

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, May 30, 1891 to February 6, 1892)

## The World

Mr. Editor

I desire to call attention for a few moments to The World. That estimable planet has just celebrated the new birthday and is entitled to some mark of respect from this club. We are not deceived by the anniversary announcement. We recognize "1892" is a fiction drawn by the feminine prerogative for the promoting of a cheerful resolution and a complacent spirit in the face of advancing years.

Mother Earth has seen more than 1892 birthdays of course. But she is excellently preserved doing credit to the sex in that particular; and if these fictions contribute to that result, she may close up her calendar and commence a new era of reckoning as often as her feminine instincts may suggest, and this club will continue to be her slave.

The expedient is a wholesome one. How long would Diana continued to be an inspiration to Art, if she had held acquaintance with time and now stood among us as a contemporary, surrounded with its rebble of years? Take another case. Would any Orlando among us "Hunt the forest" here about, and with tremulous Jack-Knife carve Rosalind upon the trees; "hang odes and elegies on brambles; all forsooth deifying the name of Rosalind," if that ravishing creature should come to him in her own proper person of today, her once glorified eighteen darkened by the shadow of four hundred years, and say: "Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown more than your enemies."?

And thou, Olivia – sweet, cruel, beautiful Olivia! Repose in the peaceful sepulture of your Octavo and cheat the ravening years. Then, au' you love me not, I'll  
"Make me a window cabin at your gate, and call upon my soul within the house. Write loyal cantos of continued love. And singing loud, even in the dead of night, – Holla your name to the reverberant hills and make the babbling gossip of the air cry out, Olivia!" But even memory might fail should you step from the narrow enchantment of that volume and take upon you the realism of years.

To be sure, these are fanciful persons. But then there is Ethel, the tangible companion of my better self, the living joy of my most secret soul. Ethel is by no means young. They say she was a debutante before I came into the country. Could she thrill me with that ringing laugh as she does, or stir forgotten fibres in my battered old heart by the music of her speech; could her discourse ensnare me out of my growing pessimism by the fresh appositeness of its deductions me who know the directness of innocence and the simulations of the world wise –

could she find real blushes to hide among the roses which I bring – as she does very prettily, bless her! – and send me home night after night with a brilliant young resolution possessing me – could she do these things, think you, if in a sudden access of candor she should say: I am not so young as I seem; I am as old as you are?”

No; all things are for the best. Ethel shall wear her credit of acknowledged years, and Madame Earth shall have recognition of her Christian Era. The dear old mother to ask her withered bosom in the spring with flowers that she would have but faint heart for sheltering if we denied her the solace of a rejuvenation.

All this Mr. Editor is from the point, and mere figure of speech as you may observe. We know what the world is in fact, it is principally a mineral body, somewhat spherical in outline and of considerable proportions. It revolves upon its axis before the sun, like a waffle iron, heating first one side and then the other. It is this literal world to which I call attention. It is curiously propelled and much transpires upon its surface in course of those alternate applications of solar heat, which the waffle sententiously styles the “Day” and “Night.” We should take note of these things; but being a literary body we do not. The literary atmosphere is not of the world, and when we breathe it for a while we fancy ourselves as it were supra terrestrial. According to tradition it is not for letters, but for journalism to note the course of events; and any man who would attempt that field from the platform upon which you stand Mr. Editor, must needs possess a great hardihood.

If the day of miracles have not passed, we should expect to see such a man convicted like Belshasser of old, by some spirit necromancy on the wall. Who knows but the venerable legend over your head might not in a twinkling blossom forth the terrific accusation: “Lo, here comes one with a news paper.” But let us proceed softly.

Experience tells us that one point of view from which mortals see only the upper air and sky, is at the bottom of a well; and it is conceded that the environment has a narrowing influence upon the mind; indeed, Mr. Hood has even pointed out to us the danger of kicking the bucket in the descent, On the other hand it is apparent that the higher you rise above the earth, the more you see of it, necessarily. The truly supra-terrestrial view, if you insist upon that, discloses in fact little else than the world panorama exhibits it at contemplative range.

I regard this sir, as a demonstration and without further apology; submit to you here with a Memorial of the World Panorama for January. On the fifth day from the reading of the last budget, in the night season, the World swept down the last stretches of the long ellipse..., and found itself just where it started from 12 months ago; wither it had returned out of the trackless void, without chart or compass, times

unnumbered, since the day of its creation. Has it occurred to you that the world was once young?

I sat looking out on the world that night, and as the dial marked the passing of the goal, my fancy travelled backward over the ellipse to the day of its nativity. The stars moved silently overhead, through the silent chambers of the sky. "Have they memory?" I mused, "Memory that morning when they sang together 'God Speed' to a young world?"

When the Omnipotent, out of the elemental dust fashioned the earth and buoyed its foundation upon the obedient air, When chaos disappeared, and when to each natural force He gave its office. When Law and Order led the infant world into the searches of an allotted time upon its infinite way? When the day-spring welled up out of the very darkness which had lain so long upon the face of the waters? What a dawning that was! What joy was there in that first quickening ray which pierced the farthest heavens with the message of a creation! Small wonder that the stars sang together upon that day, "And where wert thou, O man, out of thy vain-glory answer me if thou canst. The earth was old ere even man was. Age had marked its walls with an effacing touch and time was writ in scars upon its rocks. The music of its nativity had long merged into the silence of the widening past, a silence unbroken by the rude echo of crumbling ruin. Alas! thou wast born into a habitation of decay."

But there; I am a foolish old man, and too much given to these vagaries. I drew one conclusion however, from my vigil on that night, which you shall hear.

Men opened their eyes upon the morrow and said, "This is the new year, and they wished each other joy of it, crying with right goodwill; "Happy New Year." and they said to themselves: we have swept away this ugly past of ours. We closed our eyes and opened them this day upon a virgin year. There has been some strange transition in the "heavens overnight, and time begins anew today. It is well. This day we shall commence to live aright."

Now I have watched all through that solemn night, and I shook my head very sadly to hear these things. There is no landmark of time. There is no beginning and no ending within its whole compass. The Earth had not paused at midnight. There had been no transformation in the sky. There was not even the fiction of a perceptual succession with which monarchies are wont to hide the interregnum. No voice had cried: "The Year is dead; long live the year!"

I saw plainly that man had contrived these years for his own illusion. I have heard children argue the time begins when you turn the hourglass over, and I have seen them in their play, holding Time in the leash by staying their hands from the glass until they should be ready for the hours to proceed.

A man approached me and cried: "Happy New Year!" I said to him: Sir, do you think that this is indeed a new year, and that you are now disassociated from the past? It is not so. Stretch a wire about this Earth and hold the ends in your hands. Speak to the West; say "Happy New Year" if you like. There would be some mockery I think, in the instant message which your wire would bring to you out of the East.

"Happy New Year" in sooth! Your words spoken upon the morning of your so-called new year would return to you upon the backward flight of time, and find you in yesterday! You would stand holding the ends of your wire, a Colossus bestriding the peninsulas of two years, inhabiting neither. Sir, there are no years. I beg you to reflect upon these things." And when I left him he was in deep thought. I find no comfort in this illusion of a new year. But an abiding tranquility diffused itself upon my spirit as I looked out of my window upon that night and thought of the great world moving upon its ordered course without faltering, without swerving, true to its first impulse through myriad years.

There is a powerful Emperor in the East who was building him a Golden throne during this month of January. To his ministers this looks like an extravagance; to his parliament it means an appropriation; to his loyal subjects it is an object of never-ending wonder. The unthinking call it eccentricity; knowing ones say that it wears a political aspect.

We with our larger view have, have not failed to perceive analogies which throw about this episode a melancholy and poetic interest. Man is but the child of Nature. Though he wear a crown; and more by token, he takes after his Mother. Heredity is inexorable. It is this which furnishes us with what we call analogies.

Do you see that arbor of green? It is a ruined town. Where once stood a noble pile, echoing with the tread of mailed feet the clamor of knightly oaths, the song of woman and the sweet laughter of the young, there remains only the gaunt skeleton of the time. But Nature was kind. She sent thither the ivy and covered the dead frame with living green. Even when the autumn comes she gives a halo to the leaf before it falls. Mark that field of green. Does it not look like burnished gold in the sun? It is a ripe for the sickle. And what is this golden glory that kindles the very air about us into a tremor of warm, glowing light? It is the sun. What a spectacle! How every moment new splendors burst upon the view! Even that storm cloud which but a little while ago muttered threateningly over the West, is now wreathed in the smiles of this, all pervading, luminous joy, and floats in high Heaven, a golden promise.

Is not this indeed the triumph of the Monarch of the Sky? It may be, but it is also the end. It syncs. It touches the horizon for one moment, a disc of purest gold,

and it is gone. The sensitive air glows for a space where it had been warmed in two color by that throne in the heavens, and the fleecy canopy above it, where it had been touched with magic light, glistens brightly.

We call that after-glow. It is Memory. Then they wrap themselves in shadows and are seen no more. Gild thy throne, thou splendid Emperor – Thine empire draws near the West.

Robert Ramsey  
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