

# Glimpses of the Rich and Varied Life of Charles Wilberforce Ames (1855-1921)

When Charles W. Ames died in St. Paul in April 1921, the *Minneapolis Tribune* wrote of him, “No man in the city gave himself more unselfishly, more generously, more usefully to the betterment of the community than he... Thousands were beneficiaries of his participation and leadership in enterprises and movements for the benefit of his city and state....”

“And then there was the charm and grace of manner, the gentlemanly courtesy and delightful giving of himself in personal intercourse and friendship.... A man of fine intellectual attainments and rare culture, his home was a center of literary and artistic interest....”

“St. Paul will hardly know how to get along with ‘Charlie’ Ames.”

The *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, in a full-page obituary, called him “the citizen we could least afford to lose....”

The great humorist Will Rogers was famous for his saying, “I never met a man I didn’t like.” With respect to Charles Ames, that saying might be turned around to say, “He never met a man (or woman or child) who didn’t like him.” (Except some Minnesota labor leaders, whose efforts he resisted strenuously. See more below.)

## His Early Years

One might ask, when reviewing his life, “How did he get that way?” The answer seems to be, he never “got that way.” From childhood, he just was that way.

Charley (first called Willie to distinguish him from his father) seems to have born under a lucky star. He was born on June 30, 1855 in Minneapolis, weighing in at 8 1/2 pounds. The name first given him was Charles Melville Ames. Within a year or two, the middle name was changed to Wilberforce, presumably in honor of the great English anti-slavery crusader, William Wilberforce.

Despite what might be for others a difficult childhood, he seems to have been born to happiness, success, and a natural ability to bring happiness to others. Much of his deep sense of social obligation, his dedication to leaving the world better than he found it, came from the love--and the many precepts--lavished on him by his father, Unitarian minister Charles Gordon Ames, his mother, and later his stepmother. But his exuberance, his wit, his sense of fun, his great store of energy, his ability to make nearly instant contact with anyone he met, were wholly his own.

What we know about Charley's early life comes almost completely from the letters of his father, stepmother, and sister Serena, who had been adopted as a teenager in 1856 to rescue her from a difficult family life. We do not have any letters written by Charley himself. If his family saved any, they have since been lost.

From nearly the time of his birth, he was a cheerful, energetic child. With the family in a state of religious and economic uncertainty, and with his mother, Sara Jane, nearly continuously ill, his exuberant good spirits were a bright spot. He was adored.

But it was not a placid childhood. When he was born, his minister father was in spiritual turmoil, about to leave the Free-Will Baptists to whom he had been preaching for ten years, and among many misgivings, to spend the next three years in search of a new, broader faith. When Charley was three, he spent much of a year with his mother in various places in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, while she, already ill, tried to care for her own ageing mother. Meanwhile, his father was, for most of that time, far away in Minneapolis.

Sara Jane's illness continued after the family moved to Bloomington, Illinois. She died when Charley was barely six. The family finances were precarious. When he was seven, Charley was placed with various families in or near Bloomington, Illinois, while his father traveled to find a new pastorate. He acquired a stepmother when he was eight. In the years from age seven to eleven, he moved with his family from Bloomington to Cincinnati to Albany, New York, and then to California.

None of this seems to have fazed him very much. The only symptom of any anxiety was a stammer that he overcame while he was in college.

### **The Father's Letters About and To Charley**

When he was 16 months old, the father wrote of him: "Darling little Willie...storms round the house sometimes laughing like a little earthquake and frolicking enough to keep us all wide awake. He is put to bed all alone, early in the evening, and goes to sleep quietly shut up in the dark bedroom. Last night, half an hour after he had been put to bed, his mother went in and found him wide awake. He sat up and kissed her, then laid quietly down again. He is great at kissing. I should think he did it a hundred times a day. Sometimes he has to be spanked a little, for which he gives back 'a kiss for a blow' every time...."

When Charley was seven and living with a "Mrs. B.," in Bloomington, his father came to visit, and wrote to his daughter, Serena:

"Charley Ames I find in better physical condition than I ever saw him before.... He gave a great shout, and came bounding at me when I hove in sight, and has enjoyed my visit very much, if an overflow of affectionate demonstratives can pass for evidence. He walked and talked for an hour or two on Monday evening; he unbosomed himself in

a very refreshing and edifying manner. He stutters quite as much as ever, but gives no sign of chagrin when talked to about correcting it. He has been reading Robinson Crusoe and is able to tell quite a story.... He makes free use of words such as large folks use, offering to 'conduct' me to the garden, and describing an unoccupied room as 'vacant.'

"A growing discretion seems indicated by his turning up his pants as they wouldn't be 'so likely to get dirty.'" He tells his father that he has "learned to take care of things," but later added, "Another thing I am going to learn, and that is to do good.... If it's against the King's orders, or the President's, I'm going to do good anyway. I don't care if I'm hung...."

When asked if he heard "dirty" words from his schoolmates, and did they ever hear him use any, he replied, "I'm sure they don't and they never will. I've made that resolution already."

"At one stage of our talk," his father continued to Serena, "he asked me about my boyhood--if I did any wrong things for which I had since been sorry.... I valued the question, not only for the thoughtfulness it displayed, but also because it showed a perfect and familiar confidence in his relations with me.

"About the house and in the family he seems perfectly at home and quite happy." But later, alone with his father, Charley showed some unhappiness; his father guessed because the family expressed so little overt affection. "The family is peculiar though good," the father wrote, "high-bred and kind, but dignified, undemonstrative, exceedingly quiet, seldom collegial even with each other.... But it is not easy to plan anything better for him...."

Some bits of father-to-son letters:

At age 3: "Your sister Serena is with me in Minneapolis, and we are writing in the big books at the Register's Office. We cannot be with you and Mamma now, but I hope to come sometime. I send you a little kiss. Your own Papa."

At age 8: "Be calm, and try to be God's own child, and He will bless you and so will your affectionate Father."

At age 9 (writing from California to Charley in Albany NY): "I go rowing every evening, but the boat does not go so fast and easy as when there were two boys to help pull it along. And I miss many a kiss from lips that are dear to me..."

At age 10: "Charley, My dear lad, I got your little note and read it with pleasure and thankfulness. I have seen many things of which I would like to tell you, if I were well enough to write, but that will all come best by word of mouth. I think of you often, and always with faith in you, hope for you, and love toward you."

At age 10: “Do I need to tell you that you are often in my mind, and always in my heart. Every night, when you are already asleep, I am awake and my soul prays for my dear child that he may be well and happy and good....

“It gives me great satisfaction to get good reports from you, my dear boy.... Never forget that it is worth more than fortune to look always on the bright side of things. Even if you slip and fall, jump up and try again as if nothing had happened....

“I hope that good thoughts of your mother in heaven, and of your Father in heaven, too, as well as of your father in California...come and visit your pillow as you lie down at night. How I would love to put my head on that pillow beside yours for a few minutes, my child!”

At age 11: “I have barely time to thank you and tell you of my gladness in your letters. Still more am I glad to learn from your mother that you are a good boy and are growing in habits of order and neatness....

“The other day I had a pleasant horseback ride with Arthur Low, a boy not much larger than yourself. And I wished that some day you and I might ride together, as perhaps we may....”

### **In Albany, New York and in California**

Our first specific knowledge of Charley’s schooling is his attendance at the Albany (NY) Boys’ Academy, a period he remembered with enough enthusiasm that later in life, he formed an informal “alumni association” with fellow classmates he happened to meet, and wrote out a humorous constitution and by-laws.

His stepmother, Fanny Baker Ames, wrote of him, “The first years of our marriage could not have been wholly happy for a child, other than one whose heart never nourished rancor.... But Charles, as a little boy, was loving and utterly free from ill will or grudgingness.... If I corrected a fault, even at that age, he answered with a ‘Thank you, Mother,’ ....”

When he was 11, just before leaving Albany for California, Fanny had him spend part of his summer vacation memorizing passages from Milton, Dryden, Gray and other poets. “Pretty stiff for a boy of eleven,” she comments. (While in college, he wrote her how grateful he was to know by heart passages from poets whom many of his classmates had never heard of.) Fanny also set him to making lists of trees and flowers, leading to a lifelong interest in growing things.

His father looks forward to Charley’s presence in California, and writes to him, “Now I am more and more anxious that you would learn to do things. Your mother writes that you are very ready to help when there is any work to be done, and I do not believe you will ever shirk any reasonable and useful kind of work, even though it may not always be agreeable to your taste....”

When father, stepmother, and son are living in Santa Cruz, California, Charley's father was away from home much of the time visiting or organizing congregations elsewhere. Charley, like most sons in the pre-teen and teen years, was expected to be a combination of chore-performer and lieutenant in running household and farm, and otherwise to assist his father (e.g., seeing that the proper hymns are selected for an upcoming Sunday service, buying barley and hay, and having "the axles oiled and the carriage standing at Mr. Senter's door at half past six tomorrow eve....")

In other letters, which begin with such salutations as "Dear Laddie," he offers advice on many subjects:

--On reading (leave fiction aside and concentrate now on biography).

--On paying attention to his own development ("Day and night, waking and sleeping, in working and thinking, you are all the time storing up power for future uses....").

--On public speaking ("...a conversationalist tone commands attention better.... Accustom yourself to look people in the face.... When you have nothing to say, say nothing. Don't keep on one minute longer than your stock of ideas holds out.... Above all, count yourself the servant of truth....").

--On being aware of the Voice from above ("More than I wish that you may be wise, or well, or famous, or successful, do I pray, with all my love for you, that you may hear and obey that Voice. If it sounds sternly at first, follow it, and it will turn to a song, a sweet inward poem, set to the very music of heaven.").

We cannot know how Charley took all this advice when it was received. Some of it must have grated on him. But in later life, he appears to have internalized it all.

However, while a teenager, Charley sometimes slipped well below the expectations of his father, who had been on his own, working and seeking salvation, at 14. Therefore, it's likely that the father had little understanding of a typical teenager's wandering mind and preoccupations.

In April, 1871, the father wrote his son a letter atypical in its harshness:

"It is not right that I bear this any longer. I try to be kind and cheerful, but one sorrow presses me heavily by day and by night. It is your apparent indifference to your own progress, and your apparent weakness of will in the matter of study.

"Every arrangement and circumstance is favorable to your accomplishing something worthy of you, but all is defeated by your own folly.... What little you have learned is not enough to balance the evil habit you have formed, and which you must

drag all through the rest of your life, unless you throw it off at once--the habit of letting every vagrant impulse throw you off the track and destroy all your good resolutions....

"I know your excuses. They are shams. You are unfaithful to yourself: that is the whole of it.... Your pleasures, your ease, your love of the bed, your fondness for society, for conversation and newspapers--everything--must stand aside for the sake of regular close study..., or Charles W. Ames is a failure.

"O Charles, I am pressed to say this by my love for you and my fear for you...but unless you mend I shall weep bitter tears, for I would rather you were dead than that you should turn out to be a selfish pleasure-lover, or a weak irresolute good-for-naught."

We do not know all the reasons Charley was sent to Minneapolis for high school. The backsliding observed by his father may have been a principal reason, along with the likelihood that the schools in Minneapolis were better than those in Santa Cruz or San Jose.

There is a hiatus in the file of letters from father to son until Charley is in Minneapolis and his father back in California. When the letters resumed, the father's upset with his son seems to have been completely resolved. The letters are full of news of the father's activities--he was on a lecture and sermonizing tour of New England. From the next decade, Charley was his father's main correspondent, the person to whom the father could, though his letters, most comfortably unburden himself.

### **High School in Minneapolis**

In the fall of 1871, Charley's father accompanied his sixteen-years-old son to Minneapolis, where he was to attend high school and live with George Wright and George's second wife, Carrie. (George's first wife, Serena Ames Wright, had died three years earlier.)

Charley apparently did well in school almost from the start and easily made friends, which caused his father some unease, as subsequent letters from California testify. Charley's ease at making friends was a major asset during his whole life, but the father saw it as a grave danger to his teenage son. He is almost sorry that Charley is meeting so many people: "If it devours your time and absorbs your thoughts, it is your enemy, hostile to your growth and in the end to your manly character."

In the summers of 1872-73, he worked on railroad survey crews. So far as we know, he had no trouble in meshing himself into the fabric of the Wrights' family life.

Unfortunately, we have little information about these years except for the letters his father wrote him. Those letters are full of home news and affection, but never lacking anxiety and sermons.

He reminds Charlie that the best way he can repay the Wrights' kindness is to set an example for the children, of a "healthy, hearty, self-poised, earnest, honest, truth, helpful, self-forgetting young man.... Don't attempt to school them; just live before them."

He writes two long letters of advice about Charley's health, about wearing warm clothes, and about treating a cold as soon as it shows itself.

Most of all, "Avoid excitement and cultivate serenity. If good thoughts come to you, ponder them, turn them over, follow out the suggested lines or trains of thought, and you will discover wide regions of truth fairer than any landscape which can bless your outer eyes. But this high pleasure you will miss if you care too much for human society...."

And a further warning about socializing: "I trust you, yet I tremble.... Do not be a traitor to your nobler self." It is wrong, to accept "invitations to go away from the Wrights' house, however cordially they are given.... Sooner or later you will see that your whole character is softened."

He likes the long letters Charley writes home, but frets that they are written too late at night, thus cutting into Charley's hours of sleep.

Even when the father writes to praise him for getting good grades in school, he must add, "Please don't hurry your readings, but hold your attention long enough to fix every impression clearly."

(Three years later, when Charley is a freshman at Cornell, the father can make a little fun of himself for all his sermonizing. Reminding Charley that he hasn't heard from him recently, he writes, "As you have failed to supply me with a text, I shall fail, for once, to preach you a sermon. Please spare me the applause." And a month later, he adds, "So here I am at the old trick--preaching.")

## **The Cornell Years**

Charley entered Cornell in the fall of 1874. We have nothing to show why he chose Cornell. Though the institution was only eight years old, the faculty had excellent professors, some of whom became Charlie's lifelong friends.

Of course, he made a wide variety of friends. He joined a fraternity. He went out for crew and for track. His father thought this dangerous to his health--too strenuous--and for no good purpose, especially after Charley fell gravely ill to typhoid in the fall of 1875, the beginning of his sophomore year. For a while it was feared he might die.

The Ameses received many letters of concern and sympathy from parishioners and friends. One of his fraternity mates at Cornell wrote to Charley's parents: "I had counted on his company in our botanical work this fall, and I hope so strongly for his recovery. How we all miss him, especially his brothers in the society.... We could have

done so much with his influence.... I envy him his tact in guiding others.... May he be returned to us at New Year's even better than before."

After an intense month-long battle with fever, Charley began to improve. Once recovered, there is no evidence that he had further serious sickness during his college years, or many years after.

During the summer following his freshman year, 1875, he worked on a farm in Ohio, and the next two for J. Peter Lesley (his future father-in-law), who was directing Pennsylvania's second complete geological survey. In the summer of 1877, he also spent some time in the composing room of the George H. Ellis Company in Boston.

He excelled in academic work, and won a coveted oratory contest, the Woodford Prize. The best 20 essays submitted were selected by a faculty committee, and the authors then delivered them orally to that group. The top six then competed for the prize by delivering their essays in an auditorium before a big crowd.

James Skinner, who later became Charley's good friend, at that time was closer to Charley's principal rival. He was a fiery orator, Skinner wrote, and most people predicted that Charley "was not an orator, and would have no chance of success." When his turn came, Charley "spoke without any oratorical display whatever," Skinner reports. But the committee found the "literary excellence" of his presentation "was of such superiority that the others were not considered."

(This should have made his father especially proud, given all the advice on grammar and diction he had given Charley over the previous twelve years!)

We have other verbal snapshots from his four college years, most of them about his vacation visits to Germantown PA, where his family had moved in 1872. The following bits are gleaned from the notes various people contributed to the volume, "Memories of Charles W. Ames," gathered shortly after his death by his daughter Margaret and her husband Cushing Wright.

-- Fanny Baker Ames: "He was wonderful as a big brother.... I recall once in Germantown, when he was home from college....he gave a whole evening to entertaining Alice and me...by repeating the lay of 'Rosedale,' taking all the parts...."

-- Gabrielle Clements, who met him in Germantown when Charley was a sophomore: "It was on such outings that Charles showed his qualities of leadership. He was everywhere, full of gaiety and spirit, enjoying the sunshine and fresh air, and constantly passing from one to another of the band, making sure that none were tired or overlooked.... He always showed this talent for social organization."

--Annie Howell, a friend of the family in Germantown: He "was a most jolly kind of boy, up to everything from outdoor sports to indoor bean bags and theatricals... Those were the day when [people did] of all kinds of acting, from impromptu charades

to quite elaborate studied plays on a real stage..., and what a variety we gave to the sociables of the Unitarian Church.... In all these merry doings, [Charley] took a leading part...from an old man to lover, soldier, or small boy, just as was needed.”

His youngest sister, Edith, recalls that whenever Charley came home from Cornell, it was “like so many Christmases. He was a scintillating person, and when he and Alice were there together, I was tongue-tied with delight. (It is doubtful if I could have slipped in many words, anyhow.)”

During his college years, his father’s letters leave no subject out--his own work, his health, the weather, past personal and family history, family doings--he held little back. They are full of affection and every so often, a little humor: Some examples:

-- “Ah, if I could be young as you, and yet have the advantage of being old as I! I have it: I will be young--and am. Your fellow boy, C.G. Ames.”

-- “You are affectionately remembered by all the others, and especially by you brotherly Father.”

-- “I go forth, but not till I breathe a benediction on my son.”

-- On Charley’s twentieth birthday, “The baby, the boy, the youth -- all back there. The Man, coming to the front. God bless him.”

-- Just before his 21st birthday, “There are yet twelve days of boyhood for you. Make the most of it.”

-- On his father hearing about the Woodford prize and, at the same time, Charley is recovering from illness: “I hope your convalescence is delicious to yourself, and that you may be well and prosper. And in all your rising fortunes, don’t forget your fond and foolish old Father.”

Of course, the letters contain much advice: “Keep steadily moving toward the point you would reach.... Don’t be impatient with yourself.... Bathe the soul in the sweet waters of reflection.... Trust immensely in the hidden forces at the center of your life, or to the inflow of secret streams.... Don’t engage in sports that require violent action....”

He guesses that Charley’s stammering may come partly from an inability to completely control the facial muscles. After a length analysis, he advises Charley that with concentration he can “control the delinquent or reluctant muscles...and improve their obedience.... If standing before the glass, and (without trying at first to speak), you proceed very gently to subject these facial muscles to a squad drill, you may observe which of them are less ready to go through such maneuvers as belong to vocal exercise; and by patient self-observation and experiment, you may coax them into better discipline....”

We don't know how much of this advice Charley took, but we read nothing about stammering after his college graduation.

During one of his summer stints working for the Pennsylvania Geological Survey, Charley visited "The Willows," near Bedford, Pennsylvania, the home of Amanda Mortimer (Clark) and her parents. He had along with him his lifelong friend, Sam Hill, who was not working for the Survey but who had been ill and was tagging along as a means of improving his health. In her memoir, she remembers that "two gentlemen came over the turnpike, now the Lincoln Highway [parallel to I-70, the Pennsylvania Turnpike], wheeling, as it look to me, a wheelbarrow. The came to our home and asked my father to accommodate them for a few days.... They stopped along the route to gather and test rocks.... That evening, and other times when they were at the house, passed delightfully to me...." Charley visited Amanda and her family twice more during his work for the Survey.

"I heard no more from your father until twenty years had come and gone. In June [1898], on a Saturday, a gentleman came to the door... He said, 'Twenty years ago two wanderers came trundling a wheelbarrow...'" He had along with him his son Lesley. They were to meet Sam Hill there and hike part of the same route that they had covered twenty years before.

On Charley's 21st birthday, his father wrote: "June 30, and I have lost my 'boy.' Have you lost him too, young man? .... Well, here's a hand from another man, and a hearty welcome to the new and serious levels whereto you have climbed. I take the occasion also to congratulate you both for the gains you have stowed up in yourself--in self-conquest, self-culture, and general intelligence and consolidated faculty, but also for the perils passed as you have come up the long and slippery slope...."

"I can thank Heaven with no more sincerity for anything than for the experiences brought to me by my children.... Indeed, my hope is that your life may be a brightness and blessing to many, but that is only the inverted and magnified image of the brightness and blessing it has been to me...."

"But you had better sober down a bit and take this rhapsody of a fond and foolish father for just what it is worth and no more!... Your big little brother, Charles I."

In April 1878, as Charley's graduation approached, his father wrote:

"Dear Sir, For I am beginning to look up with awe to an impending Bachelor of Arts. It is very gracious in you, 'pon my word, sir, to send an occasional letter to a humble ancient acquaintance who never read Story, nor got much Latin, nor wrote a prize essay, nor figured in a regatta, nor had bouquets thrown at his feet..., oh, well, who never did anything in particular, but who knows how to rejoice in your ascending career...."

“I have never got over being surprised at the transformation of my first baby into a grown-up man; and I am always trying to reassure myself that it’s a fact! A latent suspicion haunts me that you will some day come out of this disguise--for I know it is something you have put on--and will reappear in your proper personal character as my lost little boy, whom I shall have right and might and occasion to thank. Indeed, you must yourself have noticed an inquiring and incredulous look pass over my features as I have measured your magnitude and your might....”

In March 1879, while still working for the Geological Survey, Charley became engaged Louisa Head, the daughter of good friends in Germantown. On the occasion, his father wrote him, “The announcement has left me a little confused, but my respect for young people’s rights is very strong, so that it costs me no effort to accept the inevitable. God bless you both, and may your love be a smokeless flame! And take for granted that your joy will always be mine....”

How long the engagement lasted or how it ended, we do not know. In the company of his college roommate, Archer Randolph, Charley took off in May 1879 for a month or more to go walking in Germany and Switzerland. A letter from George Wright to his daughter Mary gives this comment about Charley’s state of mind: “Says his health not very good and thinks the sea and mountains will help him out. And something also the matter with him, too. He and Louisa Head. Both got it bad! ....Red Head and sandy-head -- both one or gwine to be!!!” (Louisa later married Archer Randolph.)

## **Work in Boston**

In the fall of 1879, Charley joined the family in Boston, where his father had been serving a three-year stint as editor of the *Christian Register*. The next spring he suffered an attack of appendicitis, from which he recovered without an operation, and while recuperating took a brief sailing trip to the Azores. On his return, he began work for the George H. Ellis Company, in whose composing room he had spent some time the previous summer (i.e., 1878). Ellis published the *Christian Register*, religious books, and a small number of general trade books, as well as running a general printing house. Charley worked there until the fall of 1882.

After Charley’s death in 1921, Ellis remembered:

“After graduation, he came with us, taking charge of our book publishing department, which he greatly developed.... The value of Charles’s work to the denomination...would be hard to estimate, nor do I believe it was ever acknowledged or even half appreciated.... I doubt if he fully realized the depth of my affection for him.”

In the fall of 1882, Charley had heard from his friend Sam Hill in Minneapolis that a St. Paul law book publishing firm only a few years old, the West Publishing Company, might have an opportunity for Charley’s talents. Charley was hoping to stay in the East. He made a proposal to George Ellis to buy 1/3 to 2/5 of the company and become a

partner. He would take charge of the publishing department but not interfere with the printing business, which was closer to Ellis's heart. Ellis, with regret, turned him down, but they remained friends for decades. Once in an influential position at West Publishing Company, Charley and Ellis traded information on new equipment and techniques.

So in October 1882, Charley finished his work for Ellis, stopped at Philadelphia, to propose to Mary Lesley, and then went on to Minnesota to test the waters there before taking a lengthy, long-planned trip to Europe.

## **The Proposal**

His proposal to Mary caught her completely by surprise. They had known each other for at least six years, and had become good friends. In the fifty or so letters they exchanged during the years 1878-82, Charley's were affectionate and cheerful, in the "best friend" mode. Mary's were the same; and she was careful to sign them, "Your friend, Mary Lesley," seldom using any word hinting at deeper feelings.

Between the lines, however, one can detect in her letters sentiments just short of the line between expressions of friendship and a yearning to open her heart. The farthest she would go, before Charley proposed, was in a letter of June 1881, written just before leaving for Europe with her parents: "I have only a few minutes now before starting, and so goodbye with love and best wishes, your friend, Mary Lesley."

In early October 1882, two weeks before Charley left Boston, Mary wrote to him, "Dear Charles, It was good of you to write from the midst of your busy hours, and was a pleasant surprise to me.... I wonder whether we shall catch a glimpse of you on your way West, but at any rate, I hope before you start off for the Mediterranean." [Some glimpse!]

Knowing the outcome, we can see that Charley had been winding up to propose to Mary for quite a while, perhaps ever since the end of his engagement to Louisa Head, even though his letters were always written as a special friend to all the Lesley family.

In July 1879, he thanks Mary for "news of the family which I have come to consider really my own." In October, he writes, "In the bosom of this [his own] family, I long for my Clinton Street folks." Just before Christmas, he tells her, "If these were not so busy times, I would write a formal letter to be read just as the brandy is lighted on the pudding. Or else a poem to be used to stuff the turkey. But as it is, I can only send my heartiest love to you one and all...." In June 1881, he writes, "I hope always to feel very near to all my dear Lesleys, wherever they are...." In January 1882: "I can speak officially for one person who would be glad to do anything to contribute to your happiness. And that is Your Affectionate Friend, Charles W. Ames."

He proposed on Sunday, October 22, 1882, a great date for their descendants. Mary's mother, Susan Lesley, described the events of that day and the next in a letter to her younger daughter Margaret:

On Sunday noon "came dear Charles Ames; he had arrived in the early morning on his way to Minneapolis.... We all had a lively, pleasant [midday] dinner together.... [Afterwards] Mary went upstairs and Charles followed her.... I dozed away for an hour, when Charles came downstairs and sat down beside me and took my hand as he does so often. After a time he went away, and I heard the front door close. It grew twilight, and my Mary came softly in and drew a stool to my side and laid her head on my heart. I saw that something had greatly moved her, that she trembled and her voice was breathless. 'Oh, Mother!' she said, 'Charles has told me that he cares for me, and it is such a surprise.' So I only said in the same whisper, 'And you, Mary?'

" 'It is all so sudden,' she said, ' so unexpected. I have told Charles he must give me time to know myself....'

"It was at first a great surprise and, I may say, a shock. You know, dear Margaret, how we have always loved Charles, and how we always shall. But the first feeling about giving up such a precious child is that no man on earth is good enough for her.... I told Father that Mary had not yet given Charles an answer.....

"Then I told him, the only other thing she had said to me that afternoon--it was, 'Oh, Mother! It would have been easy to answer if he had asked me five years ago, but when I have been persistently turning my heart from every thought but friendship all these years, it is not easy all in a minute to change....' She was so heavenly sweet and calm through all, so self-poised. But she slept none, I knew, on Sunday night...." [Given that Charlie had once before been engaged to the daughter of close family friends, it is not surprising that Mary had momentary doubts.]

### **Mary Doesn't Linger Long Over the Question**

The next morning, Monday the 23rd, Mary went to her work at the library of the American Philosophical Society, where her father had been the long-time Secretary. There her mother found her talking with a minister, Mr. May, who was trying to persuade Mary to do some work for him at the Spring Garden church.

"Dear Mary!" she continued writing to Meg, "She looked so patient, and Charles was so lovely, waiting for a chance to talk with her. I bore Mr. May, all unconscious of what he was interrupting, away with me, and they had an hour to themselves. When Mary came home to lunch, she took me to my room and said, 'It is all settled, Mother, and I feel better.' "

The elder Ames and the Lesleys agreed that since Charles was about to depart for Minnesota, it would be better to keep the engagement a secret within the family for a while. "For we all want a little time to get used to the new relation, and for Mary, I think

it is quite essential that she has this deep and sacred event to herself a little while, to be absolutely certain of herself, and to enjoy the quiet of it, before friends begin to talk and write to her....”

The Ameses, along with Fanny’s mother, came to dinner that evening. Susan’s letter continues, “It was really a lovely evening, though subdued and so gentle. Father lay on the Newcastle couch and Mary sat at his head, with her fingers softly stroking it, and Oh! she look so exquisitely beautiful. Charles sat on the arm of his father’s chair, his arm tenderly thrown around his father’s shoulder.... Father said today that he thought there was never a more beautiful and considerate manner than they all showed....”

Charley stayed overnight (to Tuesday morning), Susan wrote, and “came into the study, with a jovial air and said, as he kissed him, ‘And now, Mr. Lesley, I believe we shall all be perfectly happy, when we get used to it,’ which made your Father laugh heartily....”

### **His Visit to Minnesota, November 1882**

Charley’s stay in Minnesota is described, amid many terms of endearment, in fifteen letters to Mary written in the space of 35 days. He stayed with George Wright and his family. “Once more,” he writes, “upon my native heath, dearest Mary, and among the native heathen.”

He reports to Mary, on a sunny Sunday morning, that he is listening to his nephew, Vernon Wright, play Schubert on the piano: “Ah, that music of Schubert’s! It exercises a spell over me, and sends a strange thrill through me.” He adds that he is becoming very fond of Vernon, then about 19. (Vernon was to accompany Charley on his five-month trip to Europe that began early in the next month.)

In a later letter, he describes to Mary an evening at the Wrights’. It was dark and rainy outside he writes, but they all enjoyed “a supper of good cheer, crowned with the inimitable waffles. Then whist, in which Vernon and I triumphed.... Then some reading aloud, then a melange of piano music from Beethoven to Irish jig. And then at 11 to bed!”

Upon his arrival in Minneapolis, he was “drafted” into the final days of Republican congressional campaign of 1882. His pal, Sam Hill, was chairman of the party’s campaign committee. Charley gave whatever assistance was necessary, running errands and delivering messages.

On November 7, Election Day, “I write you, dearest,...amid the clash of arms and the hoarse cries of contending forces, so to speak. For lo, it is the decisive day of victory, or otherwise as the case may be....”

“I am more concerned about the elections in Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts.... The characteristic feature of the times is the protest against the old political methods.... Civil service reform has made greater progress in public opinion than its friends would have dared to hope....”

And the next day, “We have met the enemy and he is ours.” He jokes that the man elected to Congress “may give me an appointment. How would you like to live in a lighthouse in Alaska, or in a post office at Gull Lake, Washington Territory, or be consul in some resort town of Patagonia.... Nay, with the aid of Col. Stone...and Judge Kelley, we might do better and go out as Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to the Court of Beloochistan.” (Mary’s letters never respond to such foolishness.)

### **Meetings with the Wests**

The election over, he turns to his employment prospects. He reassures Mary that “whatever business arrangement may be in store for me, East or West, I think I have a right to expect from it a reasonable living, for two, from the start....”

“Of course, dear, I want you to tell me all you can of your own wishes and hopes and ambitions.... Our affairs must be settled, probably, on fundamental considerations, but...we cannot afford to overlook our dear people.... Meanwhile, the world is very bright and full of hope and promise.”

Two days after the election, Sam escorted him to St. Paul to “view the West Publishing Company.” There Charles met Horatio West, the younger of the two West brothers, “and I was very pleasantly impressed with him.” But he deferred any serious discussion for two days, when the elder brother would be there.

In the days that followed, he had two meetings with the West brothers and with Peyton Boyle, an officer of the firm. Of the first meeting, he wrote, “I am much better pleased with them than I expected to be, and I am satisfied that their business is a secure and largely lucrative one. It is law book publishing, the only safe variety there is, and while it is not exactly in the line of my previous work, nor of my previous ambitions, it would prove an ample field for intellectual activity, and furnish a respectable vocation giving a good income.”

“They seem very straightforward, industrious and reliable men,” Charles continued, “and if I must come to Minnesota, I shall be glad if it may be as an associate of theirs....”

Between the two meetings, Charley got a letter from George Ellis in Boston, giving him the final word on his proposal to buy into the business: No dice.

Of the second meeting with the Wests, he writes, “They gave me every facility for examining their affairs, showed me the books, gave me a statement of their financial

condition, answering all my questions without hesitation, and seemed to invite the closest examination. Everything about the concern seemed satisfactory and commanded my confidence.... The business [started six years previously] itself is largely profitable now, and it looks as if it has a fine future.... There is plenty of room for development and growth along safe lines....

“Then...they proceeded to make me an offer, and as favorable an offer as I could have expected.... They made me the offer outright, and without reserve.... They were willing to take me in on an equal footing with themselves....”

The Wests and Boyle were about 30 years old, and “they seem like desirable associates in business or in society, intelligent, unpretentious, decent, and honorable.”

They agreed to give Charley “ample time to consider their proposition....” He tells Mary he intends to study the business further, but will make no decision until he has returned to Philadelphia and discussed it fully with her.

“If I am to live in the West here, I cannot imagine any business which would be more satisfactory.... The great objection to it is the farawayness and the Westness of it. That is a very serious objection, and it is that which will cause me to hesitate. But since my scheme with Mr. Ellis has failed, I have about given up hope of any Boston arrangement.... At worst, it is only 40 hours from Philadelphia.”

He says he will have to borrow money to invest in the business, but he considers it “perfectly safe.... When I get a little more light on this ways and means question, I will turn my face toward the East whence cometh my light.”

On the train from Chicago he writes, “Tomorrow will be the greatest of my Thanksgiving days. Surely I have the deepest and best reasons for giving thanks to God. All my affairs are arranged happily it would seem--friends, prospects, health and a fair conscience. These have I had before. But you, the greatest of my blessings and the most beneficent for my inner and outer life, have come to me in these last pregnant weeks....”

There is no letter from Mary approving their move to Minnesota, since she and Charley discussed it in person in the few days before he sailed for Europe. None is needed.

### **Letters of Engagement (from Europe)**

To us in the 21st century, it may seem strange for a newly engaged young man to promptly leave his intended and take the Grand Tour of Europe. We know that Charley had been planning trip for at least several months, well before his proposal to Mary, in company with Vernon Wright. For a rising young man, a trip to see the major cultural sights of Europe was believed the capstone of a liberal education.

The engagement aside, it was the right moment. Charley had saved money while working in Boston. Given his upcoming entry into business in Minnesota, he likely would not have a similar opportunity for a long time. Judging from Mary's letters in November-December 1882, she and he had discussed the trip at the time of the proposal. Those letters support the trip ungrudgingly, even Charley did not plan to return to Philadelphia until a month or less before the wedding.

He and Vernon set sail for Liverpool on December 6 aboard the steamship *Atlantic*. He would not return until mid-April. Their itinerary in Europe was indeed grand. England, France, Italy--two weeks in Paris, two visits each to Rome and Florence, shorter stops in London, Lyon, Marseilles, Cannes, Monte Carlo, Genoa, Bologna, Venice, Milan, Lake Como, Naples, Sorrento, and several other less well-known towns.

The main objects were educational--churches, museums--but Charley was equally taken, if not more so, by the landscapes through which they traveled and the broad spectrum of people he met. (His letters show us that he needn't have more than a couple of meals with strangers to know much of their life stories.) And in Paris and Rome, he had the pleasure of the company of Mary's sister Margaret, the art student who later became a well-known painter. There were also family acquaintances to look up in many of the cities he visited.

His letters from Europe shows so clearly the man Charley, age 28, had become. His letters are ardent, full of high spirits and humor, with impressive descriptions of landscapes, cityscapes, and people he meets. Very little ever seems to get him out of humor. He expresses his love freely; clearly he is in love with love as well as with Mary.

While Mary often writes that her letters are "stupid," and wonders if she really deserves him, if she will measure up to what he wants or expects of her, you never get the slightest hint that Charley has any doubts as to whether he deserves *her*, or whether he will succeed as a husband. It isn't because of an oversize ego, though he never lacks self-confidence. Rather, without being necessarily conscious of it, he lived out of the inner conviction that he was born to happiness and had the ability to bring happiness to others.

Mary's letters show her to be what a late Victorian spouse should be, if the husband is extremely lucky. She is more than willing to defer to Charles, but she has a mind of her own and will be an able partner. She has been raised in an intellectually rich atmosphere, has been her father's able assistant in his work for the American Philosophical Society, and has traveled, often alone, throughout the East, and on two occasions had gone to Europe with her parents. She is intelligent, affable, cultured, a good writer, accustomed to living in a pleasant, well-ordered society, and like her intelligent mother, active in community affairs but not given to frequent overt assertiveness.

There follows some quotes from the 43 letters Charley wrote Mary while on shipboard or in Europe.

### **Full of Love**

Only a few examples, from among many:

From shipboard en route to Liverpool: "The last days [that he and she had together before his departure for Europe] were hurried and crowded, but we did get in some hours of happy companionship, didn't we?... You know that I love you, that I long to be with you, that I look forward to the time when our two lives may be together as one for life."

From Nice: "Just a month today, dearest, since I caught my last glimpse of you.... It certainly seems like six months."

From Rome: "Good night, dearest love. Many kisses I send to you across the quarter of the globe that is between us...."

From Rome two weeks later: "I do hope this little Roman scarf will come to you safely and soon, and it will find itself...where I wish my arms were at this moment."

From Venice: "I I love you dearly, and count the days till I shall see you, and...I look beyond the few weeks to the time when I shall have you, when your dear presence will be part of my daily life, helping me to the possibilities which will make me more worthy of you, my darling."

### **Good Humor and High Spirits**

From London: While walking in St. James Park, he and Vernon are enveloped in pea-soup fog, "and for half an hour we groped our way into the Unknown with great glee." They then visited some law courts. "We had no end of sport over the preposterous wigs of lawyers and judges.... The principal purpose of England is to illustrate English novels to the traveling American, and really, to do her justice, she does it extremely well."

From Paris: He quotes a Mrs. Plumb as saying to Florence Kelley (who with her husband accompanied Charley and Vernon on part of their trip): "It is positively infurious [sic] for anyone to approach a foreign land, leaving his own country behind, with such a beaming expression as that your friend, Mr. Ames, bears." He adds: "I am becoming contented to the verge of piggish complacency."

From Florence: He had promised his Roman landlady to write her a letter in Italian. "So yesterday afternoon, I wore out the dictionary and worried the grammar and extracted the phrase book and tortured the language generally until I had wrought a four-page letter.... As I read it over, it sounded to me like the libretto of an Italian opera,

and Vernon declared he could not tell it from Dante. [But] I have little doubt that there is an Anglo-American accent about some of the prepositions.”

From Rome, in response to Mary’s worrying that he is so active that he is getting over-tired: “We do not overdo, certainly. The sightseeing has not become such a passion with us that we cannot remember our meal times, and if sometimes we are tired, we also sometimes rest. Indeed, repose is one of the prominent features of our landscape....”

From Sorrento: “And the English tourists played the guitar and sang, and the German tourists sat under their umbrellas and talked about wondrous beautiful soup and the heavenly cutlets, and the Italian peasants danced the tarantella and snapped their fingers to the tum tum of the tambourine, and the world was beautiful.”

## **Portraits**

From San Remo, just across the Italian-French border, he describes his dinner companions, which include an American woman from San Francisco, of Irish parentage, “the widow of a nouveau (but very) rich man, who is now finishing her five daughters. They [the daughters] have been seven years abroad, five of the years in a convent, and are now to be taken all over Italy, to spend a winter in Russia, to do Egypt and the Holy Land, and then to go to live in New York until they find husbands, unless they find husbands before then. Which is not unlikely, as they are not unattractive, quite bright and quick, and seem to have a good deal of common sense. But the mother was most interesting. She is a great walker, takes sea baths every one of these cold mornings, is independent and even strong-minded in some ways, and though she was probably not well educated to begin with, she has not gone through the world and the greater part of Europe without acquiring a certain kind of polish. And it is entertaining to see the original low-bred Irish woman showing through....”

From his pension in Florence: “I have had for my right-hand neighbor at the table a very interesting Englishwoman of, say, 3-? years, a graduate of Queen’s College and appreciator of the Alice books.... Then comes the head of the table with the Italian Signor and his English wife, a pretty woman with a beautiful voice and most commendable ‘views’ on the Woman Question. Then an elderly Austrian baron who wears a wig and dyes his mustache and complains that the English ladies do not know a good thing when they see it. Then, opposite me, a most absurd little Frenchman, about 21 years old, who is very witty and vivacious and old-maidish. Then an Englishwoman of uncertain age, who would take the palm for obtuseness in an International Exposition of Dull Women....”

From a modest hotel in Porreta, where he and Vernon stopped for dinner: “Around the fireplace, and almost in it, sat three men with their faces illuminated by the flame of a big log, three men who looked as if they had been selected for artistic reasons to sit there. A solemn looking philosophical round-faced man who said little but looked wise; a humble black-bearded one who nursed his knee and listened; and a real

alehouse gossip, who smoked his pipe and discoursed, with one arm on his hip and the other busy with gesticulation....”

## **Landscapes**

En route from Florence to Bologna, their train crosses the spine of the Apennines. On the spur of the moment, he and Vernon hop off the train just past the summit, having arranged for their luggage to be delivered to their hotel in Bologna.

“This railroad,” he writes, “is another of the marvels and triumphs of bold engineering which...are a political necessity to the unification of Italy.... It winds in and out amongst rocky defiles, with numberless tunnels and great walls of masonry built up against the hills to protect the tracks.... The scenery was charmingly wild, and such a lot of obviously complicated geology I never saw before. How I did wish for the aid of the ‘other’ State Geologist to tell me all about it....”

He discovers that his ink bottle has leaked all over the inside of one of his bags. “But who could suffer such a trifle to depress him, when he is seated, as I am, on the bank over the wall at the side of the road. With a motion of my foot I can send a big stone over the precipice, and watch it bounding off into the beautiful mountain stream seventy-five or a hundred feet below. A little farther along down, where the railroad emerges from its tunnel, a rock wall juts out into the stream, making a narrow pass for the spring torrents to whirl through. A beautiful and picturesque one-arch stone bridge is thrown across, leading from nowhere to nowhere else, springing from the precipice on one side and disappearing into a stone wall on the other, and with no roadway over it.... It looks like a mere wanton expression of the power of some Pontifex Maximus. But I suspect that it is an ingenious and elaborate buttress of the masonry of the railroad....

“The afternoon sun falls on us over the mountain tops.... The air is full of the musical sound of falling waters, restful and soothing to the point of somniferousness. And I am writing to you, my heart’s beloved....”

## **On to Marriage**

Charley and Vernon sailed from Naples on April 17, and after a brief stop at Gibraltar, reached New York. Charley went immediately to Philadelphia. After a few days there he had to attend to business elsewhere. He journeyed to Boston, (for the final wrap-up of his affairs there), St. Paul (where he began to familiarize himself with the West Publishing Company), and Ithaca (to participate in an effort by Cornell alumni to quell a crisis there). He got back to Philadelphia only five days before the wedding. No one seemed disturbed.

## **New Status in Life**

Now that Charles W. Ames is a married man, soon to be the father of a half-dozen assorted children, and a partner in an enterprise that will grow to be worth

millions, it may be fitting from now on to refer to him as “Charles,” and to his father as “Father Ames.” Not that Charles W. Ames ever lost his playfulness, his boyish *joie de vivre*, so that in obituaries, he was still referred to as “Charlie.” But Charles was what he called himself, and what Mary called him, too.

### **A 38-Year Love Affair**

Charles’s ardent affection for his partner and lifelong love never faltered. The cascade of terms of endearment he lavished on Mary during their engagement never ceased. Every letter began “Dearest” or “Darling,” and he enjoyed inventing new and loving closes, many quite humorous and playful. As we see below, his closes in the years 1917-1920 weren’t any less openly affectionate than those of the 1880’s, 30 years before.

We are fortunate that he traveled as much as he did in the years of his marriage, and that the train was the best, sometimes the only, way to go. It was from Pullman cars, on trips often lasting 24 to 36 hours, that he wrote hundreds of letters to Mary and to his children.

From his letters to Mary that still survive, here are a few samples of his closings from the 1880’s:

1885: “I suppose I shall continue to suffer from a mixture of affectionate interest and homesick jealousy every time I hear a baby cry. Your favorite husband, Charles.”

1886: “These [excuses] are why I have no letter to mail you this morning, and can only mail you this bare assurance that I am, your and the rest of ‘em’s Loving Charles. ‘Specially yours.”

1886: “Oh, my darling, as I walked through the path from Summit Avenue, and came to the new house that is to be our home, its dark outlines against the sky gave me a thrill of pleasure and happiness. I already feel an attachment to the place which seems to have our future life bound up in it....

“May that house be to our children the one place on earth in which they are most content, a place where they are always sure of loving sympathy and consolation and counsel and help. And may that house be to many a helpful place, where they shall find cheer and help and inspiration. May we be able in its hospitality to keep alive the traditions of our two elder families, and in its inner domestic life to perpetuate their atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence.

“My thoughts go out to you through the night, my love, and a sense of peace and contentment comes over me--a feeling of gratitude to God for the great blessings of human love which he has poured out on me so plentifully--for the blessed and blissful effluences of marriage and parentage--and my heart is very full....”

1888: "Last night, for the first time since I left, I dreamed copiously and agreeably of you and the children. And when in a wakeful interval, I gloated over the fact, I said to myself, 'This is request night, isn't it?' and hastened back to sleep to enjoy more of it."

1889: Begins, "Dear Madam, Only a wordlet again--six o'clock finds me warm and busy--haven't had time to read your letter which came two hours ago, except to peep at the end to see if you still loved me."

Now let's skip 28 years to 1917.

1917: "I think I will revert to a good old custom and writing you a love-note every once in a while. Not that I have anything to add to the literature of the subject. I might point to the mass of our past correspondence, and say with Madge Boyle's conciseness, '*Je same.*' That's the best part of it--it is the same--for 34 years, only probably more so.... Well, anyhow, I like you."

1917: Telegram to Mary in Boston: "Hope you will not have wearying journey homeward, but come anyhow to C. W. Ames."

1918: "Theodore's precious visit [on his way into military service] has left a sweet flavor in our mouths--of loving peace and satisfaction. It will fortify us for the long separation to come, with the anxieties which might easily beset us, if we had not schooled ourselves to disregard them. Surely never before has life been so presented to us as superior in all its incidents and accidents. Its fullness and richness make every day and every hour its own excuse for being, whatever the next day or the next hour may bring forth. And all the interest in life comes from this movement and change. That is the great lesson of Faust. Through all the varied pleasures and experiences that Mephisto lavished on him, he could never say to any moment, "Stay (perpetually), thou art fair." So we pass from strength to strength, through our space of years to the great denouement, whatever that may be! Of one thing we may be sure (you and I, of all people)--the Power that has lavished all these blessing on us, has only good in store for us...."

1918: Wire to Mary in San Diego; he is en route there: "Meet me by moonlight tomorrow evening, not necessarily alone."

1918: "So no more at present from Yours Truly--Truly, I say! CWA."

1918: "There is a difference between things temporal and things eternal. And surely love is eternal. Ours will last as long as we do.... Your Charles."

1919: "A world of love to be divided amongst the family. And the wonder is that in dividing it, it is multiplied. Your Charles."

1919: "I think of you occasionally and you'll remember me. Try. Your Husband by Marriage."

1919: "Caress my local children for me, and try to revive my grandchildren's recollection of their devoted ancestor. Your contemporary (almost) Husband (altogether\*) -- \*As you may visualize him in it."

1920: "Love and love--and love--also love. To them as likes it. Your Charles."

1920: "Hoping confidently that you are the same. I look forward to making sure of it. Your own Charles."

## **His Children**

The reminiscences gathered by Margaret and Cushing Wright shortly after Charles's death contain several entries that tell of his love and attention to his children:

Cushing Wright: "I never knew another man of Mr. Ames's age and dignity who could so completely drop outside affairs and cares and enter with such wholehearted interest and delight into the evening pastimes and amusements of the family at home."

Alice Ames Crothers: "I well remember my joy at being held prisoner in his arms and creeping out when he closed his eyes. Again his surprise was the grand climax. No wonder every little child, however timidly, went to him instantly!"

Catherine Ames Turner: Each of the children had a little trip with him when they were seven or eight, and a big trip at 12 or 13. He took Catherine to Taylors Falls when she was seven, "and I am sure no child ever had a happier time for three or four days. He had quite a time, I remember, braiding my hair..."

"We went out one day into a rocky field overlooking the river, and he read me the story of Zaida, Zoraida, and Dohrahaida, and I think it became a regular custom as he took each child to Taylors Falls.... We spent many hours watching ants and beetles moving about under a big tree...he was never at a loss for ways to amuse us on our trips...."

Mary MooreTurner, 1909. On a visit to St. Paul, she called at 501. "There was a little bustle and some happy voices in the hall, and then in came Charles for introductions, so animated, so cheery, so joyous, like a ray of sunshine. With him came four lovely daughters.... They clustered around him, and when we went into the dining room, in any pause between courses, he would grasp the hand of one, or the arm of another, smile at third, and speak some pleasantry to a fourth...."

Ted Ames: While Ted was president of his children's club, the "North Star Club," they ejected a member for bad behavior. The father of the ejected child came to see

Charles, who said he had no connection with the club, except as an interested parent, but he'd speak to "the President."

"Father called me into his study to talk 'as one club President to another'.... He explained that our action had been rather unusual and irregular, and that good clubs were as a rule less arbitrary in their treatment of members. He made suggestions, but only in a friendly and advisory way, more in the tone of a contemporary and fellow president than otherwise...."

### **Some Letters to His Children**

One can see why and how Charles related so well to children. He had the talent to see the world through their eyes, and to know, at whatever age, what would interest them most. As the children grew in age and understanding, the tone and content of his letters changed, too.

A few samples, from among several hundred letters:

To Lesley, age 4, in Milton with his mother and two sisters, visiting his Lesley grandparents:

"I am glad to know that you say 'Thank you' sometimes. If you remember to do that, and to keep still at the table, I shall be very proud of you when you come back.

"I hope you are very good to Margaret, and play with her nicely. You must tell her about your papa at home, going down to his business every morning and coming home at night and finding no children to tell stories to and sing to and give eight kisses, or 16 or 17, you rascal! You ask for so many!

"Now good night, my dear boy. Papa loves you all, his three children, more than tongue can tell. Write to me again soon."

To Alice, age 5: "Dear Little Alice Ames: Please see if you can remember that you have a Papa. He is very, very far away from you now, on a giant ship and among strangers. The other people are good and pleasant, but he would rather have his own children and their Mamma.

"Every night before he goes to bed, he look at your pictures that Mamma sent him, and he thinks of you and how you look and what you are doing, and remembers how you say your little prayer, and says it with you, far far away...."

"Hug yourself for me, dear little daughter, and get your mother to kiss you four times more than she meant to, from your own Papa." (Then a little cloud drawing, with the words inside: "What do you think this is?")

To Theodore, age 9, written on a train between Washington and Hot Springs, Virginia, on the day William Howard Taft was inaugurated as President:

“Beloved Theodore: I have been thinking letters to you for the past two weeks, but this is the first chance I have had to write one. Even now, so joggly is the chu-chu-car that I have my doubts whether you will ever be able to read what is written.... N.B., This reminds me of two stories. Get me to tell them to you sometime.

“Well, sir, your mother and I have had a very variegated time for the past three weeks. I have had ever so many kinds of business to think and do about, and much friendly visiting in between. So that I now shall be very glad to go to a place where I have no business -- and no friends--perhaps hardly even an enemy. Especially as I have Mrs. Ames with me for company.

“Speaking of company. I’ve been thinking that I must manage to ‘be with’ my youngest son sometime this spring. We need to get acquainted and talk things over, you and I, and we will have to make an engagement for some date when it will be mutually convenient. What do you say?

“Think of being in Washington on the morning of March 4, 1909 and not seeing anything of the Inauguration of President Taft except a small portion of the crowd that is there to look on! We had breakfast in the station, and I peered through the veil of falling snow, and satisfied myself that the Capitol was still there. But this time, Mr. Taft is President and Mr. Roosevelt is Ex-President, and a long procession is plodding along through sloppy streets in front of the reviewing stand. And Charlie Taft, who is about your age, I believe, has taken the place of Kermit Roosevelt as the White House Kid.

“Soon we shall reach Covington, and our car will be switched the side road leading to Hot Springs. I enclose a map so that you can tell just where we are, when you wish to send love....

“So no more just now from your ever loving and most loving Father.”

To Margaret, age 10, written from Holland: “My Dear Little Margaret (getting to be quite a big one!).... I wonder if your flower gardens have been fairly begun, and whether there will be lots of flowers to make the yard look gay when I come home in two months. When I think of you all, I get impatient to go home right away. For do you know, I haven’t seen any children in all Holland that I wanted to exchange mine for, and hardly any that I thought your mother would rather have than you. But I shall be here for several days more, and I will keep looking. Meanwhile, I am still your loving Papa.”

To Alice, age 19, and Betty, age 15: “Just think how desolate we are with no big children in the house. Yet it makes us a little less lonely to know that you are not entirely contented to be away from home. Love to you ever and always from your Papa.”

To Catherine, age 19: “My dear Catherine. It is the end of a long, peaceful, happy, solitary evening. Last night I conducted the remnants of the family to the Burlington train, and watched them standing in the vestibule of the compartment car, a quartet of darlings indeed, if there ever was one....

“But the house is not lonely nor solitary. It is fully of lovely presences, crowded with the forms of my dear ones, not merely the children who have just gone from it, but the older ones who have been away for weeks and months. And not merely with the young folks of today, but with the babies they have been. At this moment, I can see with my memory’s eye a chubby child not much more than a year old, making joyous circuits of the table on which I am now writing in the back parlor...with an expression of rapture in her beaming face, which will always be one of the sweet memories of those old days....

“So dear, I am not lonely here, but alone for a while. Do you know, as I sat at the table this evening enjoying the delicious dinner which Julia served me, there were portraits of all the family to cheer me withal: Your blessed mother’s bust, the new painting of Theodore and Betty..., a sketch of Alice in oils made by your Aunt Meggie at one sitting, the recent photographs of Margaret and Lesley--everybody but you. So therefore, missing you with the eye of the body, I saw you with the eye of the mind, and thought of you most particularly. It would have been most agreeable to have you sitting in the chair on the other side of the table.... Indeed, I quite imagined you there and had a very good little visit with you....”

To Betty, age 24, in Paris. She had been in France since early in the year, working for the American Fund for the French Wounded, often in hospitals near the front. Written from St. Paul, on Armistice Day, November 11, 1918:

“Victory Day! Darling Betty: At 2:10 this morning, we were awakened by the whistles for which our subconsciousnesses had been listening so eagerly. I embraced your Ma heartily, and we went in our nighties to rejoice with Alice and then with Catherine. Then we waked Sam [Catherine’s son, age 7] and I talked with him for ten minutes to impress him with the meaning of the sound, so that he might reminisce to his grandchildren about the end of the Great War. His final remark was, ‘And Uncle Teddy hasn’t even got over there!’

“Of course, the day has been given up to joy--just so with hundreds of millions of people. We never before could feel so much members of a vast Human Family, all making a gigantic Big One, as it were!

“But we have also been making a little one, with our own beloved circle, including and embracing those fortunate members who are over in France doing their part. The overwhelming rush of thought and emotion makes it impossible to write anything consecutive, but I must send a line to each of my absent children, on this day of all others.

“You will know much our hearts are with you and Edith [also in France]. It is a great privilege...to celebrate on the spot. If you are still at St. Quentin, you must have been almost within earshot, or at least long-range cannon shot, of that fateful conference where the wonderful Foch fixed those splendid terms which we have just read in the afternoon papers.

“Fortunate, happy girls! How much we love you I really have not time, or ink, to tell you. Your ownest Father.”

To Margaret, age 30 [with various styles of handwriting approximated]: “Dear Disrespectful Daughter: What can you mean by your suggestion that your decadent handwriting is an unfortunate inheritance from your parent on your father’s side? Why drag me into it? **Is not my writing perfect legible?** Is it not *graceful*, **perpendicular** and flowing? Hath it not character? **What’s the matter with it, anyhow?** or perhaps you might copy some style from some other relative whom you greatly admire. Since you are that susceptible, you must be careful what kind of handwriting you marry into.”

### **The West Publishing Company**

Charles’s becoming involved with West Publishing Company had a large element of luck. He was lucky to have a friend in Sam Hill, also a friend of the West brothers, and who had told them of Charles’s skills and abilities. He was lucky to be able to borrow the money (we are not sure of the sources) that he had to invest as his entry ticket to the business. He was lucky that his new wife and their two families were so supportive of their move to what was then considered the Far West.

But a wise man has said, “Luck works for you only if you’re ready for it.” And ready he was. He knew the printing and publishing business. He had a solid education and great intellectual curiosity. But more important, he had the innate drive and leadership ability that any business needs. These qualities were immediately apparent to the West brothers, whose broad offer to him came only a few days after Charles first met them.

In a memoir, Sam Hill recalls that one day in 1882, John West “told me of a dream he had of the [National] Reporter System, but he said, ‘I can’t carry it out.’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘You can’t, but I know a man who can. May I ask him to come out?’ He said, ‘Yes, of course.’ So I wired Charles, and he wired back, ‘I suppose you want me to come out and sell law books to the Indians.’ ”

The West Publishing Company, originally a partnership, was already six years old, and already quite profitable. By 1880, the company had more than a hundred employees. But to expand further, the business needed to be incorporated and to issue stock as a way of attracting new investors. This was done in 1883, soon after Charles’s arrival. He was named Secretary, with the two West brothers and Peyton Boyle occupying the positions of President, Vice-President and Treasurer. It was clear, however, that the four men worked as a team, without much of a pecking order.

Almost from the outset, Charles was contributing more than his share of enterprise, imagination, and drive to the organization. Even as Secretary he was a prime mover, traveling extensively, prospecting for and buying new equipment, lobbying Congress with respect to postal rates, buying up rival law case reporting systems, and finding new investors in the main capital markets of Chicago and New York.

By 1900, Charles was the de facto president of the firm, even though, in deference to the Wests, he had the title only of Vice President and General Manager. (He became president some years later.) The two West brothers had mainly withdrawn from active management, and Peyton Boyle had moved to Washington, D. C., where he manned West Pub's business there. Like almost any enterprise in which Charles was involved (see all his civic activities below), Charles became the leader.

The new corporation was highly successful from the outset. The timing could not have been better. Federal and state laws and regulations were proliferating as American life became more industrial and urban, and the reach of government rapidly extended. Increasingly, lawyers had to depend on more comprehensive sources of information on new state and federal laws and legal decisions. West Pub responded to this need with great energy and enterprise. Within three years of its incorporation, West Pub had launched its National Reporter System, which reported on new federal and state laws and decisions, in a move that Charles described as a "preemption of the field so far as it can be preempted.... It is a gauntlet thrown down to the rest of the trade." The new system was launched by a mailing to 40,000 lawyers nationwide.

The system was expanded state by state, by buying up reporting systems already in place, by successful competition with existing organizations, or by launching systems in states where no comprehensive system existed. By 1887, the firm had 10,000 lawyer-customers; by 1891, the number had grown to more than 30,000. By 1892, the company could claim "reports and digests of 100,000 recent cases, and all decisions of the supreme courts of every state," as well as many other kinds of information. By 1893, West Pub had published over 900 volumes of law books and sold more than four million copies.

Financially, the business was an equal success. Sales, less than \$200,000 in 1885, quadrupled in the next decade, and continued to grow rapidly thereafter. By 1890, company assets were nearing \$1 million, and net earnings were nearly 20 percent of sales. The expansion of the business led in 1887 to the erection of an eight-story building on what is now Kellogg Boulevard in St. Paul. Branch offices were later established in Chicago, New York and Washington.

It goes without saying that West Pub was the source of Charles's considerable wealth, which he devoted not only to his family's ease, education, and cultural pursuits, but also to the many charitable and cultural organizations to which he gave time, energy and money. Due to West Pub's almost instant success, Charles was able to have the

house at 501--initially about half its ultimate size--built only three years after he and Mary started married life in Minnesota. Construction cost: \$6,600.

We have not been able to discover the net worth of the company when Charles died in 1921, but a safe guess would run into millions (in days when the dollar was far more valuable than today). That it continued to prosper and grow until the present day is a gross understatement. In 1996, when the company was sold to the Canadian-based Thomson Corporation, it had 7,000 employees. The selling price: \$3.4 billion.

But to Charles, the company was far more than a super-productive cash cow. It was his second home. A turning point in his affection for the company occurred in 1888, with the company's first employees' picnic. He wrote Mary:

"The first Annual Picnic of the Employees of the West Publishing Company has gone to join the Renaissance and the Thirty Years War and other matters of history, my dear. And it has been the most astonishing, unexpected, unheard of success! I never would have believed it if I hadn't seen it! That two hundred and fifty people from all departments of our establishment should go out and spend the day together, and have a royal good time, was a thing beyond my expectation....

"Greenhoot's address of welcome was admirable, and set the thing in the right key. Everyone was to do what he wished. [Events included a baseball game, boat race, swimming, 100-yard dash, fat man's race, three-legged race, and ladies' egg race, with prizes such as a box of cigars, a fishing rod, a hat, and a box of candy.]

"We boated and danced and watched the games. There were no accidents, no quarrels, no dissatisfaction that I could see. It was a most orderly and proper picnic--jolly but not riotous. Everything in good taste. I was very proud. I think better of the West Publishing Co. than I ever did before. It is something of a unit, and the picnic has done something to make it so.....

"At 6:30 I made a little speech--'appropriate remarks,' [Master of Ceremonies] Jehle announced -- and we went to the cars, everybody asserting that it was the most successful, delightful, etc., etc. On the cars we sang, Arthur and I with three or four of the editors, for an hour or so!

"There seemed to be a good deal of esprit de corps among the heterogeneous elements.... I made the acquaintance of a number of people whom I had not known before except by sight, and I danced a lot of square dances with keen enjoyment.

"I shall have an entirely different feeling when I enter the office Monday morning from that with which I left it Friday night!"

Charles was the only corporate officer to attend.

Most of Charles's business correspondence and materials about West Pub is in the archives of the Minnesota Historical Society. We have not spent enough time with this collection to learn how Charles's role in building and guiding the company evolved over the years.

By the beginning of World War I in 1914, Charles was devoting a great deal of time to charitable and cultural causes and to business and family travel. We can therefore infer that West Pub was running so smoothly, and the team of officers Charles had assembled was so accomplished, that he could act as a true chairman, involved only in broad policy at home and in forging and maintaining only the most important contacts with the world at large.

### **His Grasp was as Wide as His Reach (which itself was extensive)**

Charles gave so much time and devotion to various causes and institutions in St. Paul and elsewhere that his friends couldn't figure out where he got the time and energy required.

A tribute from the Century Club of New York, written shortly after Charles's death, commented: "He displayed the capacity for being interested in a dozen civic enterprises at the same time, of keeping each in a pigeonhole, discussing it, replacing it, and immediately taking up another. To his great charity for those who differed with him his friends ascribed to his unusual ability to convert the most strenuous opponent."

His friends and colleagues pointed out the qualities that allowed him to do so much: A super-quick mind, the ability to make quick decisions, avoidance of dwelling on the past, a highly organized and disciplined work ethic, and the charm and persuasiveness required to win people over to his point of view and to share his eagerness to be generous.

The Ames home at 501 became one of his and Mary's main tools for persuading others to join him in various civic enterprises. They delighted in entertaining, especially when there was a worthy cause to be served. "Nothing seemed to give him more pleasure than to bring people together under his own roof," a long-time friend recalled. Except when he was traveling, there were frequent meetings at 501 aimed at straightening out or gathering support for some St. Paul institution.

### **The Saint Paul Institute**

The Saint Paul Institute was designed by Charles W. Ames, in partnership with his friend, Dr. Arthur Sweeney and formally launched in 1907. The Institute, as Charles envisioned it, was to be a combined vocational training school and a community college, open to all, "without sectarian bias or political partisanship." Sweeney envisaged that the Institute would offer courses that would make it possible for "farmer and laborer to acquire the kind of education that he wanted, rather than the...milk-and-water courses...the average schoolmarm offered...."

Their vision was that Saint Paul should become a new Athens, geared to the realities of the new, prosperous, increasingly complex America. “In twenty-five years and fifty years,” Charles wrote, “we shall find that St. Paul has taken her right place in the Sisterhood of Cities whose greatness and prosperity are not merely expressed in commerce and industry,...but in a contented, industrious, intelligent population, enjoying the highest blessings of civilization.”

“And so we talked to our Trustees,” Sweeney remembered, “and believing in the Institute just as most men believe in the Trinity, not understanding it in the least, but willing to accept it on the faith they had in Charles W. Ames and his dreams,” they incorporated the Institute in January 1907. Charles’s leadership was to continue until his death in 1921.

There were four categories of Institute activity: Evening schools, lectures and musical programs, art school and gallery, and a museum of natural and physical science. There were 58 classes to choose from, ranging from millinery and cooking to industrial arts and science. The teachers were mainly moonlighters from the public schools.

Charles had accurately read the desires of the population, many of whom were either European immigrants or their children, and who had a yen for culture in their bones. A series of eight lectures in 1907 drew 9,000 attendees. In the following year, courses on education and art drew 16,000.

For a while, all the Institute’s activities prospered. But little by little, the scope of the Institute narrowed and deepened. Some activities were closed down when attendance dropped, some when depression or war came and public support diminished, some when other organizations in the Twin Cities appeared to be in a better position to be most effective. The lecture series ended in the late 1920’s, the gallery and art classes in 1932. The formal school classes, which struggled through World War II, were closed down in 1952.

That Charles’s original concept lasted only a few decades is no sign of failure. The Institute evolved into the Science Museum of Minnesota, which has never faltered. Set up in 1913, its first-year attendance was 3,000. By 1920, it was 21,000. Today, eight decades and several homes later, visitors to its handsome new building approach nearly a million a year, with constantly changing exhibits and educational programs.

A bulletin of the Century Club of New York, issued shortly after Charles’s death, said that he “devoted [to the Institute] an enthusiasm that never faltered, a persistent and resourceful effort that taxed even his seemingly exhaustless energy, and more money than he ever confessed.”

Charles’s son Lesley served as Museum Board President from 1931 to 1942. The family’s interest and support continues.

## Unity Church

In 1884, within a year of moving to St. Paul, Charles was a member of the board of Unity Church. By the middle of the next decade, Charles was in charge of two of the most important aspects of church management, recruiting new pastors and raising funds for expansions and improvements. By 1907, he had become a member of the board of the national American Unitarian Association.

In recruiting pastors, Charles favored activists who would not only possess “divine fire” in their sermons, but also be deeply involved in all church activities. One minister was content only to preach on Sundays. He and Charles agreed it was time for him to move on. Except for this one instance, all of Charles’s recruitments led to effective, popular careers in St. Paul, including those of Samuel Crothers, Richard Boynton, and Frederick Eliot.

The residence at 501 became a gathering place for discussions of church affairs and for persuasive talks about the money required to enlarge the church and its activities. Charles led the way in making possible the enlargement of the church, including the Parish House and the Sunday School Wing.

At Unity Church today, there exists today the Ames Chapel in the Parish House, and the Ames Memorial Window, the latter a gift from the Informal Club, a 60-member discussion club of which Charles had been secretary and spearhead. for 27 years. (The club’s success, his friend Arthur Sweeney said, was due “almost wholly the genial personality of Mr. Ames, together with his bright wit and original point of view, which infused vitality and interest into the group.”)

A few days after Charles’s death, Unity’s Board of Trustees adopted a long statement (subsequently bound in leather) recognizing his 38 years of service. It says, in part:

“No one could possibly calculate the amount of [his] service. In the problems of business and parish administration, Mr. Ames was always a most trusted counselor. In the social activities of the parish, he was a leader who knew how to bring to the life of the Church a rare gift of kindly and hospitable friendliness. In the gatherings for entertainment and amusement, his keen sense of humor and his delight in dramatics made him the natural master of ceremonies.

“As Trustee, as Sunday School superintendent, as first president of the Laymen’s League, as president of the Minnesota Unitarian Conference, and in a dozen other capacities, he showed an understanding of the purposes of the Church and a devotion to the ends which the Church exists to promote.... It is only in comparison with his gifts of mind and heart that his generous financial support of the Church seems to be a matter of secondary importance.

“But the chief gift which he made to the Church was his own faith.... He was quick to see the good in every form of religion and every church, but he held strong convictions of his own.... His personal religion was utterly simple, but wholly reverent and sincere. Few men in any Church have obeyed more truly the ancient admonition to ‘walk humbly with thy God.’ ”

### **St. Paul Academy and Summit School**

Charles and Mary sent their son Lesley to one of the many private schools in St. Paul, the Barnard School. A recently published history of SPA and Summit school relates that one spring day in 1900, Charles discovered that Lesley, then 15, “couldn’t tell a cosine from a coefficient [or] the accusative from the ablative,” even though Lesley had had years of training in math and three years of Latin. As Lesley remembered it, “The effect on the roof of 501 Grand Avenue is still traceable.”

This led to Charles’s active involvement in private-school education for the rest of his life, beginning in bringing about the conversion of the Barnard School into the St. Paul Academy. He convened a committee of unhappy parents, and led them and the school to higher educational ground. He and Mary were later similarly involved in the conversion of a small girl’s school into the Summit School.

Charles and his fellow parents recruited a new principal for St. Paul Academy and laid down guidelines for the school’s educational standards and fiscal management. The history continues, “Charles W. Ames remained the school most active and outspoken supporter for the first 20 years of its life, just as he was for its sister school. One of the indelible marks of Ames’s leadership was his insistence on two principles of his own work ethic: financial solvency and discipline.”

The newly converted St. Paul Academy copied the formula of a private boys’ school in Baltimore. Its aim was to take a boy and “fill his head in the morning, his stomach at noon, sit him down in study hall and send him outside for athletic exercise in the afternoon,” and then get him home for dinner and homework and sleep in his own bed. i.e., the modern day school.

Ten years later, the Academy was able to boast in an advertisement, “In ten years since this school was founded, we have sent sixty boys to Yale, Harvard, Princeton, University of Minnesota and other colleges. It is not necessary to send a boy away to school in order to have him properly prepared for college. Our graduates are just as well prepared as those of any school in the country....”

When in 1915 it came time to save Miss Loomis’s School for Girls from financial failure, to move it into a new and better building, and to convert it into the Summit School, Charles “once more threw himself into the breach, approaching his long-time friends a second time about elevating their school to a new level.” In addition to providing the funds, Charles and his colleagues recruited as principal Sarah Converse, whose led the school for 33 years.

## The French Legion of Honor

Charles's long-time secretary, Lily Long, wrote in a memoir that Charles's work on behalf of the French involvement in World War I was carried out "with a passion which for a time absorbed all his energies. Aside from his public work in connection with the Red Cross, the Fatherless Children of France, and other humanitarian efforts, he did a great deal of the unpublished work demanded by the exigencies of war.... Everything else was cast aside..." He considered, she said, that the Legion of Honor award given him in November, 1919, was "the crown of a lifetime."

Almost as soon as World War I started in Europe, in August 1914, Charles, a lifelong Francophile, invested major amounts of time and money to assist the French. The effort which he and Mary organized in St. Paul was one of many across the nation. As he said on receiving the Legion of Honor, he had found the German actions repugnant in the extreme, and therefore "had repudiated my alleged duty of neutrality in word and deed, and gave my hearty allegiance to France and her allies."

He and Mary became especially involved in the American Fund for the French Wounded (AFFW). A good portion of 501 Grand Avenue became a workshop in which Mary, her daughters, and many other volunteers rolled bandages and assembled and boxed other supplies for shipment to France. By 1916, 150 St. Paul women had participated, and more than 100,000 articles had been shipped.

Charles was active on many fronts, advising the national leaders of the AFFW in administrative matters, negotiating with the French steamship line to transport relief supplies free of charge, and working with the national headquarters to keep the AFFW free of the interference from other relief organizations. (For example, there was a move to force all relief materials through Red Cross channels, even though the AFFW's distribution system was already efficiently in being.)

In 1916, Charles, accompanied by his son Ted, went to France to help solidify administration at the AFFW's headquarters in Paris. Daughters Margaret and Alice were already there. They acquired a little truck, driven by Ted, in which, Margaret wrote, the four of them visited "some of the more out of the way auxiliary French hospitals to carry dressings and garments.... The final touch was the chance to distribute personally the very superior 'comfort bags' made by our own friends in St. Paul and packed in our own library at home under Mother's supervision or with her own hands."

In an article written from Paris for the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, Charles wrote: "Of course, one has glimpses everywhere of wounded soldiers, with heads bandaged, on crutches, maimed, blinded, mutilated--all these are incidents for which the mind is fully prepared. But the startling, the overwhelming fact which clutches at the heartstrings is the universal mourning. Literally more than half the women in Paris are in black. Many or most of them wear veils which tell the tale of special intimate bereavement.... And

those who are not already suffering from the loss of their nearest and dearest are bearing the anguish of constant apprehension that their turn may come next.... [At the end of the war, some half a million French soldiers lay wounded, and other millions had died.]

“Then my mind goes back to America, with its millions of well-fed, comfortable people in all classes of society, most of them quite indifferent to the woes of the rest of the world. We follow our customary routines of life, [and] take [only] a temporary interest in the stories of suffering and need which come to us....

“The years 1914, 1915, 1916 will stand out for centuries as the highest peak in the mountain range of human history. Leaving aside all questions of duty and humanity, we lose a great opportunity if we fail to have a comprehending sense of the mighty events which are going on in our own times. I esteem it one of the great privileges of my life to come into slight contact with the heroic French people in this hour of their tragic exaltation....”

The Ameses' participation in other efforts to assist the French included the Fatherless Children of France, the American Memorial Hospital in France, and the Association for Fellowships in French Universities.

The ceremony awarding Charles the Legion of Honor occurred on November 12, 1919, in a luncheon at the Minnesota Club, attended by several visiting French dignitaries, and presided over by Minnesota Governor Burnquist.

French official Dr. D. Marcel Knecht presented the award:

“Then, today we are celebrating also the effort, the splendid effort of Minnesota in the war, the effort of St. Paul, the effort of the women of St. Paul, of the men of St. Paul.... We are gathered here today, to praise one of the highest types of American manhood, of American idealism, and of American patriotism--Charles W. Ames....”

“I take the liberty...to express to him the sentiments of every Frenchman who has known him. His loyalty, his modesty, his splendid heart, his generous inspiration, his unselfishness.... Today I bring the Legion of Honor to Mr. Ames ...for his acts of devotion towards our wounded.... ”

### **Anti-Subversive Activities, 1917-20**

In a speech for a celebration of Bastille Day in 1918, attended by more than 4,000 St. Paul citizens, Charles declared, “An outlaw now, Germany will be an outcast for a generation after the war, and can be readmitted to the company of civilized nations only when she abandons her evil courses....”

Given his love for France and his strong aversion to the Kaiser's Germany, it is not surprising that once the United States entered World War I, Charles should be a

totally committed supporter of the war and an unremitting foe of anyone who opposed American involvement or whose support he considered halfhearted.

As the United States entered the war, a combination of events and circumstances caused much concern among Minnesota's conservative businessmen and political leaders, and many ordinary citizens as well. Among these were:

-- Approximately a quarter of Minnesotans were either immigrants from German and Austria or the children of those immigrants. In some areas of Minnesota, more German than English was spoken, and some parochial schools had German as a first language. Some people of German and Austrian heritage came out against the war, urging resistance to conscription and refusing to buy war bonds.

-- The labor movement, whose rise began about the turn of the century, was gaining strength, and some labor leaders and newspapers depicted the war as a means mainly to enrich the controllers of capital. Business leaders such as Charles tended to view all labor unions as being like the Industrial Workers of the World -- the "Wobblies"-- whose strength had reached its peak in the period around 1912. Many IWW members served jail sentences for anti-war activities.

-- The rise of the Non-Partisan League, an agrarian movement, which had started in North Dakota, was now gaining strength in Minnesota. The League advocated public ownership of grain elevators, flour mills, stockyards, and packing houses; exemption of farm improvements from taxation; rural credit banks operating at cost; and other measures seen by business leaders as threatening American prosperity, its way of life, and its war effort. Many members of the Non-Partisan League had come out against U.S. involvement in the war.

-- The triumph of Bolshevism in the Russian Revolution of March 1917, and Russia's subsequent withdrawal from the war, following a treaty with the Kaiser. There was considerable suspicion that agents of Bolshevism were infiltrating American labor unions, with the ultimate aim of destroying American democracy and the free enterprise system.

### **The Commission of Public Safety**

When war was declared, the Minnesota Legislature was about to adjourn, and was barred by the state constitution from meeting again until nearly two years later. The legislators therefore decided that the state needed what amounted to an interim government to suppress disloyal outbreaks and disturbances and to promote patriotism. Within ten days after the United States entered the war, they created the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety.

In his four-volume "A History of Minnesota," published in 1926, William Watts Filial, first president of the University of Minnesota, wrote: "If a large hostile army had

already been landed at Duluth and was about to march on the capital of the state, a more liberal dictatorship could hardly have been conceded to the commission.”

The enabling act gave it comprehensive power “to do all acts and things non-inconsistent with the constitution or laws of the state of Minnesota or the United States, which are necessary or proper for the public safety and for the protection of life and property [and] to perform all acts and things necessary or proper, so that the resources of the state may be most efficiently applied toward...successful prosecution of the war.”

The Commission could condemn property, require any person to give testimony and produce documents, remove from office any local or county official, and take any other executive or legislative action it deemed necessary. Within very broad limits, the Commissioners were free to do whatever they deemed best. The Legislature gave them a million dollars in operating funds.

The seven-member Commission was chaired by the Governor. Charles W. Ames was one of those the Governor appointed to serve.

Almost immediately, the Commission ordered the formation of the Home Guard of Minnesota as “a deterrent [against] evil-minded persons plotting crimes or destruction of property” and forged an agreement with the Pinkerton agency to gather “desired information.” Within three months, Home Guard battalions were organized in St. Paul, Duluth, Mankato and other cities, and within a year the number of battalions had reach twenty-three.

During the late spring and summer of 1917, the Commission ordered all licensed saloons closed at 10 pm and females barred from admission. Later that year, the order was extended to pool halls and billiard rooms. In 1918, when Charles was no longer a member, the Commission required registration of all enemy aliens, ordered that no strike or lockout should occur under any circumstance, banned non-citizens from teaching positions in any school, and authorized county directors of Liberty Bond drives to summon before them people who were thought to avoid buying bonds, or not buying enough.

Three events of 1917 brought the question of subversive activities to a head. In July, the Safety Commission petitioned the federal Department of Justice to take action against the Industrial Workers of the World for its anti-war propoganda. Though the Department of Justice took no action, publicity about the Commission’s petition inflamed public patriotic groups while persuading the labor movement that the Commission was hostile toward all unions.

In September, Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin addressed the Non-Partisan League convention in St. Paul. Though a careful reading of his speech revealed no subversive or anti-war sentiments, inaccurate reporting made it seem subversive, leading the Commission to petition the U. S. Senate to expel La Follette as a teacher of disloyalty and subversion.

In late summer, the American Federation of Labor launched a strike in an attempt to organize workers of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company. The Safety Commission ordered an end to the strike and dictated the terms on which the strikers would return to work. They issued a specific order against any further attempt to organize the Transit Company and a general order that no unions would be permitted where they had not existed before the entry of the U.S. into the war.

During this labor unrest, Charles became a lightning rod for the dissatisfaction of the labor movement, whose leaders petitioned the Governor to remove him from the Commission. His opposition to having unions at West Pub was well known. He was proud of the generous way his employees were treated. He resented the suggestion that they, or the company, would be better off if unions were allowed in. When the unions began pressing the Governor to drop him from the Commission, many of Charles's business colleagues wrote letters urging his retention.

After waffling a few weeks, the Governor telegraphed Charles, who was traveling in the East, that he was no longer a Commission member. The governor's action irritated Charles, who had planned to resign by Christmas and believed the Governor knew it. He telegraphed to Mary, "Rec'd Governor's astonishing telegram just as I took the train. Seems very little consequence. Anyhow, had good eight hours sleep."

During his tenure on the Commission, Charles took a special interest in the way schools dealt with the teaching of the German language. After a group of educators held an extensive examination of German-language books used in Minnesota schools, Charles recommended the banning of "all German text books which expert examination shows to be tainted with... 'German propoganda.' " Out of 270 books examined, 20 were identified as preaching the Kaiser's line.

He also recommended that no school, public or parochial, be allowed to teach principally in the German language. Such use of German, he said, "should be absolutely discontinued in Minnesota.... The war crisis makes it plain...that the state should control the private schools, at least in respect to the primary language used."

### **His Anti-Subversive Activities Continue**

After leaving the Commission, Charles's continued his interest in ferreting out groups that he thought subversive. In a letter to Governor Burnquist in 1919, he said the country needed "to arouse the sense of loyalty to our institutions and to organize public sentiment against the impending revolutionary struggle."

At stake, Charles believed, was the future of American democracy and its free enterprise system. He joined a number of national anti-subversive organizations. His papers at the Minnesota Historical Society include folder after folder of newspaper clippings that tracked the activities of various leftist organizations.

He was not alone in his attitude. Many, if not all, his friends among the business leaders in St. Paul, and across the state, felt the same way as he. The anti-capitalistic attitudes of the Non-Partisan League and some of the labor unions continued to strike fear into the hearts of many business leaders, and the Red Scare that took over at the end of the war was gaining potency.

For someone of Charles's erudition and general conservatism, he must have been aware of many disturbing trends in the arts and philosophy. Nineteenth-century romanticism had soured and its optimism greatly weakened. Charles's was a very 19th century sensibility. He was a great music lover and read widely, but one cannot doubt his preference for the nobility of Beethoven to the angst of Mahler, the landscapes of Moran and Bierstadt to the cubism of Braque and Picasso, the forthright novels of Dickens to the moral ambiguity of Henry James. To people conservative in their artistic and musical tastes, modernism must have seemed closely tied to loose morals and spiritual ruination. These developments were often linked to the politics of Marx and the philosophy of Nietzsche, which were thought to be undermining social norms and righteous values.

How much these movements contributed to an unease that played into concerns over the emerging labor movement in America and the advent of socialism abroad--that varied from individual to individual. Some of this may well have played into the back of Charles's mind as he girded himself for "the impending revolutionary struggle." In a very real sense, the world with which he was most comfortable had been swept away by World War I.

### **Almost Perpetual Motion**

None of the events of the period 1917-1920 kept him from his many business activities, his work on behalf of the French, or from the extensive traveling that became a way of life for him during the last 25 years of his life.

He loved sea voyages. His friend Francis Tiffany reported that Charles "made it a practice every once in a while to get away from the daily routine and to be at sea, where he had the leisure to think his life over...." Tiffany believed that "this habit of withdrawal...was one of the influences that gave continuity and purpose to his life of service and devotion to large and unselfish ends." His voyages abroad were many--alone, with Mary, with individual children, and with the whole family. He was determined that his children should have the youthful experience of seeing the important historical and cultural sights of France and Italy, just as he and Mary had had when they were young.

There were innumerable train trips, most of them on business, to New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and to the West Coast, always richly interleaved with visits to his many friends and relatives. There were family outings to the great places in the West--Yosemite, Yellowstone, and the Great upland plains of Wyoming. Wherever he went, his enthusiasm for interesting scenes bubbled up.

From the Plains Hotel in Cheyenne, he wrote to Mary (June, 1919): “The hotel is a scene of revelry by night. Mr. Hands, the proprietor, is giving a big party. There is an orchestra, and the lobby is full of dancers, including, I must admit, bareback ladies--fair women and brave men--soldiers--and politicians and stockmen, mostly running to stout sizes, perspiring visibly, but not seeming to mind it. All making breaks for the dining room refreshments whenever the band gives them the chance....”

His daughter Margaret recalled, “He had a gift for languages which made his travels rich in personal contacts. He had none of the self-consciousness in using a foreign tongue which so often prevents travelers from getting below the surface.... I remember someone in Paris complementing Father on his facility with French. He said, ‘Oh, I get the effect by saying everything quite rapidly twice.’

“Wherever he went, he made friends.... The servants in hotels or pensions, the chauffeurs and cabbies and gondoliers, all were human beings to him, with families to support and lives of their own to live.... He was always buying little presents for their children and sending messages to them later....”

He sought out those he most wanted to meet. Among these was James Bryce, the author of “The American Commonwealth,” a treatise on America that is still widely read. On reaching London in June 1894, he wrote to Bryce:

“My Dear Sir, It is with some embarrassment that I present these letters of introduction, and ask for the privilege of an interview with you, for I have no special claim for such intrusion, and I know that just now you may be even more busy than usual.

“But when I planned this little vacation visit to England, I found that there was one Englishman whom I desired to meet more than any other, and that was the author of ‘The American Commonwealth.’

“I think one of my friends speaks of me as as ‘a student’ of your writings. I can hardly consider myself a student of anything in these days of exacting business cares, but I have greatly enjoyed reading your books, and I feel the indebtedness of every good American for your invaluable analysis of American institutions and American life.

“I shall be in London till next Monday. May I ask you to let me know if it will be convenient to you to have me call on you at any time this week? If your engagements are such that it would not be convenient, I beg you to say so frankly. Yours Sincerely, Charles W. Ames.”

Bryce received Charles the next day.

## The Diamond Ranche

In 1917, Charles and daughter Betty toured the West, and for the first time he saw the Diamond Ranche, a large (13 miles long) horse and cattle spread near Chugwater, Wyoming, 65 miles north of Cheyenne. It became a major love of his last years.

In July 1918, in partnership with Mary's cousin Warren Delano (and perhaps other more silent investors), he bought the ranch for about a quarter million dollars. In a two-and-one-half year span, he made at least eight trips to the ranch.

He was in charge, and loved it. He hired a new manager, raised salaries, bought hundreds of horses and cattle, and made plans for their wintering. He knew the ranch might turn out to be more of a hobby than a business: "It will be all outlay and no income for a long while to come." For the rest of his life, it turns out.

But he was not about to get out. His exuberance shows through in his letters to Mary:

--July 7, 1918: He sees a sign saying, "NO hunting or fishing permitted on these premises. By order -- Charles W. Ames." He writes to Mary: "Ain't he a *grand seigneur*.' says I to myself, says I. 'And you're him!' "

-- April 24, 1919: "It is a mighty interesting enterprise, and I could almost wish to be twenty-five years younger and with quite different tastes and aptitudes to work it out to a successful conclusion. But I wouldn't turn the clock back a minute, and if I began to reconstruct myself and my life, there is no certainty that I should improve on it or us."

September 29, 1919: "All the morning, we drove over the Range looking at ...the cheerful and plump-looking horses and cattle which came into our field of vision.... And now we have just returned, Warren and I, from our first ride along the slopes and up and down the canyons to the south and east of the home ranch. Beautiful country---- beautiful sky and cloud effects, good air and pleasant temperature, neither too hot nor too cool....."

The new ranch manager, Major Paul C. Raborg, did not keep the most careful books. Some ranch hands and families on nearby ranches began to spread rumors that he was diverting funds to his own use. He and Charles teamed up to squelch these rumors and fired some of the hands responsible for spreading them.

Where an owner might have issued a severe castigation, Charles wrote to Raborg: "I have thought a good deal about our long conference, and the more I have thought about it, the more it has seemed to me that the violent criticism, unjust though it was, was a good thing for us all, and especially for you. This is because of the way in which we took it. Without disturbing our relations, it has caused us to examine critically

the policies and methods which you have followed, and that is a really good thing. Our best lessons come from experience, and this has surely been an experience!"

## **Final Illness**

In February 1921, Charles fell ill and was having trouble eating. He was taken to the Mayo Clinic in nearby Rochester, Minnesota for tests. He appeared to rally and began to eat again, and in March he was brought home. But his health then went rapidly downhill. He died on April 3, 1921, three months short of 66.

The diagnosis was pernicious anemia, in which the system is unable to assimilate the essential vitamin B-12. Injections can now hold the sickness at bay, but had not been developed in 1921.

Charles had no long final illness. But there were indications that he was slowing down. As early as 1918, he wrote Mary, "I'm not my spunky self these days, mebbe it's years, mebbe the wear and tear of subconscious strain and tension, including constant and intense happiness..."

"Whatever, it is my sensibilities that seem dulled, my elasticity reduced, my sense of responsibility rather deadened..." (But a month later he telegraphs Mary from California, "I am mighty well, thank you, and wish you all the same.")

He would pull himself together and get on with business or pleasure. In his letter of August 16, 1920, traveling to Wyoming, he is tired and irritable, but the next day, he writes that he had a good lunch, was enjoying a novel, and "am progressing more cheerfully on my way, with my mind attuned to life in the middle sixties." And the next day, "So no more from your well-preserved husband."

In the fall, he was feeling well enough to start planning a family trip to Africa, which was to take place the next March.

In December 1920, four months before his death, he had a business trip to the East Coast, in which he said his trip had "been a continuous performance...it was rather wearing, as I am not very elastic any more.... Altogether, now, as I think of it, I am rather tired...."

## **Last Glimpses**

Here are three excerpts from "Memories of Charles W. Ames":

Marguerite Guinotte, a visitor from France: "I noticed how sympathetic your father was, how much more observant than most men of the mood of those about him, how quickly he would dispel by a kind glance or some mildly teasing remark the wave of loneliness that would...assail [us].... But to see him frolic with his grandchildren was

perhaps the prettiest picture of all.” No one could watch, she wrote, “without feeling profoundly touched....”

Charles’s good friends, Benjamin Summers, long-time treasurer of Unity Church: “His personal charm fascinated [other men], his bubbling humor drew them to him, his open-handed generosity taught others how to give, and the sweetness and purity of his moral fiber made it impossible to associate with him without trying to be worthy of his friendship.”

Louise Vincent: “...it was the sheer fun of him. No one could be downhearted while he was about.”

**END**