband, was yet a stranger to her soul?” (p. 115) to the moment when Helen leaves her husband, all one sees is a decline in Hart and the marriage, one that ostensibly takes place over years, but that seems nevertheless incredibly precipitate because of Herrick’s single-minded devotion to focusing only on instances of degeneration in Hart. Almost immediately after the wedding, or so it seems, Hart is living well beyond his means and concluding that it is “just self-indulgence to build houses” (p. 149), as he and Helen had fondly dreamed he would. Rather, he declares, with neither compunction nor even an attempt at face-saving rationalization, that he will devote himself to “a larger business,—factories, mills, hotels,—work that could be handled on a large scale, roughly and rapidly” (p. 149). Of course, Hart’s refusal to build homes obviously parallels his refusal to make his own home a happy one, as with dispatch he turns Helen, as much as Wilbur did Adela, into a mere appendage in his pursuit of worldly “success.” Because the fashionable crowd would look askance at Helen’s working in a settlement house, Hart compels her to give it up. Even Helen’s innocuous, democratic habit of riding in streetcars rather than cabs is finally too outré for one with Hart’s aspirations to allow it to continue. Thus, it is only to be expected that before long Helen realizes unhappily that she has been forced to become a “mere spender and enjoyer . . . of the money which came out of these ephemeral and careless buildings, whose pictures dotted the walls” (p. 187). This realization and the subsequent revelation that Hart has not only connived to get the contract for a trade school building funded by his late uncle’s estate but is, fur-
ther, actually cheating with Graves in failing to meet the construction specifications prompt Helen to take their children and walk out on this marriage to which her husband feels no real commitment and which Herrick has rendered in only the most simplistic of terms.

Epitomizing Herrick's failure throughout his account of the breakup of the Hart marriage is the scene in which Helen confronts Hart with her knowledge of his unethical practices. Sensitively rendered, the scene might have been a telling one, showing poignantly the futile efforts of an honorable wife to save her marriage by bringing her misguided husband to some sense of his errors. Such a rendering could have easily grown out of Herrick's conception of Hart as one who is weak rather than evil and is at last vaguely "troubled" and "distressed" that Helen has become "less loving, less passionate" toward him when, after all, as he finally resorts to rationalizing, it was "largely" for his family's "advancement in the social scheme of things" (p. 259) that he threw in with the Mrs. Phillipses and Mr. Graveses of Chicago. Sadly, this potential for building a powerful scene out of this briefly glimpsed, human, bewildered side of Hart does not come to fruition, as Herrick once again resorts to heavyhanded melodrama. Confronted with his dishonesty by Helen, Hart, "warmed by . . . liquor," becomes "insolent" (p. 288) and resentful of "her new tone of authority to him" (p. 290). He mutters accusingly, "You'd like to see me get into trouble" and "You make me out a thief at once" (p. 291). This Timothy Shay Arthur brand of luridness diminishes the effect of Helen's unhappy rejoinder, "I wish you were a clerk, a laborer, a farm-hand,—anything, so that we could be honest, and think of something besides making money" (p. 294). Her fervent declaration could in another context have been a moving one; but in this scene it seems merely sentimental, another melodramatic excess in a work irremediably marred by them.

Hart's regeneration after Helen's departure and the holocaust at the shoddy hotel he constructed is rendered as unconvincingly by Herrick as was Hart's decline. After the fire, Hart, acknowledging to himself that Helen left him because
"she had felt the leper taint, which had been eating at his heart all the years of their marriage" (p. 339), rushes to his late uncle's Vermont farm, where Helen and the children have gone to live. He is seeking not merely a renewal of Helen's love but the moral regeneration that she asserted was within his reach and that now seems to him almost as palpable as the New England landscape itself. As helpmate to Hart in his rise, Helen is depicted, unfortunately, as less a woman than as a part of the New England springtime scene, a setting that for Herrick symbolizes a lingering vestige of honor and moral courage in the American wasteland. Full of a rare "charm, like the delicate first bloom of Puritan women" (such women, presumably, as Helen herself, whom Mrs. Phillips called a "cold Puritan"), the New England spring gives promise of a "hidden, reticent beauty" (p. 360). Just as the scene with which she is identified suddenly blooms gloriously, Helen warms as she realizes that Hart is ready to be reclaimed, and she guides him along the "hard road" (p. 394) to expiation. (Too coincidentally, perhaps, one of their children recovers from a nearly fatal illness—the health of a couple's children often being for Herrick too convenient a means to be avoided for symbolizing the health of a marriage.) A better man, Hart returns to Chicago, testifies truthfully at the coroner's inquest on the fire, and decides that he and his family will be happier accepting the "common lot" in life rather than aspiring to what the world deems "success": "The woman and the child! These were the ancient, unalterable factors of human life; outside of them the multitudinous desires of men were shifting, trivial, little. For the first time in his life an indifference to all else in the world swept over him in gratitude for these two gifts . . ." (pp. 408-9). Acting on this decision, he goes back to his first employer, the honest Mr. Wright, and contentedly designs homes again—good homes for decent working folk. Thus does Herrick, like Howells before him, show how a good marriage while engendering a sense of commitment to wife and child can also develop in one a sense of social responsibility or "complicity," to use Howells's term once more. Fully aware now of his own complicity in the deaths of innocent people, Hart, under Helen's
guidance, assumes in his career a sense of social responsi-
ility that heretofore has been grievously lacking in him. (Pres-
umably, such a sense of complicity will also be developed in
Mrs. Phillips's daughter, Venetia, and Doctor Coburn, as
Herrick, holding nothing back in his effort to build an affirm-
ative ending, brings an otherwise extraneous subplot to its
conclusion by ushering this pair to the nuptial altar.)

The problem, of course, with Herrick's affirmative conclu-
sion to *The Common Lot* is the same one perceived through-
out the novel. By resorting, in a work ostensibly set in a re-
alistic framework, to unrestrained idealization, blatant
melodrama, and such crude allegory as is inherent in the use
of names like "Graves," and "Wright," and even "Hart" in lieu
of vital incident to define character, Herrick sacrifices credi-
bility and literary effectiveness, finally, for turgid, mor-
alizing, sentimentality, and incongruous romance. Conse-
quently, he fails to make a convincing case for the doctrine
that a simple, unpretentious marriage and acceptance of a
sense of social responsibility are the best means available of
attaining happiness. Realism of the Howellsian stamp, such
as Herrick is, at least in part, trying to deal in here, clearly
does not mix well with his propensity of ideality. Unaware of
this, Herrick often writes badly flawed novels; and, too much
the romantic individualist ever to value marriage as much as
he apparently wanted to, he inevitably depicted wedded life
in ways that fail to convince.

*The Memoirs of An American Citizen* (1905), probably
Herrick's most successful novel, offers in its accounts of the
marriages of the Harringtons and Drounds a picture of the
emptiness of far too many marriages in a society dominated
by egotism; but this novel has far less to do with marriage
than it does with the business world in Chicago and what
that world reveals about the modern American lust for
power. It is the panoramic vision of modern American mat-
rimony *Together*, published three years later, that is Her-
rick's fullest treatment of the intimate, reciprocal relation-
ship between the spiritual health of a society and the health
of the marriages in it. In the course of this portrayal, he of-
fers his most extensively developed and fervent attack on the tenor of many American marriages and his most idealized vision of what marriage could be were it not for the selfishness pervading the American scene. Moreover, in the course of his idealization of the institution, Herrick attempts to imbue marriage with a sense of mystery lacking in his portrayal of it in earlier works. He characterizes it here as a timeless, divinely sanctioned, even divinely inspired, means by which people attempt to accommodate themselves to each other and to their society.

As before, what keeps Herrick's vision of marriage as it is and as it might be in America from being terribly convincing is his inability or refusal to present marriages that bear much resemblance to those we know. This is evident, to be sure, with the bad marriages, which, as elsewhere, he presents one-dimensionally, often verging, as in *The Common Lot*, on melodramatic excess; but it is particularly marked with the happy ones, which are so idealized as to be positively cloying. The latter are made all the more alien to our experience by Herrick's insistence that they are linked to some benevolent, all-powerful transcendent force grounded in Nature (Herrick typically capitalizes this word in *Together*), a sort of Oversoul, apparently, that manifests itself as joy and procreative energy only to those who have rejected the lure of worldly success and have, by accepting the "common lot" as Jackson Hart did, aligned themselves with Nature and Spirit. This transcendent energy, which might almost have swept over into *Together* from Frank Norris's *The Octopus*, has devastating effects on the novel, for the attempt to link a portrayal of modern marriage to such a phenomenon inevitably runs the risk of sliding into the sentimental, even the bathetic; and sentimentality and bathos are morasses into which *Together* blunders with an unhappy facility. Further, such a notion as this type of "Life Force" is cannot do other than undercut Herrick's avowal of faith in marriage because, finally, it compels him to envision a beauty and dynamism that are difficult for the reader to conceive as graspable within the confines of a real marriage in the modern world. One can see, consequently, that even the best marriages in *Together*, idealized
though they are by Herrick, fail to have his deepest commitment. In spite of all his best intentions to make them compelling embodiments of vital joy, they seem somehow not only too good to be true but also vaguely anachronistic and, worse, plodding and uninteresting, as if Herrick is revealing his belief that anyone with real spirit who seeks this divine energy will not find it in bonds of matrimony. Once again, therefore, difficulties arise because Herrick's romantic predilections make it difficult for him to carry out his obvious purpose, which is to present accurately, and ultimately to defend, an institution that is the very antithesis of romance. In the course of describing one of the marriages in Together, Herrick notes that to the knowing observer "the most commonplace household created by man and woman would be a wonderful cosmography." Clearly, Herrick is committed to revealing this "wonderful cosmography," but he fails to do so by immediately leaping beyond the commonplace into the ideal and therefore never forging the union between simple households and transcendent value that he set out to establish.

Herrick's failure in Together to carry out a convincing portrayal of modern American marriage is all the more disappointing because of the effectiveness of the opening of the novel. Together begins with the marriage ceremony of Isabelle Price and John Lane, which Herrick uses tellingly to establish his vision of what is wrong with marriage in contemporary America. Though he shows that the ceremony is not without its awe-inspiring solemnity and grandeur as it enacts a timeless "mystery" (p. 4) in which the bride, like her mate-to-be, "stood before the veil of her life, which was about to be drawn aside" (p. 3), he skillfully reveals nevertheless that there is much in the present scene that detracts from the beauty of the ancient ritual. Thus, patrolling among the rich array of presents on display are "soft-footed detectives . . . examining the guests" (p. 15). No less discordant a note is struck by one of the fashionable guests, the worldly, cynical Fosdick, who comments chillingly that "Love and Marriage are two distinct and entirely independent states of being. . . . I have observed that few make them coalesce"
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(p.21). He objects, moreover, to the "savage glee" over marriage:

"It's as though a lot of caged animals set up a howl of delight every time the cage door was opened and a new pair was introduced into the pen. They ought to perform the wedding ceremony in sackcloth and ashes, after duly fasting, accompanied by a few faithful friends garbed in black with torches." (P. 23)

Most devastating are the bride's own misgivings. Troubled by what she perceives as Lane's "look of mastery" (p. 5), she asks herself, "What was he, this man, now her husband for always, his hand about hers in sign of perpetual possession and protection?" (p. 5). She thinks too of her parents' "happy" and "very peaceful" marriage and reflects ominously that "hers must be different, must strike deeper" (p. 4). With the family of the bride distrusting the honesty of those at the ceremony, a guest (perhaps speaking for many) vocalizing his distrust of matrimony, and, worst, the bride herself distrusting her commitment and seeking a happiness that may well be unattainable in marriage, there is ample reason to suspect that the old words of the marriage ceremony merely cloak an emptiness at the core of most modern marriages and of a large part of modern life.

This suspicion is confirmed most fully in the novel by Herrick's depictions of the marriages in the Lanes' circle of friends. Though Blake Nevius suggests that all the marriages in Together were initially intended by Herrick principally to provide implicit "commentaries" on the Lane marriage, they are there as well to establish that the difficulties confronting the Lanes are not peculiar to them but are typical of the problems arising in many marriages in modern America. More, Herrick shows, as Howells did in A Modern Instance, that such marriages, flawed as they are by the pernicious cultural forces about them, in turn become themselves part of the virulent national infection and damage other marriages. More specifically, Herrick shows here as he did in earlier works, though now on a grander, more panoramic scale, that the egotism, the lamentable drive for a personal, essentially taw-
dry “success” manifests itself in marriage as an inability to sustain ties of love and responsibility to mate and children, a failing with grave repercussions, Herrick believes, for all the marriages around the troubled union and finally for America itself.

Prime examples in Together of marriages marred by such selfishness are those of Isabelle’s friends, the Falkners and Poles. The sexual desire that prompted their marriage sated, neither Rob nor Bessie Falkner is content in their union. Bessie’s greed for possession and status (encouraged by her proximity to the overly fashion-conscious Lanes) turns Falkner into little but a chronically dissatisfied workhorse. As the marriage declines, the restless Bessie has, in turn, a powerful impact on Isabelle, heightening the latter’s own restlessness and longings for some vague romantic fulfillment, the substance of which eludes even her but which she feels certain marriage cannot bring her. The strongest repercussion of the failure of the Falkner marriage is felt, however, in the marriage of Margaret Pole, as that discontented seeker’s inertia of unhappiness with her vapid, selfish, clubman husband is broken by the availability of the no less discontented John Falkner, prompting their affair. Though Herrick presents this affair in highly idealized terms as a real union of a deeply loving pair, he describes it, ultimately, as injurious to the family and to social stability. An appealing relationship, therefore, and one that shows, ironically, what is lacking in all too many marriages, it is nevertheless a dead end as far as Herrick is concerned here. Thus do flawed marriages work to destroy each other and perpetuate forces of egotism that are socially harmful.

The unfortunate effects of the Falkner and Pole marriages on those who come within the compass of the unhappy couples are mirrored throughout Together, as other marriages pull down not only husband and wife but also friends and even those barely known into a maelstrom of misery, corruption, and even violent death. Early in her marriage, Isabelle meets the brooding Kentuckian Tom Darnell and his wife. Fascinated by the romantic Darnell, Isabelle is titillated to learn that he is having a particularly lurid extramarital affair.
Though she is suitably horrified when Darnell kills himself and his wife, she continues to be captivated by this man's unrestrained passion in pursuit of his own ends, and this leads to her unhealthy relationship with the *soi-disant* Byronic type, the self-indulgent, self-pitying Tom Cairy, a relationship that in turn results in the violent death of her brother, Vickers, who seeks to save her from falling into corruption with the odious Cairy. Similarly engendering an unhealthy influence is the marriage of Conny Woodyard. An extremely ambitious, restive woman, Conny is a threat to all around her, not only driving her husband into misery and immorality but carrying on a flirtation with Tom Cairy that makes him seem all the more attractive to Isabelle, with, of course, disastrous results. Driving home his point that bad marriages set up a network of unfortunate influences, Herrick comments, "Cornelia Woodyard . . . was becoming for Isabelle a powerful source of suggestion, just as Isabelle had been for Bessie Falkner in the Torso days" (p. 247). Glimpsed briefly is another unhappy and, hence, dangerous marriage, that of the Conrys. Observing the beautiful Mrs. Conry's apparent helplessness in dealing with her brutal husband inspires such sympathy in the suggestible young romantic, Vickers Price, that it leads him to run away with her, resulting in the ruin of his prospects, in his chronic depression (when Mrs. Conry, less helpless than he thought, runs off with another man), and in his subsequent decision to redeem himself and save his sister by goading Cairy into killing him.

For Herrick, though, as I noted, bad marriages damage society as well as individuals, engendering nothing less than cultural suicide. Politics become debased: Conny Woodyard, for example, virtually compels her weak, uxorious husband into political corruption. Literature becomes degenerate, as idle, bored women seek unhealthy diversion: "Gay little books, saucy little books, cheap little books, pleasant little books. . . . A literature composed chiefly by women for women,—tons of wood pulp, miles of linen covers, rivers of ink,—all to feed the prevailing taste, like the ribbons, the jewels, the candy, the theatre tickets!" (p. 521). Ultimately, too, procreative power atrophies among the native-born Amer-
icans, those Herrick feels are inherently fittest for leading the nation. The perceptive Alice Johnston declares to Isabelle, "... The people who made the country are dying out so rapidly, giving way before Swedes and Slavs and others,—because these people are willing to have children" (p. 158). More bitterly, Herrick himself comments blatantly on the rising power of the immigrants: "We chatter of the curse of Castle Garden, unmindful that in the dumb animal hordes, who labor and breed children, lies the future. For THEIRS WILL BE THE LAND, when the blond hunter of the market and his pampered female are swept into the dust heap" (p. 518).

This last statement by Herrick, disturbing in its bitterness and its distrust of the newcomers, culminates a chapter that is nothing less than a diatribe lamenting the unfortunate impact on society of the decline of marriage in modern America. In it, as he presents an extended account of the healthier marital patterns he insists once predominated on the national scene, he is trying to set up a standard toward which, he hopes, his contemporaries will aspire. Unfortunately, his propensities for grandiose idealization, lavish generalization, and the ponderous tone of the jeremiad hinder his effort to convince one either that such marriages as he envisions once were the American rule or that, even if they were, they are worthy of emulation.

Originally, Herrick declares in the course of this essay-chapter, marriage in America was a "primitive body-wracking struggle of two against all," with the "Man and Woman . . . free and equal"; and this, he asserts, "remains the large pattern of marriage to-day whenever sound. Two bodies, two souls are united for the life struggle to wring order out of chaos,—physical and spiritual" (p. 513). With the Civil War sending the husband off to fight, the pattern changed, but this also made for "the perfect type of Marriage—comradeship, togethership,—and yet larger than before because the two share sacrifice and sorrow and truth,—things of the spirit. Together they wage War for others" (p. 514). Similarly, the postwar period brought a new but no less perfect marital relationship. The returned soldier "goes down into
the market-place to sell his force . . . ; while his woman waits behind the firing line to care for him,—to equip him and to hoard his pelf.” Of this sort is the marriage of the Prices, Isabelle’s parents. Her mother proudly asserts, “He made the money, I saved it” (p. 514). In each of these stages, claims Herrick, the “union of Man and Woman is based on effort in common, together; . . . not on individual gratification of sense or soul” (p. 514). Among the fashionable on the contemporary scene, however, those whose way serves as an example to be followed by the many, Herrick sees only selfishness. The husband works not in the “hope of hard-won existence for woman and children”; he works only for gain, for self. So “Woman,” notes Herrick, “no longer the Pioneer, no longer the defender of the house, no longer the economist, blossoms—as . . . The Spender.” She is “the fine flower of the modern game, of the barbaric gamble” (p. 515), the “mistress rather than the wife” (p. 516). Like all mistresses she is selfish and restless, longing for a legitimate fulfillment that her debased marriage cannot bring her and, consequently filled with ennui, experiencing a vague sense of malaise and inchoate yearnings that she seeks to gratify in social climbing, adherence to silly fads, and, worse, in affairs.

In order to show that modern marriages need not be corrupt, that there is, in fact, an alternative to the way of the Falkners, Poles, and Woodyards, Herrick focuses on several happy marriages that have attained a real success in conforming to the earlier American marital patterns he extols. These are marriages involving people who seem virtually untouched by the contemporary infection of devotion to worldly conceptions of success—devotion, that is, to self. Among these people are, as we have noted, the Prices. Mrs. Price, a loving homemaker, Colonel Price, a fair, enterprising businessman, are, Herrick notes, “the best aristocracy that this country has seen” (p. 111). That their daughter Isabelle is as misguided as she is, is testimony not to the failings of the Prices and their sort but to the power of the modern corruption that undermines their influence.

Another marriage that is a happy one in the old way, bringing contentment to those in it and benefit to society, is that
of Isabelle’s cousin Alice Johnston and her husband Steve. Though Isabelle at first cannot bring herself to emulate this couple who can be satisfied with few possessions and no social position to speak of, she does see nonetheless that there is something fine in their marriage. Herrick notes, “Isabelle could understand that Alice’s marriage was quite a different thing from what hers was—something to glorify—something to glorify all the petty, sordid details, to vivify the grimy struggle of keeping one’s head above the social waters” (p. 101). If the marriages of those such as Conny Woodyard damage those around them and society as a whole, the Johnston marriage and those like it have an opposite effect. Steve Johnston, his selflessness and integrity constantly reinforced by his closeness to his strong wife, gives up his job rather than participate in the shady dealings his employers demand of him, and later sacrifices his life rather than stand by and let a motorcar run down a woman and child. In acting as he does, he leaves behind himself a legacy of courage and decency not only for his wife and children and the pair he rescues from the car but for others too, including John and Isabelle Lane, whose lives are drastically changed, even redeemed, by the example of Steve Johnston.

Similarly, though glimpsed only briefly, the marriage of the Shorts, a humble New England farm couple, benefits all who come into contact with it. Their marriage, says Margaret Pole, “is the figure of perfect marriage, interlocked activity, with emotional satisfaction” (p. 491). She observes that they have a perfect union: “Mrs. Short’s climax of the day is her hot supper laid before her lord. . . . Do you see how they talk without words across the table? They know what the other is thinking always. So the Shorts have found what so many millions miss,—a real marriage!” (p. 491). Isabelle too is impressed by the Short marriage; along with the Johnston marriage and, perhaps, the lingering influence of her parents’ marriage, it encourages her to return to John and try to salvage their union.

Significantly, all three of these happy marriages seem not merely in the earlier American tradition of matrimony but positively anachronistic. All are linked with an earlier, pi-
After the vows were spoken, oneering America and with a primitivistic conception of life close to nature rather than with the modern, increasingly urban landscape. The Shorts are farmers, the Johnstons become truck farmers when Steve leaves his job, and the Prices are remnants of an earlier, more rugged way of life. By his refusal, or inability, to portray a successful marriage functioning in a complex, modern, urban society, Herrick is not only portraying modern America as corrupt but implicitly revealing his lack of faith that marriage can mitigate the shortcomings of a decadent age. He is, then, pushing marital happiness into the past and into the realm of sentimentality.

This is precisely what happens with Herrick's portrayal of the central marriage in Together, that of the Lanes. Ostensibly, the salvation of their marriage through their rejection of the shabby contemporary values that have stunted them and their relationship is to serve as Herrick's affirmation of marriage as an institution in which people can attain rare happiness and through which society can perpetuate virtue and the desire for real achievement. Unfortunately, Herrick, as in his earlier marriage novels, fails to convince one that he really believes this to be the case. Shallow and generalized as his account of the marital difficulties of the Lanes is, it is far more credible than his vision of their redemption and subsequent happiness. As unhappy moderns, the Lanes are not implausible. Their weaknesses are not rendered with Herrick's usual tendency to melodramatic excess when dealing with marital discord; rather they are shown, within a generally realistic context, to be like those of Wilbur and Hart, the natural products of the unfortunate influence of the age.

The grip of their time upon the Lanes is apparent from the first. Their honeymoon, significantly, is in the vacation lodge of a blatantly corrupt United States senator. During the honeymoon Isabelle, shaped by a zeitgeist that discourages giving of oneself, finds that she is repelled by sex and fearful of motherhood. Herrick notes, "The idea clutched her like fear: she would defy this fate that would use her like any other piece of matrix, merely to bear the seed and nourish it for a certain period of its way, one small step in the long process..." Thus, "lying there in full contemplation of this
new life that might already be putting its clutch upon her life, to suck from her its own being, she rebelled at it all" (p. 39). From this time on, she is an indifferent wife and, as time passes, an indifferent mother, giving herself over solely to her modern marital role as "Spender," which engenders such concomitant roles as blind adherent of foolish self-improve-
ment fads, neurotic semi-invalid, and potential mistress of wastrel dilettantes such as Tom Cairy. Nor is her spiritual decay hindered by her husband, who, like her, fails to resist the worst pressures of his day and thereby fails, as she does, to align himself with the vital, transcendent force that Herrick in this work perceives to be at the core of existence. Beginning his career as a junior executive for a large railroad, he soon reveals himself to be only too willing to rise by ruthlessly carrying out the monopolizing company's most unsa-
vory schemes. A poor boy originally, Lane, like John Wilbur and Jackson Hart before him, is driven by the American "success" ethic, so alluring, Herrick knows, to clever poor boys; and he is willing, no less than Wilbur and Hart and Van Harrington, to give up his integrity and ignore his wife in the process of carrying out his financial and social rise. Starting in the oddly named small town of Torso (signifying paucity of spirit?), Lane becomes a power in railroading, but only at the cost of everything that counts, the cost demanded by the times.

Though the Lanes' decline is, as I noted, credible enough, the redemption they and their marriage undergo presents some difficulties for the reader. Several factors are put forth by Herrick as initiating the change in John and Isabelle. Vickers's self-sacrificial death prompts Isabelle to question the whole tenor of the life she has been leading. Putting herself under the influence of the psychologist-cum-guru Doctor Renault, she learns from him not only that "Life is GOOD—all of it—for every one" (p. 468) but that there is within the reach of all "the Vision that abides within apart from the teasing phantasmagoria of sense, the Vision that comes, now dim, now vivid, as the flash of white light in the storm, the Vision by which he may learn to live and endure all!" (p. 501). All that keeps one, Renault teaches her, from seeing and fol-
lowing the Vision is "Egotism . . . the pestilence of our day" (p. 497). Such egotism might well be overcome by making a wholehearted commitment to another in marriage, but, Renault tells Isabelle, she and others like her "make marriage a sort of intelligent and intellectual prostitution" (p. 498). He goes on to declare vehemently, "Man is given you to protect, and you drive him into the market-place," and then he asks her pointedly, "What have you done for your husband?" (p. 499). Shaken, Isabelle is ready for regeneration. Though previously convinced that she is irremediably different from such types as the Johnstons and Shorts, she now longs deeply to emulate them, to be able to say of John as Alice Johnston says of her devoted, honorable husband, "It's Steve—and I wouldn't have him different for all the success in the world." Finally, she perceives that "such was marriage,—perfect marriage,—to be able to say that in the face of worldly defeat" (p. 554). Coincidental with this sincere longing of Isabelle's for a better marriage there comes a change in John. An ugly trial in which the railroad officers are prosecuted for graft and the subsequent suicide of one of his powerful associates lead John to a realization of the unsavory turn his life has taken. Moreover, like Isabelle, John finds Steve Johnston's life and death and the Johnston marriage inspirations that finally cannot be ignored. Consequently, the Lanes decide to go to the West, where John will manage a small railroad line, which he will run fairly, for the benefit of the farmers of the region. All indications point to the genuine success of the railroad, the region, and the marriage. Thus, as the novel closes, it is apparent that the Lanes have found happiness by foreswearing the "cult of the ego" (p. 587) and by aligning themselves with the "vision," or, those "forces other than physical ones, beyond,—not recognizable as motives,—self-created and impelling, nevertheless; forces welling up from the tenebrous spheres in the depths" of one's being, welling up, in short, as "something higher than Judgment" (p. 589).

The difficulties with such an ending to the novel lie less with the plausibility of the Lanes' regeneration—though the plausibility is suspect—than with Herrick's insistence that their regeneration reveals the intercession of transcendent
impulses. Blake Nevius notes that Herrick here as elsewhere is attempting to express "a truth beyond the visible facts, which could be embodied in appropriate symbols drawn from the reality of everyday life."22 Such a task, obviously, cannot be an easy one, and a writer is bound to fail at it if he cannot effect a union of all-encompassing "truth" and "everyday life," if he fails, that is, to find his "appropriate symbols." And, unfortunately, this is what occurs in Together.23 Even if the Lanes' regeneration were unquestionably plausible, they are not sufficiently large or sufficiently developed characters to sustain all the symbolic significance Herrick loads upon their change of values. Thus, Herrick's grandiose claim that there is a sort of divine energy, grounded somehow in the "common lot" to which the Lanes, like the Harts, turn, driving all irresistibly to the good seems little more than a bombastic exercise in wish-fulfillment. Nothing in the novel itself makes such an affirmative, romantic vision credible. In fact, all seems to point the other way. If Goodness is driving all before it, then the evil and shabbiness that pervade America in Together are ultimately inexplicable and presumably ephemeral. Hence, Herrick's frequent moralizing—either as narrator or through mouthpieces such as Renault—is beside the point.

Therefore, in Together social criticism yields to vapid romanticism. Marriage, ostensibly regarded by Herrick as a crucial means of overcoming the national malaise, is left behind, as the novel leaps into the cloudlands of a vaguely conceived transcendentalism. In fact, it is clear that for all of Herrick's supposed faith in marriage, he is writing the institution off as a means to a gratifying life in modern America. Revealingly, the most fulfilling union in the work is that of Margaret Pole and Rob Falkner, the affair that Herrick disavows in the interest of social order but that he renders in more detail and with deeper emotional commitment than he does any of the marriages. Further, as I touched on earlier, the successful marriages, those of the Prices, Johnstons, Shorts, and the Lanes after their redemption, are tied inextricably not so much to the possibilities of modern American life as to an earlier America that may not even have existed
save in the sentimental imaginings of Herrick—a proud, young land filled with the perfect marriages of pioneering men and loyal, submissive, protective women. Clearly, for Herrick, marriage can function only in a context of primitivism and ideality, not in the complex modern world in which Together is presumably set. More, it is a work that argues against itself and is thereby irresolvably incoherent. We are back with the failings of The Common Lot, but the incoherence is more potent here, for in Together both the supposed faith in marriage and the contradictory commitment to a vague transcendental romanticism are established more fully and explicitly than they ever were in the earlier work. Such incoherence, revealing Herrick's desperate discomfort with marriage and the "common lot" he so wanted to promote, finally marks Together as, in spite of its own affirmative trumpetings, a work of virtually unremitting bleakness.

Herrick's disavowal of faith in marriage, which is largely inadvertent in Together, becomes more conscious and explicit in his next three novels that present notable depictions of marriage. In One Woman's Life (1913), Milly Ridge, a foolish and egotistical romantic, destroys her first husband's career as an artist by pressuring him to do merely commercial work, and will presumably injure her second mate, a man far too good for her. What women need in order to grow, Herrick concludes, is not marriage so much as the practical training that will prepare them for any course they choose to follow, be it matrimony or a career. Adelle Clark, in Clark's Field (1914), marries an ineffectual fellow who turns to drink and finally starts a fire accidentally that kills their little boy. Though she may at some time in the future marry her capable, virtuous second cousin, it is significant in any case that Herrick makes no attempt here to offer marriage itself as a means either to personal development or the social reform that he believes a nation spawning such slums as Clark's Field needs so desperately. Similarly, marriage offers little of worth in Homely Lilla (1923), in which Lilla's marriage to the pompous, vicious Gordon James ends in her desertion of him. Though Gordon refuses to divorce her, she effects a lasting
union anyway with a rugged western rancher (himself formerly married unhappily), thereby manifesting that Herrick has come round to the belief—earlier rejected, though with difficulty, in Together—that a man and woman might find permanent happiness with each other although unmarried. However, the novel that shows Herrick’s loss of conscious commitment to marriage most fully and intensely is Waste, his last major work after Together. An unrelievedly grim book, Waste delineates Jarvis Thornton’s futile search for value in a tawdry society. In an America given over to pursuit of possession and social status, Thornton learns that seekers after real value are only deluding themselves if they look for understanding, comfort, or inspiration through a lasting union with another. Apparently Herrick believes that in the Vanity Fair that is modern America as he sees it the chances of a questing idealist finding a kindred soul are so slim that he had best go it alone. Obviously such a view reflects little commitment to marriage, and certainly the marriages that Herrick portrays in Waste do not inspire faith in the institution. At the close of the novel, after years of looking vainly for understanding from another, Thornton sees marriage as out of the question for himself. Like Herrick, he has come to believe that marriage offers little of value to either the sensitive individual or the cause of social reform.

The marriages portrayed in Waste are at worst hellish and at best stultifying. Jarvis, a sensitive boy, grows up, as Herrick himself did, in a home in which the mother, a nasty snob, berates the ineffectual father for having developed “no proper ambition in life.”24 “Stamped indelibly on his memory” is the scene in which his mother, barely prevented from throwing a great pan of hot water over his father, managed to get a few scalding drops on the poor man as he sat “dumbly, head bent, at the kitchen table” (p. 13). Despite this hideous background, Jarvis does not recoil immediately from marriage. Glimpses of other marriages—that of his friend’s parents and of his kindly aunt and uncle—lead him to believe that happiness is perhaps attainable in matrimony. However, his own marriage to a whining, greedy social climber, a girl who reveals herself to be little different from his mother,
goes a long way toward disabusing Jarvis of this notion. Never marrying again, Jarvis drifts into relationships with two unhappily married women, Juliana Laurence and Cynthia Walton, both of whom appreciate his sensitivity and honesty but are finally hindrances, too weak to perceive the value of Jarvis's efforts to attack various manifestations of American commercial and social corruption. This confirms Jarvis's realization that he must fight on alone, as he apparently perceives that if lovers restrict his efforts for reform, a wife certainly will.

Even the happy marriages with which the mature Jarvis comes into contact are, unlike those in the earlier novels, not without sinister overtones; for example, the comfortable union of Jarvis's sister, Susan, with the thoroughly likable Forest turns them into a smug, overly comfortable pair, totally impervious to any awareness of just how corrupt American life has become. When Jarvis, after losing his son in the World War and seeing its horrors firsthand, fails to join in the abrasively jingoistic sentiments of his community and consequently inspires anger and distrust, his sister, formerly bright and sensitive, is unable to understand his refusal. Similarly, the Gerson marriage, a generally happy one, succeeds only because Gerson's perceptive wife shuts her eyes to his greed, his shady business practices, and his chauvinistic, home-front brand of patriotism. The tendency of a happy marriage, then, as Herrick sees it, to encourage Americans to follow a pattern of mindless conformity to the worst motives of the powerful on the American scene makes it impossible for Thornton, or Herrick, ever to advocate marriage as a means of ameliorating unfortunate social conditions. Finally, then, for Herrick, to be married in America, even in what may be a relatively happy marriage, is to make oneself merely part of a group of "huddling, little animals, pressing blindly towards some center, for the warmth of contact with their fellows" (p. 213).

After reading Waste, one ought not to be surprised when looking at Herrick's subsequent work that the crucial lesson learned by the widower-protagonist in The End of Desire (1932) from his protracted affair with a woman long sepa-
rated from her husband is of the futility inherent in "the fat­
vous belief that at last he might achieve the perfect union" or
that Herrick in his utopian novel Sometime (1933) should en­
vision his perfect society of the future as one in which the
government sponsors free love.

Writing of Together, William Dean Howells noted that
Herrick "may be painting moods . . . where he seems to be
painting lives, when he portrays so many women loathing
their husbands in the first moments of marriage, or getting
sick of them as marriage keeps relentlessly on, and breaking
from them at last in open or covert rebellion." The obser­
vation is a shrewd one, for Herrick's marriage novels never
delineate the actual pedestrian course most marriages follow.
Without being grounded in portrayals of marriage that seem
credible, the dissatisfactions expressed by Herrick's married
characters do indeed seem as unsubstantial, as lacking in au­
thority, as are mere moods. Ultimately, though, the "moods"
that pervade these works find their origins less in the char­
acters themselves as they respond to marital exigencies than
in the psyche of Herrick. Prompted by a romantic impatience
with the commonplace, which he has little inclination to ob­
serve closely or depict accurately, Herrick is unable to offer
either a careful examination of the manner in which many
modern American marriages fail or a clearly thought-out
theory of how good marriages might be fostered.

There is little, therefore, that is "realistic" in the Howell­
sian sense in Herrick's vision of marriage. The bad marriages
are simplistic, often lurid, melodramatic portrayals. The good
ones (except for those in Waste, in which even the ostensibly
good marriages come off badly) are rendered in such primit­
vistic, idealized terms as to be inherently unconvincing; for
one just does not find credible Herrick's panoply of husbands
who, despite youth, energy, and intelligence, turn their backs
on modern life or his wives who find fulfillment in unques­
tioning submission to their men. If this is what good mar­
rriage entails for Herrick, it is clear that real marriage, that
mixture of sweets and sours, of accommodations and skir­
mishes, had little appeal for him. Conveyed inadvertently by
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As they show Herrick, consequently, struggling to offer social criticism and social remedies while clinging to a residual romanticism, his marriage novels exhibit not only the poignant situation of a writer stymied by internal conflicts that he does not fully understand but a striking example of the persistent hold of romanticism in the midst of what is ostensibly a time of realism. Though, as we have seen, a greater writer, such as James, could fruitfully combine romantic and realist impulses, Herrick could not; and his work suffers accordingly, never delineating convincingly what Herrick took real success to be. That he should as a realist attempt to write accurately and even admiringly of marriage as a means to such success is understandable. No less understandable, though, is the fact that as a romantic he would simultaneously suspect marriage to be an impediment to individual growth and, not unlike many an earlier New England romantic, finally conclude that "the tragedy of living . . . was not the recognition of . . . isolation, but the vain efforts after union" (*Waste*, p. 444). Apparently well on the way to this conclusion all through his career, Herrick found himself, nonetheless, trying to write novels that would show compellingly that such union was possible through matrimony in a social context embodying all the homespun, commonsensical, domestic virtues espoused by a realist such as Howells. That he failed in his efforts to write against his own deep convictions should surprise no one.


5. Nevius comments that "although three-fourths of his fiction, according to his own estimate, is conventionally realistic in method, Herrick resented being typed as a realist." Herrick, in fact, declared, "Consistent realism can be found only in the work of inferior and unimaginative artists, because they are more easily satisfied with surfaces. . . ." Herrick noted, though, that "conversely . . . consistent romance easily becomes nonsense . . ." (Nevius, Herrick, p. 199). Thus, again does one see the mixed and often conflicting tendencies in Herrick's work.

6. Herrick commented of the critics, "If [an author] has shown that he can do 'realism' of a certain sort fairly well, they pigeon-hole him forever as a 'Realist' . . . and woe to the author who ventures to disturb their conviction about himself." The segment of his work that, as Herrick described it, "does not conform to the harsh lines of Realism" was, as Nevius puts it, "nearest to his heart." Unfortunately, though, Herrick well knew, notes Nevius, that it "held no appeal for the public" (Nevius, Herrick, p. 200).

7. Kenneth Lynn notes in this connection, "Cheated by his parents out of a happy childhood in the golden age of success, Herrick the man concluded that he had been cheated again, that the success society in which he was fated to live did not at all resemble the glorious world which he was sure had existed in the past but was a horrible facsimile of his own family life" (The Dream of Success [Boston: Little, Brown, 1955], p. 213).

8. Kazin notes, "[Herrick] could not place his faith in makeshift laws and the politics of the moment; he believed too completely, out of the fullness of a great sensibility, in individual perfection" (p. 97).


11. Quoted in Nevius, Herrick, p. 204.

12. That melodramatic elements can be used fruitfully in fiction set in a realistic context is, of course, evident in a number of Henry James's works. However, the melodramatic aspects of James's better works are handled with a subtlety that eludes Herrick and are never linked, as they are in much of Herrick's work, to an incongruous insistence that happiness is to be found in the "common lot."

13. The Man Who Wins, a novella by Herrick published in 1897, is of some interest for its portrayal of a scientist who is kept from doing his best work by his neurotic, egotistical wife. The bleak marriage here is, of course, an anticipation of many to come in more significant works by Herrick.


15. Lynn, p. 218.


17. Nevius, Herrick, (p. 18) and Louis J. Budd touch on these similarities, Budd asserting, further, that Adela "is a New Woman, a role that dwarfs her similarities to James's Isabel Archer, whose name she echoes" (Robert Herrick [New York: Twayne, 1971], p. 34).

18. Roberts Herrick, The Gospel of Freedom (New York: Macmillan, 1898), p. 11. All subsequent page references to The Gospel of Freedom and to all other Herrick novels after the identification of the edition of each will be given in the text.


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23. One who concurs with this view is Warner Berthoff, who notes that Herrick “had a weakness . . . for furnishing vaguely transcendental solutions to the dilemmas of the characters he favored” (*The Ferment of Realism* [New York: Free Press, 1965], p. 140).