The Selected Letters of Charles Whibley

The Selected Letters of Charles Whibley:

Scholar and Critic

Edited by

Damian Atkinson

Cambridge
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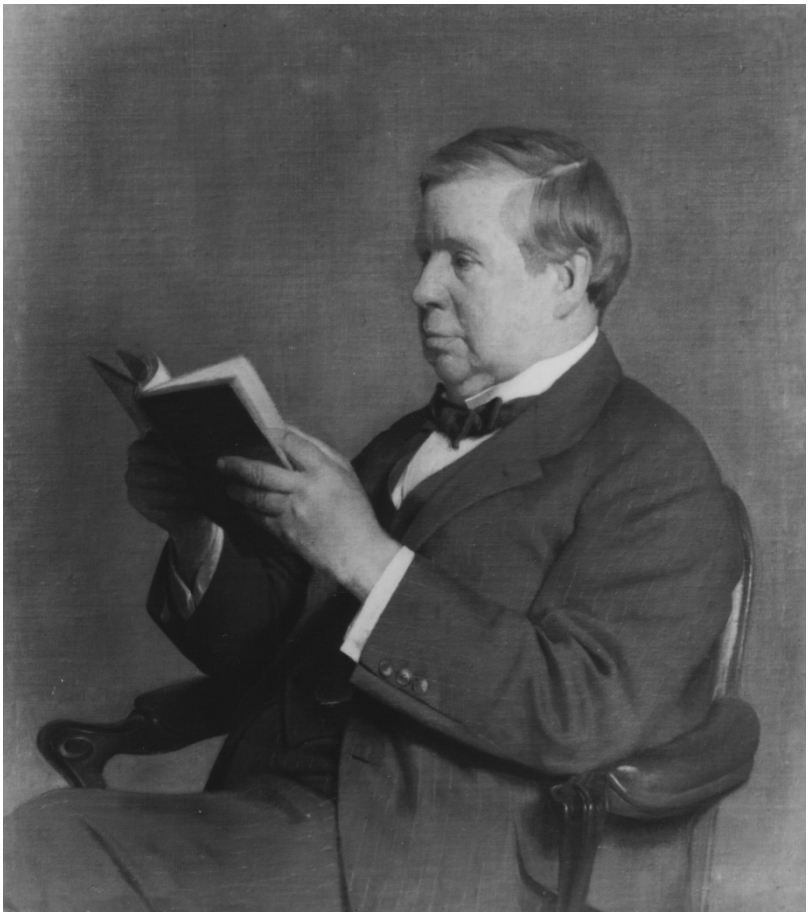
In Memory of

Dermott Kydd

A fine gentleman and true friend



Charles Whibley by Sir Gerald Kelly (National Portrait Gallery, London.

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INTRODUCTION

T. S. Eliot wrote in 1931 that "The Musings without Method" which Whibley contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine* for thirty years, "was one of the best sustained pieces of literary journalism that I know in recent times". A compliment indeed from one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century.

Charles Whibley was born on 9 December 1859 in Sittingbourne, Kent. His parents were the silk merchant Ambrose Whibley and his second wife Mary Jean Davy. His brother Leonard, the classics scholar, was born in 1863. Throughout his life Whibley suffered from neuralgia which caused him great pain and he had numerous operations. He attended Bristol Grammar School and then read classics at Jesus College, Cambridge, where he obtained a First. After Cambridge Whibley worked in the educational department of the publishers Cassell & Co. for three years. While there he published *The Cathedrals of England and Wales* (1888) and contributed three articles to Cassell's *Magazine of Art* and more importantly met William Ernest Henley, editor of the magazine from November 1881 to October 1886. The friendship with Henley soon blossomed and when Henley became editor of the weekly *Scots Observer* in Edinburgh, he wrote to Whibley in January 1889 that "I shall be glad to have your help. Write & make suggestions" (*Henley/Whibley Letters*, I, 7). Whibley duly obliged and became the mainstay of the journal until Henley's resignation in March 1894, writing mainly unsigned "middles" and reviews with the occasional signed article. Despite his continued contributions he was being constantly reminded to have his copy in on time. On the few occasions that Henley managed a short holiday Whibley took the editorial chair in Edinburgh and later in London. Today Whibley is remembered more for one review than his other contributions. In the 5 July 1890 issue of the *Scots Observer* Whibley's unsigned damning review of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, buried in the Reviews and Magazines section, produced a defence from Wilde and correspondence on art and morality from Whibley and others which ran for a few weeks. Henley was editor of the *New Review*, 1895-97, and Whibley became a contributor, though not as committed as previously.

Towards the end of Henley's editorship of the journal, now retitled as the *National Observer*, Whibley had been writing for the *Pall Mall*

Gazette, a task he continued to do in Paris from 1894. Whibley immersed himself in Parisian literary life, becoming friends of Whistler, Paul Valéry, Stéphane Mallarmé and Marcel Schwob. It was here that he met Ethel Birnie Philip, Whistler's sister-in-law, model and secretary. On 8 July 1895 she and Whibley were married at the British Consul's Office, Paris, by (Albemarle) Percy Inglis, Consul-General, with Leonard Whibley and Whistler as witnesses, followed by a church ceremony on 10 July, at the Church of the British Embassy, Paris, by the Rev. J. C. Pyper, M.A.

While living in Paris Whibley was writing for *Blackwood's Magazine* and was also involved in Fisher Unwin's *Library of Literary History* series. For the latter he suggested authors to Unwin and also wrote the prospectus for the series, but declined to have his name attached to the series.

By March 1899 he and Ethel had returned to England and lived at 36 Tite Street, Chelsea, later moving to Haslemere, Surrey, by May 1899. William Blackwood had suggested to Whibley that he write the monthly critique "Musings without Method", the title of a short-lived series that had previously appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* from April 1885 to September 1887. Whibley assented with the comment: "As to your suggestion of Musings without Method it pleases me very much, for it will give me plenty of scope & freedom." And scope it did provide, for Whibley's unsigned "Musings" over the years covered almost every topic and he did not hold back in his views. His first contribution was February 1900 and his last December 1929, although he missed twelve odd months in between. In 1902 he published anonymously his *Musings Without Method: A Record of 1900-01.*

By September 1903 the Whibleys had moved into accommodation at Wavendon Manor, Woburn Sands, Buckinghamshire, a house owned by Sir Henry Hugh Arthur Hoare and they remained there until their new house was built in 1916 at Great Brickhill.

Besides *Blackwood's Magazine*, Whibley also contributed a fairly regular Saturday article, "The Letters of an Englishman", from 3 November 1906 to 30 October 1920 in the *Daily Mail* and he published anonymously two collections of these articles in 1911 and 1912, with a signed reprint of the first series in 1915.

A major friendship was with Lord Northcliffe: Whibley, the erudite Classics scholar and conservative thinker, and Alfred Harmsworth, the journalist and newspaper proprietor, who had first met through W. E. Henley, seemed unlikely companions, but they became very good friends to the extent that Lord Northcliffe (as he became in 1905) took him on a trip to America in 1906. This resulted in Whibley's articles for

Blackwood's Magazine from November 1906 to May 1907 which were later published as *American Sketches* (1908) with the dedication to Northcliffe. When Northcliffe went to Paris in March 1910 for a short period to improve his health Whibley was one of the very few who went with him. The two men corresponded until Northcliffe's death in 1922, and such was the friendship that Northcliffe left Whibley an annuity in his Will. Whibley wrote to *The Times Literary Supplement* after Northcliffe's death showing another side to Northcliffe: his love of books.

Another important friendship was with the publisher Sir Frederick Macmillan, who suggested that Whibley became a reader for the firm, which he duly did for many years. Whibley's letters to Macmillans commenting on an author's manuscript do not contain the actual report except for that of Thomas Hardy's widow in 1928. Whibley often writes that a book has no value or is not worthy of publication but unfortunately we do not have a report to support his views, so we have lost an insight into his dismissals of many books: one or two of the books he dismisses were in fact published. Charles Morgan commented (*The House of Macmillan*, 1943, 219) that "Whibley's [report] had fire and light in it which enabled him to see and know himself, to mark and evaluate his prejudices, and to prevent the distinctions of aesthetic taste from being obscured by moral indignation". Sir Frederick Macmillan, in a letter of 19 December 1918 to George Augustin Macmillan, agreed with him and (Maurice) Harold Macmillan, that "we ought to make up Whibley's enumeration to £300 for this year & continue it at the same rate. His reports on manuscripts are most valuable & his general literary advice is just what we require".

Another life-long friend was Lady Cynthia Asquith who recalled their first meeting in about 1904 at the home of Lady Plymouth at Hewell

> Among the guests star-scattered in the vast hall, I noticed, the moment I arrived, a short funny-looking man. With his pendulous, very long upper lip, several subsidiary chins and obviously myopic eyes, he was a strictly ugly little man□yet there was something about him that reminded me of a lovable, if unlovely, nursery plaything called, I think, a "Billykin"; and though he was some distance away, I could see that he was talking with immense zest and that those about him were shaken with laughter (*Remember and be Glad*, 91)

Whibley took to the Hon. Cynthia Charteris, as she then was, and developed a deep infatuation for her which was not always to Cynthia's liking and his letters pour out his admiration and later his love for her. This friendship introduced Whibley to a wider aristocratic set and he was

often at the Charteris family home at Stanway in Gloucestershire and for the last decade of his life he was a regular summer visitor. Cynthia's marriage in 1907 to Herbert ("Beb") Asquith, whose father was Prime Minister from 1908 until December 1916, did not deter Whibley's quest for Cynthia.

There was one other major friendship in Whibley's life: the poet and editor T. S. Eliot. In contrast to his other friendships T. S. Eliot was more in Whibley's vein: a graduate of Harvard and very much a man of letters. Whibley became a contributor to the *Criterion* under Eliot's editorship and the two became good friends, to such an extent that Whibley was instrumental in securing Eliot's naturalisation as a British citizen in 1927. While editing the *Criterion* Eliot was working at Lloyds Bank and in May 1925 moves were made to offer him a Research Fellowship at All Souls, Oxford, but despite Whibley's written support (among others) he was not elected, but his future was assured elsewhere

> Eliot had joined the Board of Directors of Faber and Gwyer in the Autumn of 1925 after having worked for Lloyds Bank for eight years. His friend, the journalist Charles Whibley, had been consulted by Geoffrey Faber about finding a literary adviser. Whibley suggested Eliot (apparently over dinner at All Souls). On meeting Eliot, Faber was so impressed that he immediately offered him a place on the Board. ("The History of Faber: 1920s, 4 May 2016, http://www.faber.co.uk/blog/about/faber-1920s").

Whibley had worked under Henley's editorship in the 1890s and early 1900s on the *Tudor Translations*, a series of reprints. In the 1920s Whibley edited a small second series which was not successful as Michael Sadleir, a director of Constable, remarked that "Constable's were considerably out of pocket on the whole venture".

Whibley rarely mentions his first wife Ethel in his letters. His visits to Stanway and London to see, dine and go to the theatre with Cynthia, seem the actions of a bachelor. On Ethel's death, 21 April 1920, while they are holidaying in France, he remarks to Edmund Gosse on 2 May: "I have lost the closest & wisest comrade that man ever had, & to make the blow heavier, fate took her from me at the end of a long & happy journey in Southern France." He poured out his feelings to Cynthia and decided to take a sea voyage to South America in 1921.

His world was now taken up with his monthly "Musings" and his weekly Saturday articles, "Letters of an Englishman", for the *Daily Mail*. Whibley had been a consultant for the Royal Literary Fund since 1913 recommending, or not, writers who had applied for a grant. In 1919 he became a committee member. He was awarded an Honorary LL.D from St

Andrews, in May 1922. Prior to this he had been made an Honorary Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1912, and had given the prestigious Leslie Stephen lecture, on Jonathan Swift, at Cambridge University, in 1917. In October 1917 Whibley had paid a short visit to France at the request of the French authorities and recounted this in *Blackwood's Magazine*, December 1917. He visited Belgium in 1919 and described this in *Blackwood's Magazine*, October 1919.

He threw himself into work and 1925 was a busy year as he published his two volume biography *Lord John Manners and His Friends*, a study of the 7th Duke of Rutland, and the *Collected Essays of W. P. Ker* and also a three volume *The Works of William Shakespeare chronologically arranged.* Whibley had not forgotten his old friend and editor W. E. Henley, and with Sir Frederick Macmillan, he produced Macmillans' edition of Henley's *Works* in five volumes but did not attach his name. After the death of Henley in 1903 Whibley had constantly been asked to provide permission for the inclusion of Henley's poems in a variety of anthologies, and in a letter to Harold Macmillan, 1 September 1921, he writes: "This making of modern anthologies is becoming a commercial pest, & I think the makers of them should be asked to pay." They were then charged a small fee.

Whibley now had to travel on his own and in late February 1926 he went to Egypt and the reason is not known, but it did result in an article in *Blackwood's Magazine*, April 1926.

1927 was a turning point in his life for he married his god-daughter Philippa Raleigh, forty-three years his junior, and daughter of the Oxford Professor of English Sir Walter Raleigh, in October. In August 1929 they stayed with the Earl of Wemyss and his family in Scotland.

Their final visit to France was in January 1930 and while at Hyères Whibley was corresponding with Mrs Katharine Richmond, who had nursed Henley's widow Anna through her final illness, to sort out the problem of his biography of Henley, a biography which was first mentioned in the press in the *Academy*, 17 August 1912. Whibley died on 4 March 1930 and his body was returned to England and buried at St Mary's Church, Great Broomhill, Buckinghamshire. The obituary in *The Times*, 5 March 1930, spoke of his carrying "on in the changed conditions of this age the combination of man of letters and political pamphleteer, associated with such names as L'Estrange and Defoe". In summation the obituary stated: "Both he and his opinions would perhaps have been more at home in London, somewhere between the Restoration and the French Revolution: but we may be glad that there was at least one of his sort among us in the late 19th and early 20th centuries."

Among the tributes to him was Barrie's in a letter to Lady Gwendolen Cecil, 11 April 1930 (*Barrie Letters*, 141)

> Yes, I am sad about Charles Whibley of whom I was very fond. He had a remarkable individuality, sometime widely extravagant in talk and again so modest and delightful, you would have thought at time he wanted to reduce (by drastic means) the population of his country, though if you knew him closely you know he wouldn't kill a fly; he was really hopelessly lovable and kind. At his best he wrote about the best English of his day.

An old Cambridge friend, Sir Stanley Leathes, in his "Charles Whibley by an Old Friend", *Blackwood's Magazine*, April 1930 wrote

> In an age of critical anarchy it is not easy to appraise the loss to English letters of this staunch upholder of all that is best in our literary tradition. He stood for intellectual honesty and sound craftsmanship, and to everything he wrote he brought ripe learning and a pungent wit that will long be remembered.

A short obituary in the *Daily Mail*, 5 March 1930, finished with

> Mr Whibley was one of the "polemical dragons". He had no match as a controversial writer. The hard, chisel strokes of his style were never more enjoyable than when in one of his many historical books or literary studies he was demolishing an accepted judgment on some figure of the past. He had prejudices and expressed them strongly. One of the chief was that whatever the Whigs did was wrong.

Whibley was a great talker who held strong views on almost every subject. One in particular was the education of women and in a letter to Macmillan & Co in 1921 he writes: "Cambridge is very good now, or it would be if the Harpies of Newham & Girton would leave it alone." In an article "The encroachment of women. Their desire for university education" in the *Nineteenth Century*, April 1897, he writes that: "No hardship can change the truth that Cambridge exists for men and men alone." Was he also anti-Semitic or merely echoing the views of the time? Perhaps, for on more than one occasion he refers to acquaintances as "Ebrew" or "Jew" and in one notable outburst comments

> And in the tube I saw thousands of things that called themselves even women & children, lying in disordered heaps. They "palliated"—that is the only word. They were Ebrew Jews, unclean & loathsome, & all terrified. What an odious thing the human race can be! (to Cynthia Asquith, 3 October 1917)

His conservativism was not to everyone's taste, but

> Inevitably so definite, extreme and challenging a man had, and still has, his detractors; but whatever Charles Whibley's faults, real or imputed, I know that for those friends—and they were many—who delighted, indeed revelled in his company, life has been very much less lively since his gay and gallant spirit left this planet (*Remember and be Glad,* 102).

And

> Charles Whibley was a great talker; he held his opinions obstinately, and the opinion of others he belaboured heartily, *pour s'encourager lui-même*, one might say. So far as I could see he stood in fear of only two men: Henley and Whistler. (*Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein, 1872-1900*, 285).

Whibley himself shows his true colours in a letter to William Blackwood, 2 November [1898]

> I suppose you are the oldest magazine in the world, & it is a wonderful thing that you alone have been able to stem this awful tide of cheap printed stuff, which threatens to overwhelm us all. For people like myself who hate progress, it is an infinite satisfaction that there is one magazine of sound opinion which has never condescended to the common trick of philosophy.

In her *Portrait of Barrie* (173), Cynthia Asquith notes that Whibley was a usual summer guest along with Barrie and others at Stanway. On 3 September 1930 she remarks sadly: "Our first August here without Whibley □ 'turn down a glass'."

EDITORIAL PROCEDURES

Whibley's letters have not previously been published but many to him have, notably in *The Letters of William Ernest Henley to Charles Whibley* (2013). The current selection consists of three hundred and four letters by Whibley, one by his first wife Ethel, and eleven letters by his second wife Philippa. The layout of the letters has been standardised. The holding institution is indicated to the left of the letterhead. Any previous major publication or quotation of a letter is then noted. The position of the address is to the right irrespective of its original position and a printed or embossed address is signified by italics. Below the address the date has been standardised. Postscripts are retained after the closure, whether written as an afterthought at the letterhead or not. Whibley's spelling has been retained throughout, as has his punctuation, except where clarity demands an alteration or insertion. Cancelled passages are generally included and illegible words are indicated within square brackets and words inserted by Whibley are indicated within < >. Where the sense demands, an apparently omitted word may be added within square brackets. The closing of the letters has been centralised irrespective of the original position. Whibley's use of quotation marks or underlining for titles has been retained. Where a reference in the text is unidentified, or too well-known, a footnote has, in most cases, not been added.

Working as a reader for Macmillan Whibley corresponded with a few of the family and it is obvious that he was on good terms with them but it is not always possible to establish to whom he was writing except for Sir Frederick Macmillan, (Maurice) Harold Macmillan, George Augustin Macmillan and Daniel de Mendi Macmillan, so such letters are simply headed "**To Macmillan & Co.**". Unfortunately Whibley did not include a year date in the majority of his letters, which has made some dating difficult, with some dates being conjectural. Some of the letters to Cynthia Asquith and Macmillans have a year date in an unknown hand and cannot always be relied upon. The one notable missing recipient of Whibley's letters is his onetime editor and friend William Ernest Henley, who unfortunately tended to destroy the majority of the letters he received.

SOURCES OF LETTERS AND SHORT TITLES

Asquith	Cynthia Asquith, *Remember and be Glad* (James Barrie: 1952)
Atkinson	Damian Atkinson
Barrie Letters	*Letters of J. M. Barrie*, ed. Viola Meynell (Peter Davies: 1942)
Beauman	Nicola Beauman, *Cynthia Asquith* (Hamish Hamilton Ltd: 1987)
Beinecke	Yale University Library
BL	British Library, London
Bodleian	Bodleian Library, University of Oxford
Berg	Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library
Brotherton	Brotherton Collection, Leeds University
Cadbury	Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham University
Cambridge	University Library, Cambridge
Columbia	Columbia University, New York
Diaries	*The Diaries of Lady Cynthia Asquith 1915-18,* Foreword by L. P. Hartley (Hutchinson: 1968)
Eliot Letters	*The Letters of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden, vol. 3: 1926-1927 (Faber & Faber: 2012)
Faber	Archives of Faber & Faber, publishers
Getty	Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
Glasgow	The Library, University of Glasgow
Henley Letters	*The Selected Letters of W. E. Henley*, ed. Damian Atkinson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).
Henley/Whibley Letters	*The Letters of William Ernest Henley to Charles Whibley*, 2 vols, ed. Damian Atkinson (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2013)
Houghton	Houghton Library, Harvard University
King's	King's College, Cambridge
Lasner	Mark Samuels Lasner Collection, University of Delaware Library
Lilly	Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington

Morgan	The Morgan Library, New York
NLS	National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
Paris	Bibliothèque nationale
Portrait of Barrie	Cynthia Asquith, *Portrait of Barrie* (James Barrie: 1954)
Princeton	Princeton University Library, New Jersey
Northcliffe	Reginald Pound and Geoffrey Harmsworth, *Northcliffe* (Cassell: 1959)
Queen's Belfast	McClay Library, Queen's University, Belfast
Reading	Museum of English Rural Life & University of Reading Special Collections
Shakespeare	Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon
Temple	Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia
Texas	Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas at Austin
West Sussex	West Sussex Record Office, Chichester
Wilde Letters	*The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Merlin Holland & Rupert Hart-Davis (Fourth Estate: 2000)
Wiltshire	Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, Chippenham
York	Scott Library, York University, Toronto

A Brief Chronology of Charles Whibley

1859	Born 9 December, Sittingbourne, Kent
1863	His brother Leonard born 20 April
1879	Leaves Bristol Grammar School
1884	B.A (Classics), Jesus College, Cambridge
1886-89	Editorial department at Cassells. Meets W. E. Henley, editor of the *Magazine of Art*. Writes for *Magazine of Art*, January 1888.
1888	*The Cathedrals of England and Wales.*
1889	First article for Henley's *Scots Observer,* 26 January. In *Cap and Gown: Three Centuries of Cambridge Wit*
1890	Notorious review of Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray, Scots Observer*, 5 July
1893	Visits *Bibliothèque nationale* in September
1893-1900	Various introductions to Henley's *Tudor Translations*
1894	Living at 10 Millbank Street, London. Co-edited with Henley *A Book of English Prose, Character and Incident, 1387-1649.* Last contribution for *National Observer,* 31 March. Writes for *Pall Mall Gazette* and becomes its Paris correspondent
1895	Writes for Henley's *New Review* January 1895 to December 1897. Mother dies 14 January. Visits Edinburgh in June. Marries Ethel Birnie Philip, 8 July (civil wedding), and 10 July (church wedding), in Paris
1896	Publishes *A Book of Scoundrels*
1897	Advisor for Fisher Unwin's *Library of Literary History*. Trip to Spain from Paris in June
1898	Publishes *Studies in Frankness*
1899	Returns to England. To Madrid 2 June, back on 12 June
1900	First *"Musings without Method"* in February *Blackwood's Magazine*. Paris and Senegal in June. Paris in November. Publishes *The Pageantry of Life*
1902	Publishes anonymously *Musings without Method: A Record of 1900-01*
1903	Publishes *William Makepeace Thackeray*
1904	Meets Cynthia Asquith. Publishes *Literary Portraits*

1906	Visits America with Lord Northcliffe in June. Writes for *Daily Mail*
1907	Attends Henley Memorial at St Paul's, 11 July
1908	*American Sketches* as a result of his American trip
1909	Summer in France and a visit to Berlin
1910	In Paris with Northcliffe
1911	Visiting the Brownlows and the Custs at Belton House, in April. 1st unsigned *Letters of an Englishman*. Macmillan suggests Whibley as a reader
1912	Hon. Fellow, Jesus College, Cambridge. M.A. Cambridge. 2nd unsigned *Letters of an Englishman*
1913	Introduction to *Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough*
1915	Honorary LL.D, Edinburgh, 8 July. Visits Cynthia at Littlehampton. Signed reprint *Letters of an Englishman*
1916	They move into their newly built Broomhill House, Great Brickhill, in November
1917	*Political Portraits (1st series).* Gives the *Leslie Stephen Lecture* at Cambridge University. Attends internment of Harry Cust at Belton. Visits France as guest of French authorities resulting in December *Blackwood's* article
1919	Visits Belgium
1920	Holiday in France and Ethel dies, 21 May. Buried at Great Brickhill, Buckinghamshire. Resigns from *Daily Mail*
1921	Departs for Buenos Aires, 21 January. Returns to Southampton, 7 May. Operations on his head, 2 October and 7 October
1922	Honorary LL.D, St Andrews, 3 May
1924	Edited second series of *Tudor Translations*. Trip to Holland to visit art galleries in September.
1925	*Lord John Manners and His Friends*. On 2LO (BBC London) 26 May Whibley gives the counter lecture to George Grossmith's "Why not Brighten London?" held at the London School of Economics. Edits *Collected Essays of W. P. Ker* in 2 vols and *The Works of William Shakespeare chronologically arranged* in 3 vols
1926	Visits Egypt in February with resulting article in *Blackwood's,* July
1927	Marries his god-daughter Philippa Raleigh, 19 October

1929	Heart attack in April. They holiday in Italy and later cruise to Norway. Last “Musings without Method” in December
1930	They visit France and Whibley dies on 4 March 1930, at Hyères. Buried at Great Brickhill.

THE LETTERS:
1888-1930

I. EARLY JOURNALISM AND FRANCE

APRIL 1888 TO DECEMBER 1898

To George Bernard Shaw[1]
MS BL.

9 New Inn, W.C.
2 April [1888]

Dear Shaw,

Don't you want to re-publish your *Cashel Byron's Profession* in a more popular form?[2] I believe you said something about doing so at the Blands' sometime ago.[3] If you do wish to do so, I think Cassells would probably take it up for you.

I spoke to Arnold-Forster about it the other day and it would be quite worth your while to give him a call.[4] His address is

H. O. Arnold-Forster
Messrs Cassell & Co
La Belle Sauvage
E.C.

If you do call on him, it would be better to write him a line first—he is not at Cassells' every day—& you might say that I mentioned it to you.

Yours very truly
Charles Whibley

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[1] George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), socialist and writer.

[2] Shaw's novel of an Irish boxer was originally published in serial form in *To-day: A Monthly Magazine of Scientific Socialism* between April 1885 and April 1886, then as a book in 1886. A new and revised edition was published by Walter Scott in 1889.

[3] The novelist and children's writer Edith Nesbit (1858-1924) had married the bank clerk Hubert Bland (1855-1914) in 1880. Shaw and the Blands met at a Fabian Society meeting in 1884 although Shaw had met Hubert at an earlier meeting.

[4] Hugh Oakeley Arnold-Forster (1855-1909), barrister and politician. Unionist MP for West Belfast, 1892-1906, and for Croydon, 1906 until his death. From 1903 to 1906 he was Secretary of State for War.

To George Bell & Sons[5]
MS Reading.

6 Mechlin Mansions, Brook Green, W.
29 March [1889]

My dear Sir,

I am editing a volume of verses and jeune d'esprit of all sorts relating to the University of Cambridge[6] and I am most anxious to include in my book Mr. Calverley's "Hic Vic, hic est" , which is printed in *Verses and Translations.*[7]

Of course no book of the kind relating to Cambridge would be complete without something by Mr. Calverley, who knew and described University life so well.

I know not to whom to apply for permission to reprint but I feel quite sure that you will help me in the matter, & if the copyright of the volume is not yours, will bring my request before those to whom the copyright belongs.

I am
My dear Sir
Yours faithfully
Charles Whibley

[5] The publishers.
[6] Whibley's *In Cap and Gown: Three Centuries of Cambridge Wit* (Kegan Paul, Trench & Co.: 1889).
[7] *Verses and Translations* (1862) by the barrister Charles Stuart Calverley (1831-84) who was educated at Oxford and Cambridge. Whibley included "Hic Vic, hic est".

To the Editor, *Scots Observer*

London
16 July 1890[8]

Sir,

The old battle between subject and treatment is likely to be fiercely waged as long as artists and critics inhabit the same planet.[9] And as an ultimate settlement of the controversy would prematurely close the freshest and most entertaining of discussions, it is to be hoped that one will never be arrived at. Yet I think it is possible, without sacrificing a cherished topic, to enter into the contest with more spirit and energy than the writer of the article "Crumbs of Criticism", which appeared in your last number, has permitted himself to do.[10] Your reviewer, though he is loath to confess it, is fighting in the camp of the Philistines. In spite of the best intentions, he cannot endure the theory that style is sufficient for the production of a work of art. The further element for which he seeks he "hardly likes to call moral", yet knows not "how otherwise to define it". In support of his opinion he quotes one of the best instances that could be

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[8] Published under the heading "Art and Morality", *Scots Observer*, 19 July 1890.

[9] Whibley, in an unsigned review, in the *Scots Observer,* 5 July 1890, had attacked Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* which had appeared in the July issue of *Lippincott's Magazine*. Whibley's article was buried in the section "Reviews and Magazines"

> Why go grubbing in muck heaps? The world is fair, and the proportion of healthy-minded men and honest women to those that are foul, fallen or unnatural is great. Mr. Oscar Wilde has again been writing stuff that were better unwritten; and while *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which he contributes to *Lippincott's*, is ingenious, interesting, full of cleverness, and plainly the work of a man of letters, it is false art for its interest is medico-legal; it is false to human nature—for its hero is a devil; it is false to morality—for it is not made sufficiently clear that the writer does not prefer a course of unnatural iniquity to a life of cleanliness, health and sanity. The story—which deals with matters only fitted for the Criminal Investigation Department or a hearing *in camera*—is discreditable alike to author and editor. Mr. Wilde has brains, and art, and style; but, if he can write for none but outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph-boys, the sooner he takes to tailoring (or some other decent trade) the better for his own reputation and the public morals.

[10] An unsigned review by John Hepburn Millar (1864-1929), of William Ernest Henley's *Views and Reviews*, under the heading "Crumbs of Criticism", *Scots Observer*, 12 July 1890.

found. For it is impossible to deny that *Bel-Ami*,[11] with all its brilliance and dexterity, is tainted by a caddishness which its author cannot for long conceal. But the failure of *Bel-Ami* has nothing to do with that mysterious "further element". It is a bad novel because M. Guy de Maupassant has not handled his subject like an artist. What your reviewer is deposed to regard as immorality seems to me to be nothing but a lack of proportion. The author is dealing with certain facts and types which are not wholly pleasant; yet he might have woven them into a work of art had he set a watch over his style and suppressed his own idiosyncrasy. Instead of excluding from his story all details that distract or are trivial, he has purposely exaggerated whatever is *canaille*. So that by tediously insisting upon vulgar incidents he has destroyed the balance of his story, and by his want of restraint exposed the prejudices of a *boulevardier*. But surely this is a fault of style, not of morality. Another writer might have accepted all the characters, all the episodes, of *Bel-Ami*, and by giving to each its proper place, its due proportion, have achieved a work of which on one could say that it was written "by a bounder for bounders". In painting style is something more than brushwork; in literature is not to be limited by words. Arrangement, harmony of construction, selection, taste, feeling, the subtle expression of the artist's personality in accordance with the rules of his art—these are some of the qualities which go to make up style. And it is because these qualities are not always present in M. De Maupassant's work that his novels leave an unpleasant taste in the mouth.

This I imagine to be the theory of art enunciated in Mr. Henley's *Views and Reviews*.[12] One word, however, which he constantly uses needs further definition. What does he mean by "selection"? Who is the arbiter of propriety? If the reader, then the whole question has been begged, and we must perforce acknowledge that subject-matter no less than style demands criticism. If, however, as I believe to be the case, it is the artist's duty to select material as best suits his own method without regard to the taste of his readers, then the critics has nothing to say to his choice, and may only condemn or applaud his treatment. What are the materials of Dostoievsky's masterpiece, *le Crime et le Châtiment*?[13] A murderer, a prostitute, a libertine, two or three policemen, a scoundrel who drank his wife's stockings, much hysteria, the two supreme dreams of fiction. From the readers point of view this is not a wise selection. Yet the author has remembered throughout that it is his "function not to copy but to

[11] Guy de Maupassant's novel was published in 1885.
[12] *Views and Reviews* (1890), a collection articles and reviews by the poet, critic and editor of the *Scots Observer*, William Ernest Henley (1849-1903).
[13] Published in 1867.

synthesise"; he has not destroyed his work by a mean regard for realism; by enveloping his characters in a fantastic atmosphere he has lifted the grime and vice of humanity into the sphere of romance, he has justified by his grandeur of treatment the selection of hideous types and squalid incidents. What is it that makes *Madame Bovary* immeasurably superior to *Sapho*?[14] Strip the two novels of their style and there is little to choose between their morality or subject matter. But while Flaubert selected such material as the resources of his art could deal with worthily, M. Daudet deliberately chose a topic which should prove that he also was a "naturalist", and treated it with the filthy self-consciousness of one who finds pleasure in scrawling obscenities upon the wall. Here, too, we have a contrast of style, not a difference of moral feeling. And I believe it would be impossible to point to a single work within the whole range of fiction which was made or marred by any quality of style save style in its widest and most liberal interpretation.

Art then is *un-moral*. If this theory has any secure basis your criticism of *Doran Gray* seems to me more than fair in its applause and less than just in its condemnation. You find in it art and no morals; I detect in its pages lots of morality and no art. From the beginning to end Mr. Wilde has permitted his love of paradox to obscure his sense of proportion. If I may parody the conversational style of Sir Henry Wotton—surely one of the dullest characters in fiction—there is nothing in life so tedious as an epigram.[15] And a novel which is made up of inverted commonplaces and idle phrases developed παρά προσδκίαν has no more claim to be called artistic than has a picture composed entirely of dazzling spots. Does an artist break the march of his story with tedious dissertations upon jewels and wearisome catalogues of furniture? And does he not, when dealing with an avowedly delicate topic, refrain, as Marlowe refrains in *Edward II.*,[16] from superfluous detail and exotic sentimentality? Mr. Wilde has proved he lacks the tact and restraint to give us an artistic representation of a hero who is half Jack-the-Ripper, half Gaveston,[17] and the reception which has been accorded his story must be peculiarly painful to him. He himself claims an artistic triumph, and he has been hailed by at least one religious print as a moral reformer. Was there ever so unhappy an apotheosis?

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[14] Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) and Alphonse Daudet's *Sapho* (1884).
[15] In *Dorian Gray*.
[16] Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II* (1594).
[17] Piers Gaveston, 1st Earl of Cornwall, was a close favourite of Edward II and seen as homosexual. He was executed by some of Edward's barons in 1312.