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Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers

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Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Selected Tales, Essays, and Poems

Edited by Elizabeth Duquette and Cheryl Tevlin

Introduction by Elizabeth Duquette

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Editor's Introduction

From December 1907 to November 1908, *Harper's Bazar* published *The Whole Family*, a project conceived by the author and editor William Dean Howells and executed by Howells and eleven other prominent authors. Each writer contributed a chapter in the voice of a different member of an American family, developing the plot from previously completed sections. Howells wrote the first chapter, setting the story in motion and introducing the family members. Many noteworthy authors agreed to participate, including Henry James, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. As part of the fun, *Bazar* published the installments anonymously, encouraging readers to match the author of each chapter to the list of twelve contributors. But, as a commentator noted, the list of contributors made it is hard to imagine the family as anything but dysfunctional: "The man—or woman—who could draw Mr. Howells, and Mr. James, and Mrs. Phelps Ward, and Dr. Van Dyke into such a scheme, and hold them to playing the game with straight faces in public" "deserves" to have his name "written on brass" (Howard, 53).¹ The gathered authors had won their reputations in a dizzying range of styles and genres, including regionalism, sentimentalism, children's literature, religious fiction, reform writing, and realism. As a result, *The Whole Family* is characterized by a chaotic style and lurching plot, so much so that a *New York Times* reviewer dubbed it a "comedy of confusion" (Kelly). But then, as now, the real accomplishment of the project lay in bringing the complexity of the late nineteenth-century literary world into stark relief.

Twenty-first-century readers are accustomed to tidy accounts of post-bellum literary history, organized around the dyad of realism and naturalism, with a quick nod to local color or regionalist writers. There is little sign of the multiple styles included in *The Whole Family*. Where

did the “comedy of confusion” go? The critical priorities and professional anxieties that shaped postbellum literary history derive from the (often fierce) late-century debates about realism and the changing status of writers and their critics.² Even though women writers participated in these debates, few were included either in the literary histories written during the period or the canon they established. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps was not one of the few. This might have surprised postbellum readers, who were accustomed to encountering Phelps’s writings alongside works by Howells, James, and Mark Twain in prominent and elite periodicals such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s Monthly*, *Century*, and the *North American Review*. Phelps’s home was profiled in Richard Stoddard’s *Poets’ Homes* (1879); her literary contributions were detailed in *Our Famous Women* (1888); and her advice to writers was included in *The Art of Authorship* (1890). Helen Gray Cone confidently asserted that women writers belonged “among their brother authors, in classes determined by method, local background, or any other basis of arrangement which is artistic rather than personal,” pointing to Phelps’s achievements to support her claim (928). Phelps was, in other words, a popular and respected author across the postbellum period, even if, as scholars have detailed, it became increasingly difficult for her to maintain her position as the business of literature evolved. One of the aims of this collection of stories, essays, and poems is to return Phelps to the prominence she once enjoyed, thus bringing to view both the chaos of the postbellum literary world and the vital contributions Phelps made to it.

Phelps was close to the end of her career when she contributed to *The Whole Family*. She was assigned “The Married Daughter,” and her chapter was scheduled to follow Henry James’s contribution, “The Married Son.” According to June Jordan, the *Bazar* editor in charge of the project, Phelps bristled at what she took to be James’s attacks on “her” character. “I shall defend Maria from the aspersions of being ‘a manger,’” she promised Jordan (*Three Rousing Cheers*, 277). Unsurprisingly her chapter begins on a defensive note: “We start in life with the most preposterous of all human claims—that one should be understood. We get bravely over that after awhile; but not until the idea has been knocked out of us by the hardest. I used to worry a good deal, myself, because nobody—distinctly

not one person—in our family understood me; that is, me in my relation to themselves; nothing else, of course, mattered so much” (*The Whole Family*, 185). Maria Price may be speaking, but it is easy enough to hear the author herself in this lament. Indeed, as Alfred Habegger has observed, “The authors [of *The Whole Family*] often revealed a deep sympathy for their assigned characters” (Howells et al., *The Whole Family*, xxvi). This is especially true in Phelps’s case, and it raises an important question: What would it take for contemporary readers to understand Phelps?

A first step would be to revise our approach to postbellum writing by devoting less attention to the novel. Decades ago Nina Baym observed, “If critics ever permit the woman’s novel to join the main body of ‘American literature,’ then all our theories about American fiction . . . will have to be radically revised” (36–37). Feminist scholars have regularly reiterated Baym’s trenchant observation, achieving only modest success with the field at large.³ To finally enact these much-needed changes to literary history, a slight revision to Baym’s argument is needed: it is not just the “woman’s novel” but also the vast number of short works, including essays, tales, and poems, published by women after the Civil War that must be added to “the main body of ‘American literature.’”⁴ The handful of Phelps’s novels familiar to scholars represents only a small portion of her impressive body of work. While some may be familiar with *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *The Silent Partner* (1871), *The Story of Avis* (1877), or *A Singular Life* (1895), few know the short works that echo and complicate the narratives presented in the novels. Phelps’s longer works gesture to the diversity of her interests and the range of her talent, yet they cannot capture the whole of her achievement, articulated across the hundreds of stories, essays, and poems she wrote during her nearly five-decade-long career.

Phelps herself would likely have endorsed a shift in emphasis to short works. Like male authors of the period, Phelps wrote essays about literature, and hers make a powerful case for the artistic value of short stories. “The short story is to literature what the opal is to jewels,” she asserts in one essay. When done well, the story is “the most delightful” form of fiction, but in the wrong hands it can be “the dreariest of things” (“George Eliot’s Short Stories,” 1). Ideally suited to the pace of

postbellum life, “the short story is, without question,” Phelps writes, “the literary favorite of our time” (“The Short Story,” this volume). Too often, she explains, tales are not given their proper due, for they cannot be accurately assessed by standards developed for longer-form fiction; only “judges” “trained” in their particular features can fully appreciate the artistry of stories (“Stories that Stay,” 118). In an effort to transform readers into “judges,” Phelps lists four qualities that help stories to make a lasting impression: “originality, humanity, force, and finish” (123). Sounding like Edgar Allan Poe, who also lauded the power of short fiction, Phelps explains that stories should have “some surprise or shock of novelty; some hell or heaven of human feeling; or some grip of absolute strength” (123). Because of their brevity, stories can jolt readers in a way novels cannot, providing edifying and entertaining access to the extremes of human experience.

Phelps moderates her interest in the power of “novelty,” however, when she asserts that literature’s main charge is the depiction of “life as it is” (*Chapters*, 263). For readers who know Phelps from her best-selling novel *The Gates Ajar*, which describes heaven as embodied, domestic, and familiar, the claim that she draws her subjects from “life as it is” may be a surprise. Yet Phelps is clear that art cannot be divorced from the moral demands of mortal life. As she explains in her autobiography, *Chapters from a Life* (1896):

the province of the artist is to portray life as it is; and life *is* moral responsibility. Life is several other things, we do not deny. It is beauty, it is joy, it is tragedy, it is comedy, it is psychical and physical pleasure, it is the interplay of a thousand rude or delicate motions and emotions, it is the grimmest and merriest motley of phantasmagoria that could appeal to the gravest or the maddest brush ever put to palette; but it is steadily and sturdily and always moral responsibility. An artist can no more fling off the moral sense from his work than he can oust it from his private life. (263)

To hold that “moral responsibility” is the first, and final, duty of the artist in an era that struggled to understand changing paradigms of re-

sponsibility from legal interpretation to arguments for evolution, indicates one of the key challenges associated with reading Phelps; to do so after modernism's campaigns to reject the social utility of art is even more difficult.⁵ As the short works collected here demonstrate, Phelps's commitment to purposive fiction was a fundamental component of her thought; her works both argue and plead for social reform, changed economic priorities, and revised moral norms.⁶

It is not just to fiction that readers should turn to understand Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, however. She also wrote learned essay on theology, philosophy, and literary history, as well as polemical essays on contemporary social and political concerns. Not only do her essays, some of which are included in this volume, provide new perspectives on key subjects for the postbellum period, such as the definition of the fact or the aims of realism, they also challenge the prevailing assumption that affect was the primary means women writers used to engage readers or ideas. While Phelps was certainly capable of manipulating her readers' emotions, her essays make clear that she was also adept at crafting abstract arguments. Her immense erudition, on display in all of her work but especially the essays, complicates established conventions and counters lingering prejudices about the nature of women's writing during the period.

Like many nineteenth-century authors, Phelps wrote poetry as well as prose, composing key occasional pieces, such as a poem for the first graduation ceremony of Smith College in 1879 ("Victurae Salutamus"), as well as ballads and lyrics. In his *Poets of America* (1885), Edmund Stedman posits that Phelps is "essentially a poet," a quality he suggests is evident even in her prose (446). Subsequent readers have not always shared Stedman's assessment and, like much of the poetry written by women in the nineteenth century, Phelps's poetry has been largely ignored. This critical neglect might not have surprised the author, however, for she wrote in 1876, "My poetry is a great mystery to me. I accept criticism upon it with the meekness of perplexity. If people didn't read it, I shouldn't blame them, but as long as they do, I suppose I shall print it. But it seems so very *clear* to me that I am fain to cast about for greater reticence, half the time" (Bennett, 98). When compared to her

prose, Phelps's poetry is admittedly limited in subject matter. Rather than ranging widely, Phelps returns to a handful of themes and images in her verse, focusing especially on issues of love, loss, and the promise of eternal life. In recent years scholars have returned to her poems, discovering new ways to appreciate the "beauties in them" (Howells, "Recent Literature," 108). To assist in this important work, this edition provides a sample of Phelps's poetic styles and themes, particularly her ongoing interest in a "Love so godlike that it could not die" ("Stranger than Death," this volume).

Phelps's short works command attention for a final reason: they productively unsettle current accounts of sentimentalism. In the past twenty years scholars have developed sophisticated arguments about the work of antebellum women writers, clarifying both their reformist aims and their formal complexity. As critics have made clear, these works often fused sentimentality and domestic ideology as a way to establish their claims. After the Civil War, however, this combination became less important, an observation that helped to justify the narrative of realism's rise. But scholars have been too hasty in dismissing postbellum sentimentalism. Not only is it a more important element of late nineteenth-century writing than has been acknowledged, but it is often deployed as a means of attacking the very domestic ideology it supported in the years before the Civil War. Because approaches to antebellum literature encourage scholars and students to conflate sentiment and domestic ideology, it has been difficult to appreciate the works of writers like Phelps who rely on sentiment to challenge, and even dismantle, the constraints of domesticity. As June Howard explains, "Sentimentality, although not always stigmatized, is always suspect, always questionable; the appearance of the term marks a site where values are contested" (223). Because reform fiction exists to challenge and change social values and norms, it must mobilize sentimentality if it is to succeed; this does not mean, however, that all uses of sentiment share the same political or social aim.

A full reconsideration of Phelps's place in American literary history requires, in other words, a thorough revision of established ways of approaching sentimentalism, realism, and the decades *before* the "rise"

of realism in the 1880s.⁷ Renewed emphasis on Phelps's short works should make it easier to begin this important work and to understand her considerable contributions to late nineteenth-century American literature. Its history may become somewhat more chaotic as a result, but it is long past due that we abandon the paradigms that exclude women like Phelps from the canon in the first place.

Life

Born into a New England family with roots dating back to the early seventeenth century, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps reminded many of New England's Puritan past. Poet John Greenleaf Whittier described her as "a Puritan with the passion and fire of Sappho" (187), and Rebecca Harding Davis observed that her friend could draw "the educated Puritan woman from life" (1). Critics made a similar connection: "There is a strong breeze out of the Puritan quarter in all her books," opined a reviewer for *Century*, "and it is thoroughly stimulating" ("Miss Phelps's 'Dr. Zay,'" 624). By the early twentieth century, the connection, still acknowledged, was no longer a compliment; Vernon Parrington slights Phelps's *The Silent Partner*, calling it an "emotional Puritan document" already "out of date when it came from the press" (62). Phelps never shrank from the association, counseling readers of *Chapters* to "Fear less to seem 'Puritan' than to be inadequate" (262). For Phelps, the daughter and granddaughter of highly regarded ministers, "seem[ing] 'Puritan'" meant devoting oneself to the reform of society along the lines of a Christianity committed to dignity, love, and respect for all. In this regard, she followed her paternal grandfather, Eliakim Phelps, who authored temperance tracts, worked with the Underground Railroad, and organized one of the earliest Sunday schools in the nation.

But the more severe side of Puritanism, the stern divines of popular culture, also shaped Phelps's development, even if her theological views diverged from their orthodox teachings. Both her maternal grandfather, Moses Stuart, and her father, Austin Phelps, served as faculty at the Andover Theological Seminary, which opened in 1808 as a bulwark against the perception of a creeping liberalism in American Protestantism. Phelps is comparatively reticent about Andover's theological atmo-

sphere in *Chapters*, eliding her opinion in a dash's pause and speaking elliptically about the challenges it created for her, but the seminary was widely known as "the bosom of orthodoxy" ("Miss Phelps's 'Dr. Zay,'" 623). To underscore "the brevity of life," for example, students in attendance during Phelps's childhood were required to construct coffins (Rowe, 2). Not until later in the century did Andover incorporate more progressive doctrines into its theology, a move Phelps's father resisted from his retirement.⁸

Her parents met at Andover when he attended the Seminary as a resident licentiate; the couple, Elizabeth Stuart and Austin Phelps, married in September 1842. Austin had by this time accepted a position at Boston's Pine Street Church, where the family remained for six years. Their first child, Mary Gray Phelps, the future author, was born on August 31, 1844. In 1848 Austin was invited to return to Andover as Professor of Sacred Rhetoric and Homiletic and, although his wife was unenthusiastic about the move, he accepted. He was elected president of Andover in 1869, a position he held until 1879, when ill health forced him to resign. Andover proved a congenial environment for Austin; while there he wrote a number of books, including *The Still Hour* (1850), and his rhetoric lectures became important textbooks (*Theory of Preaching* [1881] and *English Style in Public Discourse* [1883]).

But Austin Phelps was not the only author in the immediate family; his wife was also an accomplished writer of stories and novels. Under the pseudonym H. Trusta, Elizabeth published several best-selling works, among them *Sunny Side* (1851) and *A Peep at "Number Five": or, A Chapter in the Life of a City Pastor* (1852), which presented pious and cheery pictures of the lives of ministers and their families. The crushing burdens of Andover life, motherhood, housekeeping, and authorship sadly proved too much for Elizabeth, who died shortly after the birth of their third child in 1852. After her mother's death, her first-born, Mary, changed her name to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and, because "it was as natural to her daughter to write as to breathe," eventually followed her mother into a literary career. Of the elder Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, the daughter observed sadly, "She lived one of those rich and piteous lives such as only gifted women know; torn by the civil war of

the dual nature which can be given to women only" (*Chapters*, 12). That writing could be fatal for women became one of Phelps's reiterated claims, made in essay ("What Shall They Do?" [1867]) and story ("The Rejected Manuscript" [1893]) alike.

Austin Phelps remarried twice, first to his wife's consumptive sister, Mary Stuart, and then in 1858 to Mary Johnson. Additional children soon followed, and with them came more housework for his oldest child. Phelps complained bitterly about the tedium of housework in her writings, recalling in *Chapters* that she wondered, "Must I cut out underclothes forever? Is *this* LIFE?" (104). But her father's attitude toward women "always retained something of a feudal view" about what they "should" find "natural," she explains in *Austin Phelps: A Memoir* (1891), and it was only thanks to her eventual critical success that she was able to put aside domestic chores (87).

Phelps could not attend either of the highly regarded schools in Andover, a fact that surely contributed to her later agitation for co-education, but she nonetheless received an education far superior to that available to most young women in the 1850s. The curriculum at Mrs. Edwards' School for Young Ladies nearly matched that of Phillips Academy, minus Greek and trigonometry. The erudition Phelps displays in many of her works reflects this formal education, as well as the intellectual environment of her home. In *Chapters*, Phelps recalls, "I learned to read and to love reading, not because I was made to, but because I could not help it. It was the atmosphere I breathed" (17).

Like her mother, Phelps began writing at an early age, composing works for children and Sunday school publications. *Chapters* records the thrill she felt at receiving her first payment for a story but still dismisses much of her early writing as "hack work" she was happy to abandon (81). Although she contributed to children's periodicals, such as *The Youth's Companion*, across the decades, the mainstream success Phelps achieved in the late 1860s allowed her to become more selective in her efforts, wrestling from her reluctant family the liberty to focus more fully on her writing. Two works in particular are responsible for establishing Phelps's reputation with readers and editors. In March 1868 "The Tenth of January" appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Based

on a disastrous fire at the Pemberton Mill eight years earlier, Phelps's grim depiction of the tragedy won her "first recognition" from literary notables like John Greenleaf Whittier and Thomas Wentworth Higginson (*Chapters*, 92).

Later the same year Phelps published *The Gates Ajar* with the prestigious Boston publisher Ticknor and Fields. The novel catapulted the young author into the spotlight. Phelps would later claim that she wrote *The Gates Ajar* because "our country was dark with sorrowing women," a group to which she herself belonged (*Chapters*, 96). Samuel Hopkins Taylor, a member of the Philips Academy class of 1862, was killed at Antietam just a few short months after his graduation. Although no formal arrangement existed between the two, Phelps was devastated by his death; her late story "The Oath of Allegiance" (1894) appears to draw on details of their relationship. Surely much of the power of *The Gates Ajar* derives from Phelps's own experience with grief and loss.

Phelps hoped *The Gates Ajar* would "say something that would comfort some few . . . of the women whose misery crowded the land," but the book far exceeded expectations: readers flocked to it (*Chapters*, 97). Critics were less enthusiastic, however, attacking its theology and accusing Phelps of "heresy" and "atrociousness" (119). "Religious papers waged war across that girl's notions of the life to come," Phelps recalls, "as if she had been an evil spirit let loose upon accepted theology for the destruction of the world. The secular press was scarcely less disturbed about the matter; which it treated, however, with the more amused good-humor of a man of the world puzzled by a religious disagreement" (118). Complicating matters, Phelps dedicated the novel to her father, a move she later admitted had been unwise, for "certain citadels of stupidity" thus assumed "the views of the book" were his (107). Nothing could have been further from the case. Although his daughter boldly challenged restrictive and alienating religious dogma, Austin's commitment to Protestant orthodoxy remained unchanged throughout his life.

The Gates Ajar never matched the influence of the nineteenth century's most famous best seller, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), but it too was a cultural phenomenon, inspiring pamphlets repudiating or defending its positions, grateful letters from readers, crossover

products (patent medicines, funeral wreaths, cigars), and literary imitations, some parodic, like Mark Twain's "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" (1907), others celebratory, like Louis H. Pendleton's *Wedding Garment: A Tale of the Afterlife* (1894).⁹ Phelps penned two additional novels and a poem on the subject (*Beyond the Gates* [1883], *Between the Gates* [1887], "The Gates Between" [1885]); the final novel was later adapted for the stage as *Within the Gates* (1901). Over the course of her career, Phelps published scores of stories and novels, essays, and poems, many of which would attract significant attention, but *The Gates Ajar* remained her most influential work.

Reflecting back on the novel's success in 1893, Phelps observed, "It may be called either a disadvantage or an advantage that, when a writer has begun his career with a large or a lofty subject of discussion he is never quite "let down" from it. Nothing lower or less is expected of him, nor, indeed, is ever really tolerated in him by his public" ("Immortality and Agnosticism," 567). In this regard she never disappointed her "public," demonstrating a consistent commitment to "lofty" goals in her writings, including expanded rights for women, the institution of temperance laws, and the prohibition of vivisection. These topics provided subject matter for her short stories and novels, as well as many essays. Her poetry likewise tackled "lofty" subjects but tended to be more explicitly religious than her prose. In the early 1870s Phelps regularly contributed polemical essays to the *Independent*, a New York religious weekly; these essays, many on subjects related to women's rights, were featured prominently on the paper's front page and helped to establish her credentials as an advocate for reform.

Although Phelps explores many themes in her writing, she returns most often to the condition of women in postbellum culture, showing how marriage forestalled their opportunities and squandered their talents, complaining about women's inability to establish independent lives, and demonstrating the need for religious practices that would comfort them more fully. While her essays argue for the expansion of women's opportunities, her fiction and occasionally her poetry depict women who reject marriage to pursue social reform or remain true to past promises, who suffer from the grinding cares associated with mar-

riage and motherhood, or who compromise between competing demands, including those associated with professional choices.

In addition to her focus on the social challenges facing women, Phelps was also deeply and personally interested in the physical challenges both men and women had to confront when their health was compromised. On this subject, Phelps had a wealth of experience on which to draw. She was never physically strong, and her health deteriorated across the 1870s; until the end of her life she regularly suffered from debilitating illnesses, even calling herself a “professional invalid” in an 1884 letter to the famous physician S. Weir Mitchell. Like her father, Phelps suffered from acute insomnia; like her mother, she held that work contributed to her physical weakness. “I am not well enough even to earn my living!” she complains in 1890 (Curtis, 100). In a late essay, “Sympathy as a Remedy” (1909), Phelps writes bracingly to invalids, urging them to remember the “relativity of human misery” and insisting that they learn to do without “ease” and “sympathy” (743, 744). Although it is easy for the ill to forget, the healthy also have their cares and worries, so “nothing is more necessary,” she asserts, “than for us to put ourselves in the places of the well” (745).

In 1888 Phelps surprised, and amused, the literary world when she agreed to marry Herbert Dickinson Ward (1861–1932), a man seventeen years her junior. Son of William Hayes Ward, editor of the *Independent*, Herbert had an advanced degree in theology but hoped to establish himself as a writer. Phelps’s biographers have assumed that her ill health contributed both to her decision to wed and to the eventual decline of the marriage. The couple collaborated on several projects, including prize-winning children’s fiction and two biblical romances (*The Master of the Magicians* [1890] and *Come Forth* [1891]), but it was not long before Phelps returned to publishing under her own name. In a 1903 letter to Harriet Spofford she confided, “Marriage is such tremendous material for the novel-writer! I wonder that it is not worn out in the using. But the married are hampered in what they can say” (Bennett, 83). Phelps found a way, however, to get around this limitation, publishing the withering *Confession of a Wife* (1902) under the pseudonym Mary Adams. In it a reluctant woman is wooed by a determined man,

who tires of her quickly after the marriage; addicted to morphine, he decamps for Uruguay, returning a year later remorseful and damaged but hoping for reconciliation. Phelps's actual marriage did not end as happily as the fictional account; Herbert and Elizabeth spent most of their time apart, so much so that he was not present at her death.

Although still invited to participate in public forums and other projects, like *The Whole Family*, and celebrated in accounts of famous American women and famous American authors, including an article, "Nine Famous Women," in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1903, Phelps was no longer a literary celebrity when she died on January 28, 1911. Her previous prominence, however, guaranteed that her death was worthy of note. Obituaries celebrated her "breadth of mind and largeness of heart" ("Mrs. E. S. P. Ward Dies"), the "earnestness and intensity" that animated her best (and worst) literary efforts. "Indeed, for pure ability as well as for literary power," the *Independent* concluded, "she stood, notwithstanding her lifelong invalidism, at the head of our women writers" ("Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward," 269).

To Phelps, it had been an "incredible privilege" to speak to and for many readers, but popularity has often been met with suspicion in American literary history, taken as an indication of mediocrity, not merit (*Chapters*, 97). This was especially the case in the early decades of the twentieth century, as modernism solidified its intellectual position. Aided by the critical practices it invented to secure its spot atop the literary hierarchy, modernism "left women" like Phelps "out of the literary canon" and "made *sentimental* into a term of invective," Suzanne Clark explains (34–35). Not only did the modernists reject the fundamental relationship between art and morality, so central to Phelps's artistic practice, but they also made disinterestedness a chief critical principle, thus dismissing purposive writing as banal. Building on the literary histories written at the end of the nineteenth century, twentieth-century critics defined a predominantly masculine canon predicated on putatively timeless values. To fully appreciate Phelps's earnest "intensity," then, it is necessary to locate her more fully in her own moment, a moment when literary categories like realism and sentimentalism that seem so fixed today were very much in flux. A brief introduction to some of the subjects

about which Phelps had strong opinions will help accomplish this goal and provide access to the selections of Phelps's writings collected here.

The Civil War

Literature during the Civil War sought to enlist men, women, and children into the conflict, defining the different ways they might participate and detailing methods of encouraging, or testing, universal patriotic engagement. Young men were to join the army, cheered on by wives, mothers, fathers, and sweethearts. While authors heaped fulsome praise on martial valor, they also detailed activities for those left at home, who were urged to write happy letters to the front, suppress their bonds of affection in the name of patriotism, buy war bonds, police their speech, volunteer at Sanitary Fairs or hospitals, and accept crushing loss bravely. "Such literature did not displace the importance of men in the conflict," historian Alice Fahs explains, "but it did sometimes ask for equal recognition of women's sacrifices, thus contributing to the diversity of claims to the war's meaning" (148–49).

In the suffering of those left behind during the Civil War, Phelps found inspiration for some of her best, and best-known, work, including *The Gates Ajar*. Her first major story, "A Sacrifice Consumed" (1864), spoke directly to the loss of hope and happiness many women struggle to manage.¹⁰ Depicting the misery of a lonely seamstress after her fiancé is killed in battle, the story draws attention to the "martyrs at humble firesides" who "give up more" than the young soldiers who "face death with a smile." Women like the seamstress must endure "desolate" years from which "all the beauty, all the fragrance, all the song, has departed" (240). Here Phelps introduces a claim she develops at length in *The Gates Ajar*: there is no end to the war for those who suffer on the home front. Across her writings Phelps works to sketch a vision of heroism that could include the sacrifice of noncombatants, equating it to the more readily acknowledged efforts of the soldiers. In her last published story, "Comrades" (1911), as in her first, Phelps points to the contributions made by women to the Civil War. Here an elderly woman recalls how the war had "com[e] on" in her youth: "She thought of the day

when he marched away—his arms, his lips, his groans. She remembered what the dregs of desolation were, and moral fear of unknown fate; the rack of the imagination; and inquisition of the nerve—the pangs that no man-soldier of them all could understand. ‘It comes on women—war,’ she thought” (39–40). Without diminishing the veteran’s efforts, Phelps argues here, as in her other writings, that women’s efforts are worthy of being remembered and celebrated.

When Phelps wrote “A Sacrifice Consumed,” magazines and newspapers were filled with articles, stories, and poems written for families struggling with the war’s unprecedented slaughter. But as Reconstruction proceeded, Southern states were readmitted to the Union, and the fighting retreated into memory, writing about the Civil War shifted focus. Memoirs by famous generals and other kinds of battle reminiscences, like those printed in the “Century War Series” (1884–87), dominated the market; such works tended to ignore or diminish the efforts of noncombatants, leaving less room for the heroism of women. Phelps’s writings provide a critical counterpart to the explicitly gendered representation of the Civil War that became prominent across the postbellum period. Yet even as she stressed the importance of women’s contributions, she never slighted the soldiers. In poems like “A Message” (1875) and stories like “The Oath of Allegiance,” Phelps reminded readers that soldiers should figure prominently in the memory of the country for which they fought.

The Civil War was critical to Phelps’s writing in a second way; it provided her with an important figure for the representation of conflicting visions of gendered social organization. She shows women, like her own mother, suffering from internal conflict, unable to bring the warring sides of their nature into harmony. In *The Story of Avis*, for example, the title character likens love to “death. . . . It is civil war” (106). Later in her career, Phelps even compared unhappy marriage to civil conflict, transforming the home into a battlefield of daily emotional warfare.

Despite Phelps’s serious engagement with the affective aftermath of the war, she seldom confronted the issues related to race that provided important material for other writers of the period, like Lydia Child, Re-

becca Harding Davis, John De Forest, or Albion Tourgée, to name just a few. Where they engage with the promises and paradoxes of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, Phelps tended to see slavery and its abolition as ways of thinking about women's rights.¹¹ At the end of "The Higher Claim" (1871), for example, Phelps argues that the extension of suffrage to women should have the same moral authority as the extension of suffrage to former slaves. On the subject of race, she is more likely to use a theoretical argument than to depict African American characters, although her short fiction does include some exceptions, like "How June Found Massa Linkum" (1868), to this general rule.

Religion

Phelps believed that abstract religious doctrines were cruel, for they obscured the important truths of Christianity from all people, but especially women. "Creeds and commentaries and sermons are made by men," she notes in *Chapters*, but "what can the doctrines do" for women (98)? Providing a satisfactory answer to this question was one of the chief motivations for her writing. According to Phelps, Christianity offered both the possibility of a rich future world and provided a useful guide for bettering the present one. "The important things—all that any of us need, all that most of us care for—are few, clear, and unquestionable," she explains in *The Story of Jesus Christ: An Interpretation* (1897). Chief among them, she continues, is that "Jesus Christ lived and died, and lived again after death. He lived a life explicable upon no other view of it than his. He founded a faith comprehensible upon no other interpretation of it than his own. . . . He is the greatest force in civilization: the highest motive power in philosophy, in art, in poetry, in science, in faith. He is the creator of human brotherhood. To apprehend him is to open the only way that has yet been found out of the trap of human misery" (ix). Like many nineteenth-century religious thinkers, Phelps stressed the importance of religious affections, particularly those inspired by the person of Jesus. "It all comes, in the end, perhaps, to a matter of feeling," she notes in "The Great Hope," "profound and high-minded feeling" (*In After Days*, 30). Although Phelps indicates that this "feeling" has a personal component, as in "A Jew-

ish Legend" (1885) when she writes, "I like to think, for playmate / We have the Lord Christ still," it would be wrong to assume that her interests were exclusively private (38). On the contrary, Phelps's Jesus was "a holy exemplar of social reform," and her writings emphasize the central importance of Christian action in society, as well as private piety (Curtis, 17).¹²

In stressing the social aspects of Christianity, Phelps was very much of her time. The postbellum period was, Claudia Stokes reminds us, "a veritable golden age of religious fiction." Rather than a minor subfield, religious writing was an important element in mainstream American literature. Historical novels like Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur* imagined the rich world of Roman antiquity, while others brought biblical figures or events to life; prominent examples include novels by Phelps and Ward (*The Master of the Magicians* [1890] and *Come Forth* [1891]), Harriet Beecher Stowe (*Woman in Sacred History* [1873]), and fellow member of *The Whole Family* Henry van Dyke (*The Other Wise Man* [1895]). Following the example set by Ernest Renan, whose 1863 *Life of Jesus* had an enormous transatlantic influence, authors offered fictional accounts of the life of Jesus, like Phelps's own *The Story of Jesus*. At the same time, pious poetry filled many periodicals. Enormously popular with readers although ignored by most literary histories, such works drew on progressive theological trends, as well as debates about the relationship between fact and fiction, to bring religion alive for readers.

Phelps shared many principles with adherents to the Social Gospel, a nondenominational Protestant tradition that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and urged believers to ask themselves, "What Would Jesus Do?" This phrase, the subtitle of Charles M. Sheldon's 1896 novel *In His Steps*, encouraged the faithful to imagine themselves in the position of Jesus, an identification that leaders of the Social Gospel movement argued was central to a rich understanding of the New Testament. Optimistic even in the face of intransigent poverty and misery, the Social Gospel embraced the idea of human perfectibility, emphasizing the importance of placing community before self (Jackson, 155). In her representation of heroic ministers, sacrificing social position to combat drunkenness in Massachusetts or risking death to preach the

gospel in the unreconstructed South, Phelps not only demonstrates the potential heroism of everyday existence but also traces important connections between Christianity and social justice.

Trying to separate Phelps's religious principles from her commitment to social change would be foolish; they are fundamentally connected. A key difference between her socially oriented Christianity and that of her antebellum predecessors, however, is the emphasis she placed on combining feeling with action. Drawing on the valorization of labor prevalent in Protestant culture, Phelps argued for the importance, economic and religious, of work for women. She repeatedly asserted that labor is a source of dignity and self-respect for both genders and, as such, is key to personal and spiritual health both in and out of marriage. Along the same vein, she constructed the argument for suffrage in "The Higher Claim" to culminate in a defense of the necessary correlation of Christianity and expanded civic participation.

One area where Phelps was especially active was in defending the right of women to preach. Although conservatives pointed to 1 Corinthians 14:34 to justify keeping women out of the pulpit, Phelps joined those who argued that women were better suited than men to share the truths of the Gospel with others. "A Woman's Pulpit" (1870) takes up this theme, expanding an idea already introduced in *The Gates Ajar*. As the essay "In Her Sphere" (1873) makes clear, Phelps had no doubt that the pulpit fell within women's "sphere." Years later Frances E. Willard, president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, published *Woman in the Pulpit* (1888), a defense of female ministers that included testimonials reminiscent of "A Woman's Pulpit."

Despite her progressive tendencies, there were limits to the challenge Phelps would mount against organized religion. For example, she took no part in the feminist revision of the Bible organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, published in 1895 and 1898 as *The Woman's Bible*. Written in part as a feminist response to disappointment in the Revised Version of the New Testament (1881), the controversial project demonstrated the gendered bias of scripture, including the way that religion had been used as a weapon in the battle to deny women their rights. Stanton's project dismayed many less radical activists, but it provides an impor-

tant context for appreciating the prescience and topicality of Phelps's work, for many of its claims are anticipated or echoed in her polemical essays and religious tales.¹³

Phelps's religious thinking bears the impress, as well, of two notable experiences from her youth. She may have rejected much of the theology taught at Andover, the "sacred West Point," but its impact is evident in the nuanced representations of theological controversies and the diverse range of scholarly references that appear throughout her works, particularly in "What Is a Fact" and other essays collected in *The Struggle for Immortality* (1889) (Smith, ix). At the same time, Phelps's ideas were influenced by nineteenth-century spiritualism, the belief in the possible material presence of the dead, and specifically by her paternal grandfather's "seven months' affliction by spirits" (*Chapters*, 6). In an 1868 letter to Kate Fields, Phelps admits her belief "in the fact" of spiritual manifestations, which she maintains she holds "precisely on the principle by which I believe in the pyramids of Egypt" (Bennett, 5). Although she experimented with subjects adjacent to spirits and spiritualism, as in the story "Since I Died" (1873), Phelps's interests were ultimately more religious than sensational.

Women's Rights

Because *The Gates Ajar* is Phelps's most famous work, twentieth-century scholars tended to label her a religious writer. But, as should be clear, her religious commitments can be understood only in the context of her deep commitment to social justice, particularly for women. Writing to John Greenleaf Whittier in 1871, Phelps observed that the "'Woman Cause' . . . grows upon my conscience, as well as my enthusiasm, every day. It seems to me to be the first work God has to be done just now" (Bennett, 56–57). In advocating for women's rights, Phelps saw herself as doing God's work, and she was not alone in drawing this conclusion. Across the nineteenth century many thinkers and writers fused religion and social reform, grounding arguments for abolition, temperance, and women's rights in Christian precepts.

Phelps's ideas about women's rights were shaped by the writings of the British philosopher John Stuart Mill, as well as by her religion.¹⁴

In private correspondence, she expressed her admiration for Mill's work, particularly his treatise *The Subjection of Women* (1869); she cited the volume frequently, especially in essays arguing for greater equality in marriage.¹⁵ As Mill provocatively points out, "The wife is the actual bond-servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called. She vows a livelong obedience to him at the altar, and is held to it all through her life by law" (31). In an ironic reversal, Mill used fiction, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to argue that women were more fully subject to their masters than slaves had been. While this conclusion is doubtful, it is part of Mill's larger strategy, one that challenges readers to question the relationship between fact and fiction. Reasonable people assent to the subjugation of women, Mill argues, because an "artificial" view of the "nature of women," "the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others," has been accepted as fact (22). Phelps drew on Mill both in terms of the content of his argument and the way he passionately questioned the ability to differentiate clearly between fact and fiction on contested issues.

Phelps, like many activists after the Civil War, was energized to improve the condition of women both in and out of the home. For many who embraced the cause, an expansion of voting rights was the main goal. The Fifteenth Amendment, which extended the vote to African American men, frustrated and angered women, many of whom believed that they were better equipped to participate in the electoral process. Reconstruction was therefore a chaotic and disappointing time for women's rights activists, split over the best way to continue after this defeat. More radical activists, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, maintained that a constitutional amendment was necessary to secure women's rights permanently, and in 1869 Stanton and Anthony formed the National Women's Suffrage Association (NWSA).¹⁶ But others disagreed, preferring a more gradual approach; these women joined the American Women's Suffrage Association (AWSA), with Julia Ward Howe and Lucy Stone at the helm, which adopted a state-by-state approach to the challenge. As sympathetic as she was to the aims of these groups, particularly the more conservative AWSA, Phelps seldom had anything but a remote relationship with reform organizations. On

one rare occasion she did participate, contributing an essay to a volume Howe edited on the subject of women's education. Written in response to *Sex in Education* (1873), Dr. Edward H. Clarke's explanation of the dangers to women's health from expanded educational options, the essays in Howe's volume *Sex and Education* (1874) vigorously defended the importance of female education. Most often Phelps's reform activity took written form, either in prose pieces of her own or as part of forums, like the one included in this collection titled "Women's View of Divorce." Phelps seldom used poetry to express her reform goals, but she did pen a few poems about women's conditions in marriage, including "Congratulation" (1875) and "New Neighbors" (1885). Because her poor health limited her ability to appear in public, Phelps rarely engaged in other reform activities, such as lecturing or organizing events.

Over the course of her career, Phelps's interest in women's rights found expression in many causes, including her impassioned pleas for dress reform. Restrictive corsets, heavy skirts, and revealing bodices all met with her withering scorn. According to Phelps, prevailing fashions were not just ruinous to women's health, limiting the ability to move and twisting the body into unnatural and dangerous shapes, they also made women symbolically subservient to and dependent on men. In forwarding this argument, Phelps anticipates claims made by Thorstein Veblen, who famously argues for the symbolic function of women's clothing in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899): "It may broadly be set down that the womanliness of woman's apparel resolves itself, in point of substantial fact, into the more effective hindrance to useful exertion offered by the garments peculiar to women" (172). Yet where Veblen's arguments have been celebrated as innovative, the same claims made by women reformers like Phelps have been largely ignored. Phelps developed her argument for dress reform across a series of articles in the *Independent*, later expanded into *What to Wear* (1873). In this campaign, as in her arguments in favor of coeducation and the expansion of economic opportunities for women, Phelps opposed the social construction of women to the rich abundance of women's possibility.

Phelps based her argument in favor of expanding women's options for education and employment on her reading of Mill, specifically his claim

that women's abilities had yet to be tested. Women are trained to see themselves as weak and helpless, he argues, so a change in the perception of the capacities of both sexes would be necessary if women were to reach their full potential. Forwarding a similar argument, Phelps writes in "Men and Muscle" (1871), "A man is *trained* to be strong. A woman is *trained* not to be. Good health is *expected* of a man. Ill-health is *expected* of a woman." "The expectations of society," she concludes, "are to an all but mathematical extent the limits of the individual. What others look for in us, that we are" (1). Although she advocated for many professions, her interest in "the physical disabilities of women" pointed to the fundamental importance of medicine as a career for women (1). It is medical training that receives the most sustained attention in her writings, even though "What Shall They Do?" offers a full list of career options.

Form and Reform

Phelps argued directly for reform in her essays and only slightly less directly in her fiction. As a reviewer of *The Silent Partner* observed, the novel "is a terribly needed lesson" as much as an "interesting story" ("Editor's Literary Record," 301). But her commitment to social improvement has diminished her appeal to subsequent generations of readers. Trained to view purposive fiction as less literary, readers across the twentieth century generally ignored the works produced in the decades right after the Civil War, when Phelps achieved her greatest success. Only those works that "apparently prefigure the dilemmas facing 'modern' women" have continued to draw readers, Lisa Long rightly notes (265). The issues that engaged Phelps, such as dress reform, temperance, and antivivisection legislation, are easily enough viewed as quaint relics, even though these movements were instrumental in creating the conditions of possibility for the New Woman, the idealized independent and educated career woman of the turn of the century. A renewed appreciation for the work Phelps's fiction set out to do requires, however, a fuller sense of her aesthetic principles, the ways she thought form could help to forward the goals of reform.

"It is the duty of artist in fiction to-day," Phelps asserts unequivocally, "to paint life as it exists" (*Chapters*, 259). The stress on "duty" captures

the moral urgency she brought to her literary practice. For Phelps, as for other writers of the period, an accurate representation of life often meant consulting either historical accounts or economic studies. Like Stephen Crane, who read testimonials about slum life while writing *Maggie, Girl of the Streets* (1893), Phelps scoured available records to guarantee the accuracy of her works, studying historical accounts of the Pemberton Mill fire for “The Tenth of January” and reports from the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor for *The Silent Partner*. But where Crane seems to have done so to divorce accuracy from compassion, Phelps hoped to fuse them permanently, inspiring readers to take action. “Fear less to ‘point your moral’ than to miss your opportunity,” she urged (*Chapters*, 265). As Susan S. Williams has recently argued, Phelps’s style of writing may best be described as “ethical realism,” for it takes the communication of ethical principles as one of its main aims (174). Although scholars often claim that hers is a utopian vision, Phelps herself hoped to intervene in the daily lives of readers, providing comfort and direction, while also presenting characters or scenes that challenged readers to expand their capacities for sympathy.

According to Phelps, literature that sought to reform readers required both accurate content and the proper form and tone. Phelps scolded Dr. E. H. Clarke for failing to recognize that “he is not in the lecture-room of the medical school” when addressing a general audience, urging him to work harder at gauging “the real effect” of his words (*Sex and Education*, 126). In this instance Phelps’s advice was sarcastically intended: her constructive criticisms are part of an attack on his ideas. But the main thrust of the argument is one she repeated in other instances. In *The Gates Ajar*, for example, Winifred Forecythe explains to the narrator that she tailors her arguments to match the intellectual capacity of each auditor, thus guaranteeing greater success. As Phelps observed elsewhere, the “time” must be “ripe” and the audience receptive for didactic works to be effective (*Friends*, 126).

Like antebellum writers, Phelps believed that it was affect, not argument, that was most likely to motivate change. It is no surprise that she claimed her Andover neighbor Harriet Beecher Stowe as an important predecessor, calling her “the greatest of American women” and penning

"Birthday Verses" in honor of her seventieth birthday (*Chapters*, 131). Yet critics who conflate Phelps's writing with the domestic ideology of antebellum novelists like Stowe mistake her aims: Phelps's approach to the work of affect diverges importantly from that presented in antebellum reform fiction. She explicitly rejects the idea of "the true woman," arguing pointedly that women can be "true," fulfilled in themselves and fulfilling their divine purposes, only when they are allowed to explore a potential that is not linked in any necessary way to domesticity or maternity ("The True Woman," 1). Indeed for many of Phelps's female characters, like the young woman depicted in "The Sacrifice of Antigone" (1891), fulfillment is more likely to be found in serious study than marriage and motherhood.

Even though Phelps appears ardently local, situating the majority of her works in New England and celebrating the virtues of provincialism in a review of Henry James's *Hawthorne* (1879), the two authors who had the most profound influence on her work were British: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot. Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) was personally important to Phelps and is prominently referenced in *The Story of Avis*, but Eliot is more fundamental to Phelps's evolution as a thinker and an artist. Phelps celebrated Eliot's achievement extravagantly in essays, poems, and an 1873 series of lectures at Boston University, the first given by a woman at the institution; the letters that remain between Eliot and Phelps convey the American's ardent, sometimes too ardent, admiration for the British author.¹⁷ And it is not hard to see why Phelps valued Eliot's example, despite their divergent positions on Christianity.¹⁸ In *Adam Bede* (1859), Eliot writes that the "secret of deep human sympathy" can be found in the lives of average people; when we pay proper attention to people, we get to the "truthfulness" of human existence: "It is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise. I find a source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions" (161). Like Eliot, Phelps hoped to convey the "truthfulness" of the human condition in her fic-

tion, fusing this aim with a moral commitment she likewise associated with Eliot. Although Eliot did not share Phelps's committed Christian perspective, the American found in her British counterpart an example of what morally complicated realism might achieve.

Passionately committed to the hope of human perfectibility, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps spent a lifetime advocating for change, personal and social, that would yield a better and more just society for women and men alike. In addition to the causes discussed above, she was also active in the postbellum temperance movement and the campaign to outlaw vivisection. For Phelps, the suffering of the individual, human or animal, always demanded action, attention, and compassion. Despite these laudable goals, Phelps's comparative conservatism, as well as her fundamental religious orientation and her investment in the Civil War, have made her difficult to place in literary history. As Lora Romero observed, scholars struggle "to entertain the possibility that traditions, or even individual texts, could be radical on some issues (market capitalism, for example) and reactionary on others (gender or race, for instance). Or that some discourses could be oppositional without being outright liberating. Or conservative without being outright enslaving" (4). Romero's observation is certainly true of Phelps's writing, which is sometimes radical, sometimes conservative. But if we can come to understand Phelps better, we will have a clearer sense of the complexity of the postbellum past, as well as a helpful guide for creating a finer future.

Notes

1. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps chose to publish under her married name, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, for only a few years after her 1888 marriage to Herbert Dickinson Ward; her decision to revert to her own name, unusual for the time, was not always respected by critics.
2. Stokes provides an indispensable overview of this history in *Writers in Retrospect*, 17–32.
3. Baym's claim was reiterated by Judith Fetterley in 1985, Elizabeth Ammons and Sharon Harris in 1991. Several recent scholars, including Susan

- Williams, Anne Boyd, and Naomi Sofer, have detailed the exclusion of women both during the period and in the histories written about it.
4. Such a shift could also have a positive effect on the study of long-form fiction as well. As *The Whole Family* underscores, the distinction between story and novel in the period was far from fixed; novels were often published serially alongside or even comprise short stories.
 5. For an overview of these changes, see Goodman, 65–97.
 6. Claybaugh argues compellingly for the use of the term *purposive fiction* to describe a range of reform writing in the nineteenth-century Anglo-American world (*Novels of Purpose*).
 7. There is a growing body of excellent work in this area, however, including books or articles by Glazener, Howard, Boyd, Williams, and Sofer. On changes to the publishing industry and their effect on Phelps, see Coultrap-McQuinn, 168–92.
 8. In the 1880s, for example, he offered a spirited defense of the principle of infant damnation, an incident Phelps depicts in *A Singular Life*.
 9. Twain's story did not appear until 1907, but he started writing it much earlier, probably around the time that *The Gates Ajar* appeared.
 10. There is some dispute about an earlier publication. Scholars now attribute the unsigned "Tenty Scran" (*Atlantic Monthly*, November 1860) to Gail Hamilton, the pen name of Mary Abigail Dodge, but an index from 1889 identifies Phelps as its author.
 11. The influence of John Stuart Mill on Phelps's thought is discussed later in this introduction, but it is worth noting that he is an important precursor of this idea. See, as well, Claybaugh, 91.
 12. It is interesting to note how Phelps's definition of religious sentiment diverges from the one William James develops in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). According to James, religion is "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (31).
 13. Kessler argues, "Neither Phelps nor women who read [*A Singular Life*] are likely to have read Stanton's *Bible*. The novel is, nonetheless, a realistic representation of the implications for women of this *Bible*" (99).
 14. Mill first drafted the book in 1861 and had to revise some of its sections, particularly those comparing the condition of women to that of slaves in the United States, to reflect the outcome of the American Civil War.
 15. An especially pertinent example is "The New Earth," *Independent*, September 28, 1871, 1.
 16. For an overview of the two organizations, see Clinton, 94.

17. Phelps destroyed much of her own correspondence late in her life; the materials that remain are scattered through multiple archives, often held in the papers of her correspondents.
18. In her poems about Eliot, Phelps seeks to convert the British author, suggesting that Eliot was accompanied by Jesus, "though she knew [Him] not" ("George Eliot," 43).

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Note on the Text

All of the texts selected for inclusion in this volume were published during Phelps's lifetime, many more than once. For each selection, we have included a full publication history. Because Phelps revised, sometimes significantly, for each reprinting, we have decided to include the last version of the story, essay, or poem over which she could be said to have had control. There are two notable exceptions to this general rule, however. Phelps substantially expanded her essays on dress reform, "Is It Healthful?" and "What Can Be Done about It?," for *What to Wear* (1873); so as to be able to present these arguments in their entirety, we have decided to include the earlier, more compact versions, originally published in the *Independent*. "The Moral Element of Fiction" is a redacted section of Phelps's autobiography, *Chapters from a Life*, originally published serially in *McClure's Magazine* (1895–96) and then as a volume (1896). This abbreviated section circulated at the same time, and we have chosen to include it, rather than a longer excerpt from the autobiography, because it appeared on its own during Phelps's lifetime.

We have made minimal changes to the texts, amending them only in the case of obvious printer error or intrusive and confusing anachronism. The vast majority of the footnotes in the volume are the editors', but a few were written by Phelps herself; these are presented as footnotes, not endnotes.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

