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A life in progress: motion and emotion in the autobiography of Robert M. La Follette

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Abstract:

This article is a study of a *La Follette's Autobiography*, the autobiography of the leading Wisconsin progressive Robert M. La Follette, which was published serially in 1911 and, in book form, in 1913. Rather than focusing, as have other historians, on which parts of La Follette's account are accurate and can therefore be trusted, it explains instead why and how this major autobiography was conceived and written. The article shows that the autobiography was the product of a sustained, complex, and often fraught series of collaborations among La Follette's family, friends, and political allies, and in the process illuminates the importance of affective ties as well as political ambition and commitment in bringing the project to fruition. In the world of progressive reform, it argues, personal and political experiences were inseparable.

Keywords: Robert M. La Follette, Sr.; autobiography; Ray Stannard Baker

Introduction

“It was very generous of you to send me your Autobiography,” the Columbia University historian Charles A. Beard wrote to Robert M. La Follette, Sr. from his home in New Milford, Connecticut in May 1913.¹ “It is a pleasure ... to see how quickly you get to the main point and illuminate every big problem in American politics by your own story.”² Beard had just written one of the great works of American history, his *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*;³ quite understandably, he was eager for his correspondent—the Republican U.S. senator for Wisconsin, and one of the nation's leading progressive politicians—to read and review it.⁴ But in this letter, Beard's chief purpose was to congratulate his friend on the publication of *La Follette's Autobiography*, a stirring account of a life devoted to progressive reform, a cause to which both men, in their different ways, were equally dedicated.⁵ Beard did not share all of the Senator's political positions and prejudices, but he valued the autobiography for its moral force, for its didactic potential, and for its recognition that in the world of progressive reform personal and political experience were inseparable.⁶ Indeed, so impressed was Beard by *La Follette's Autobiography*, that he pledged to use it in his own teaching: “I shall certainly make my students in Politics read it

next year,” he declared, “for in it they will find the inner history of the rise of the progressive movement.”⁷

Beard’s observation that reform movements have an inner as well as an outer history has been only fitfully pursued in historical work on the progressive era.⁸ In some ways this is surprising given that autobiographical writing came so easily to progressives for whom the idea of reform necessarily involved the effortful transformation of private as much as of public worlds. Indeed some of the most persuasive and powerful writing by progressive reformers appeared in autobiographical form. In addition to *La Follette’s Autobiography*—the main focus of this study—other major examples of the genre include Theodore Roosevelt’s *An Autobiography*, which was also published in 1913, and Jane Addams’ seminal *Twenty Years at Hull House*, which first appeared in 1910.⁹ Progressive autobiographies were published in a variety of different formats—often they were serialized in magazines or periodicals before they were published in book form—and were written by reformers who occupied a range of positions on the political spectrum. Some of this autobiographical writing was fragmentary or incomplete, as in the cases of Florence Kelley and, extending to the radical wing of the movement, Eugene Debs.¹⁰ Not all progressive autobiographers wrote their life stories in the progressive era itself: Lincoln Steffens and William Allen White, for example, produced autobiographies long after the progressive tide had receded. Steffens’ *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* helped to rehabilitate his reputation, and to shape later perceptions of progressivism, following its publication in 1931; White’s posthumous Pulitzer prize winner, *The Autobiography of William Allen White*, appeared later still, in 1946.¹¹ These progressive autobiographies vary in character, tone, and perspective, but their authors shared a conviction that personal and political experiences were intermeshed. As Christopher Lasch explained more than 40 years ago, for many radicals and reformers in the first years of the twentieth century, “[t]he problem of society was a problem pre-eminently of

consciousness or, in Steffens' phrase, intelligence—a problem, at bottom, not of politics, or economics but of psychology and culture.”¹² For historians of the progressive era, therefore, reformers' autobiographies are an important resource for mining the vital relationship between reform's inner and outer histories.

La Follette's Autobiography is one of the most attractively written and widely read progressive-era autobiographies.¹³ First published in book form in 1913, it sold approximately 40,000 copies and was a major influence on at least one U.S. President: Richard Nixon—whose father was a La Follette voter in 1924—declared it one of his three favorite books.¹⁴ In the foreword to the 1960 edition, which brought it back into print (where it has remained ever since), Allan Nevins stated that “[f]or an understanding of Bossism, Reform, and Progressivism as they were known in the United States between 1890 and 1912,” it was “the most illuminating as well as the most important work in existence.”¹⁵ Organized into 13 chronologically-arranged chapters, it describes La Follette's family background, relates episodes from his university career, charts his battles in Wisconsin politics as he strove to establish a new model for reforming government at the state level, and details his emergence as a leading voice of progressive Republican insurgency in the United States Senate following his election in January 1905. The final three chapters consist of an account of his unsuccessful campaign for the 1912 presidential nomination, explaining his motives for running, his efforts to forge a national progressive force in the form of the National Progressive Republican League, and his refusal to withdraw from the race even when it was perfectly clear that he would be defeated.

Historians have not always agreed, however, with Allan Nevins's assessment that *La Follette's Autobiography* “has enduring value in its honesty as a piece of self-portraiture.”¹⁶ In fact they have dwelt as often on its omissions, elisions, and other perceived imperfections as on its value for understanding La Follette's place in the world of progressive reform.¹⁷ As

Nancy Unger has pointed out, for instance, La Follette omits from his account any mention of his stepfather, John Z. Saxton.¹⁸ The one-sidedness of the autobiography's description of the 1912 presidential election contest, which is notably hostile toward Theodore Roosevelt, has also attracted criticism.¹⁹ Most significantly, perhaps, the veracity of La Follette's charge that on 17 September 1891, in the second-floor parlor of the Plankinton House, Milwaukee, the wealthy businessman-politician Philetus Sawyer tried to bribe him has been called into question.²⁰ The alleged bribe was connected to a series of lawsuits—filed by the new Democratic administration against state treasurers from previous Republican administrations—over which La Follette's brother-in law, Judge Robert Siebecker, was presiding.²¹ Sawyer, who had made his millions from lumber and the railroads, and was now both a U.S. Senator and the leading figure in Wisconsin GOP politics, stood to lose a six-figure sum if the case went against him. For his part, La Follette claimed that his ill-fated meeting with Sawyer revealed the organized way in which concentrated private power was threatening American democracy. "It was all-powerful in its effect on me personally," he wrote, adding that it "brought the whole system home to me ... in its ugliest and most revolting form."²² As Jørn Brøndal has explained, differences between the two men over patronage appointments also played a role in provoking the La Follette-Sawyer clash.²³

The precise nature of the clash, which La Follette termed "the crucial episode in my public life," may well never be known; but what is clear is that the Plankinton House incident serves a specific narrative function in *La Follette's Autobiography* which is to represent in the starkest possible terms the precise moment at which La Follette realized he should give his public life to fighting against vested interests and concentrated power.²⁴ Conversion narratives such as this are in fact a staple of progressive autobiography, their power stemming from their capacity to connect the inner self-transformation of the autobiographical subject with a commitment to reforming the world at large. A case in point is Theodore Roosevelt,

whose *An Autobiography* was published in late 1913, just a few months after La Follette's. For Roosevelt, the critical moment comes when, as a boy, he is humiliated on discovering that he cannot defend himself when teased and taunted by older, rougher boys. It was at this point, Roosevelt claimed, that he began the work of disciplining himself mentally and physically so that he would become, to use Arnaldo Testi's phrase, the very image of the "self-made male," an aristocratic reformer whose self-styled "virile character" enabled him to navigate the treacherous rapids of reform in a period in which gender norms were markedly unstable.²⁵ It is in Jane Addams' *Twenty Years at Hull House*, however, that we have the exemplary, and perhaps most complex, example of the merging of an outward commitment to reform with an inward desire for self-transformation. In a famous series of passages, Addams describes how her devotion to reform, and eventually to the settlement house idea, crystallized in her mind as she travelled through Europe in the midst of the long nervous crisis which afflicted her between 1881 and 1889.²⁶

In November 1883, while on a missionary-led bus tour of London's East End, she witnessed a scene of such "human wretchedness"—a Saturday night food auction at which half-rotten fruit and vegetable was doled out to desperate, destitute recipients—that she felt moved to do something practical to aid the poor.²⁷ But what is most striking about Addams' account is that she was disgusted as much by her reaction to what she had witnessed as by the spectacle itself: looking down upon London's poor she found herself incapable of a direct emotional response, thinking immediately instead of Thomas De Quincey's "The Vision of Sudden Death," a story in which, on seeing two lovers about to be crushed by a large vehicle, De Quincey finds himself unable to cry out to save them because he is striving to remember some apposite lines from the *Iliad*.²⁸ Appalled that she had responded in this way, Addams determined that she, like other college educated women of her generation, had given too much of her time and energy to the accumulation of knowledge, thus denying themselves the

opportunity to feel the more active and emotionally direct responses of their mothers' generation.²⁹ "This is what we were all doing," she wrote, "lumbering our minds with literature that only served to cloud the really vital situation spread before our eyes."³⁰ The final stage of Addams' conversion to the cause of social reform also came again on foreign soil, this time in Madrid, where, in 1888, she watched a bullfight with friends, staying longer than any of her companions as numerous bulls and horses were ritually gored and maimed. Repelled by the strength of her attraction to the aesthetic qualities of this public spectacle, Addams was overwhelmed by feelings of self-disgust. The experience was crushing, but it helped her, she claimed, to overcome the "snare of preparation"—Tolstoy's phrase—which had up to this point prevented her from acting upon her desire to establish a settlement house in Chicago. Within a matter of months, Hull House had opened its doors.³¹

As the brief discussion of Theodore Roosevelt and Jane Addams' writings above suggests, studying autobiographies of reform can do much more than point to errors of fact and interpretation. In addition to identifying and commenting upon the significance of the errors, distortions, evasions, and misrepresentations so indispensable to the autobiographical form, historians can also mine these texts to shed light on how progressives understood, and chose to represent, the relationship between their public and private selves, that is between their outer and inner commitments, motivations, and desires. Accordingly this study has two chief purposes. First, it aims to show that we can learn as much from studying how particular autobiographies came into being and were written as we can from analyzing their final contents and comparing them, in more or less mechanistic fashion, to the historical record. Focusing on *La Follette's Autobiography*, this essay sets out what is in part the unknown story of how an influential autobiography of a major American progressive came into existence, explaining the unusual collaborative process by which it was compiled, and in the

process illuminating the fraught historical circumstances of its conception, gestation, and birth.³²

In addition to mapping the trajectory of a particular autobiographical life, this study has a second purpose, which is to use an examination of the making of *La Follette's Autobiography* to reflect on the relationship between the personal and the political in the American politics of reform. Senator La Follette called direct attention to this vital relationship by titling his autobiography "a personal narrative of political experience." Historical studies of La Follette and the extraordinary political dynasty he founded vary considerably in their treatment of this subject. Some of the most recent scholarship does acknowledge and explore the psychological and emotional dimensions of the world of reform inhabited by the La Follettes.³³ Many major studies of the La Follettes and the progressive era, however, neglect it entirely.³⁴ Indeed this essay argues that despite the 'the emotional turn' taken by disciplines across the humanities and social and human sciences over the past decade, historians who study the politics of reform in modern American history have yet fully to absorb the implications of Charles A. Beard's insistence that progressive politics has an "inner" as well as an outer history.³⁵

***Hampton's* magazine and the origins of a progressive 'life'**

La Follette's Autobiography is not a conventional campaign biography.³⁶ Ten chapters of the book were, it is true, published in article form at a time when the campaign for the 1912 presidential nominations was in full swing, the first of them appearing in October 1911 and the last in July 1912. But, as we shall see, the articles were not originally conceived with the 1912 campaign in mind, and the autobiography did not appear in book form until the middle of 1913, by which time Woodrow Wilson was safely ensconced in the White House. The original idea for the autobiography, furthermore, came from outside La Follette's

immediate circle. The articles and the book were in fact generated by a series of complex collaborations which developed over a three-year period, and which involved not only the Senator and his inner circle of family and other supporters, but also a diverse cast of progressively-oriented writers, journalists, publishers and magazine owners. *La Follette's Autobiography* is best thought of, therefore, not as a campaign book but rather as a product of unusually complicated relationships among early-twentieth-century progressives. Considered in this way, *La Follette's Autobiography* is a historical work whose significance lies in its capacity to offer historians a point of entry into a world of reform in which power politics were intensely connected to affective bonds between family, friends, followers, and political allies. In this world, emotional ties and progressive political commitment were closely entwined.

The first trace of what would become *La Follette's Autobiography* can be found in a memorandum written on an unspecified date in the first half of 1910 by the journalist Judson Welliver.³⁷ Entitled "Memorandum of some general ideas about proposed series of articles by Senator La Follette," the document makes clear that it was Welliver, not La Follette or Benjamin Hampton (the owner of *Hampton's*, the magazine for which the articles were initially intended), who proposed the autobiography.³⁸ Welliver began his memo by defending his idea for an autobiography, believing this suggestion of his to have been "an inspiration," despite La Follette's "preference for a different form," and Hampton's insistence that "the question of adhering to this form is not particularly important."³⁹ He expressed regret that La Follette and Hampton did not appreciate the "dramatic possibility" presented by his suggestion and, assuming that his idea would not prevail, proceeded instead on the assumption that La Follette would write (or have written for him) a series of articles on the major issues of the day, such as the distribution of wealth, the concentration of economic

power, the cost of living, the valuation of property, municipal government, and conservation and the public domain.⁴⁰

By June 1910 Welliver was eager to start work on the articles. At Benjamin Hampton's suggestion, he sent La Follette an outline for a possible opening article on "The Owners of America," which he had in part culled from a recent La Follette speech on currency reform.⁴¹ As with his previous memo, Welliver assumed that the articles would deal in turn with "present-day conditions in America" rather than with the Senator's life-story, but he did focus on what would become the core theme of the autobiography, the increasing and dangerous concentration of private power: "[W]e have been lavish in our bestowal of special privileges," Welliver wrote, "and this, in turn, has been organized into what we all know as the money power."⁴² La Follette, then, was not yet reconciled to the autobiographical mode, but even at this very early stage the idea that eventually became the core political message of both the published articles and book—that the most pressing problem of contemporary American political life was "the encroachment of the powerful few upon the rights of the many" and its deleterious consequences for representative democracy—was clearly established.⁴³

A mix of personal and political calculations informed La Follette's decision to agree to write the articles in the summer of 1910. The most important factor was that his finances were in some disarray as he struggled to retain his Washington residence at 1864 Wyoming Avenue, his family home outside Madison, Wisconsin (Maple Bluff Farm), and, most draining of all on his time, energy, and resources, *La Follette's Weekly Magazine*, the newspaper he had set up in 1909 to spread his political influence and message. If writing a campaign biography for 1912 had been La Follette's principal motivation, he would not have agreed, as at first he did, to have the first three articles in the series appear before the 1910 midterm elections, in which La Follette had to fight off a primary election challenge from

Sam Cook, an opponent backed by wealthy conservatives aware of La Follette's growing national profile as a leading Senate insurgent.⁴⁴ The decision to delay work on the articles until after the Wisconsin primary election came only after a period of anguished reflection: "It will be hard for me to get through the campaign and carry the magazine without earning this money," La Follette confided to his assistant Gilbert E. Roe, "but we can squeeze through some way, as I find I have a little credit left."⁴⁵ A year later, by which time the first article still had not been published, he insisted that financial rather than political motivations drove the magazine deal. "I am losing money every month on the magazine," he wrote to a friend, "and I have taken this means of earning something outside."⁴⁶

La Follette's poor health also influenced the timing and motivation for the series of articles. As his biographer Nancy Unger has explained, the Senator was prone throughout his life to recurrent bouts of debilitating illness. These were self-induced, Unger has argued, a product, at least in part, of La Follette's refusal to rest, exercise, sleep or eat properly, despite repeated advice to the contrary from his family and doctors.⁴⁷ Ignoring such warnings, La Follette routinely worked himself to a state of total exhaustion, a strategy that freed him to enjoy the period of guilt-free recovery that followed, during which time he received the devoted and uncritical attention of family, friends and supporters.⁴⁸ This pattern of behavior also allowed him to put back deadlines, which is what he did in relation to the *Hampton's* articles in July 1910, telling Judson Welliver that the "killing strain" of the previous congressional session was to blame and that publication of the first article should accordingly be deferred until January 1911.⁴⁹ Later that month, the Senator's secretary John Hannon told Benjamin Hampton that in the last two weeks La Follette had "passed ... nearly a pint and upwards of one hundred gall stones."⁵⁰ In September 1910 an elective operation to remove gallstones, carried out at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, did little to improve La Follette's physical health, while considerably worsening his family's financial wellbeing.⁵¹

It would, however, be wrong to neglect political factors entirely in any explanation of the origins of *La Follette's Autobiography*. In 1910, with the end of his first term in the Senate approaching, La Follette understood that his political stock was growing and that divisions in the Republican Party presented an opportunity which he might exploit to his advantage. He won the 1910 Wisconsin primary without making a speech, relying on the work of his well-oiled personal machine and his reputation as the man who had made his state a model of reform.⁵² Writing a series of articles would help to maintain this high profile in a fashion that was remunerative and did not require energy-sapping travel or exhausting speaking engagements. But the articles were also an opportunity for self-promotion, potentially giving the Senator a platform from which to advance his claim to be the national leader of the progressive movement. This was particularly important in 1910 because Theodore Roosevelt, having returned the previous year from his widely publicized African sojourn, was now setting out his New Nationalism credo, elements of which occupied territory La Follette considered his own: direct democracy through the referendum, initiative, and recall; a graduated income tax; labor and tariff reform. In an attempt to impress upon other progressives that he—not Roosevelt—was the movement's authentic champion, La Follette announced to Benjamin Hampton in December 1910 that he had “come back” and was ready to go ahead with the articles.⁵³

The articles were designed to put La Follette's personal stamp on the project to advance the cause of progressive reform, and as such were devised not solely with the 1912 presidential race in mind. Evidence of this wider political purpose is that as he reinvigorated his plans for the articles he also sent out a tranche of letters to fellow progressives laying out a plan to establish a new organization to promote progressive reform, the National Progressive Republican League.⁵⁴ La Follette and other progressives with links to both major parties—including Louis D. Brandeis, James C. Garfield, Frederic Howe, and Gifford and

Amos Pinchot—wanted to set up an independent organization for progressives which would be free from the influence of the Republican and Democratic Party apparatuses. Theodore Roosevelt was one of La Follette's first recruitment targets. On 19 January 1911, however, sensing that membership might politically constrain him, Roosevelt politely declined to sign up to the League's principles.⁵⁵ Thereafter, Roosevelt and La Follette's intensely competitive relationship entered a downward spiral, the fierce rivalry that rapidly developed between them reducing both men's chances of becoming the undisputed champion of progressive reform, and diminishing their presidential prospects in the process. Divisions among progressives—as well as the split between the Republican Party's progressive and conservative wings—ensured that it was not a Republican but a Democrat, Woodrow Wilson, who emerged from the 1912 presidential election carrying the banner of reform.⁵⁶

Having examined the origins of *La Follette's Autobiography*, we can say that a combination of personal and political factors informed the Senator's decision to write and publish. Spiraling debts and fragile health were important motivations, as was La Follette's desire to put himself forward as the progressive movement's true leader. One further factor accounts for the timing of the articles, however: the economically precarious nature of progressive magazine publishing in the early decades of the twentieth century. In late 1910, La Follette struck a lucrative deal with *Hampton's*, agreeing to a contract which would have earned him \$1,500 for each of 10 articles. But it became increasingly clear through the first months of 1911 that *Hampton's* could not be relied upon to honor this deal and that its owner, Benjamin Hampton, was losing control of his business. As a result, *La Follette's Autobiography* was first published not in *Hampton's* but in a competing publication, John S. Phillips's *American Magazine*.

The switch between the two magazines was not formally completed until July 1911, less than three months before the first article was published. The Senator knew as early as

February 1911 that *American Magazine* was interested in asking the prolific author and journalist Ray Stannard Baker to help with the articles.⁵⁷ For La Follette this was a tantalizing prospect because while the terms Phillips finally offered were less attractive than *Hampton's* (\$1,200 rather than \$1,500 for each installment), Baker was a gifted writer sympathetic to the Senator's political agenda and ideas.⁵⁸ By this point the Senator had embraced Judson Welliver's idea to present discussion of major political themes by means of an autobiographical narrative. The overarching theme of the articles, he explained in a letter to Louis D. Brandeis, would be "the Money Power."⁵⁹ Accordingly he asked Brandeis to furnish him with examples of "business coercion and business assassination."⁶⁰

Through the spring of 1911, La Follette worked with his legal advisor Gilbert E. Roe to free himself from his contractual obligations toward *Hampton's*. On 7 March, he informed Roe in writing that he was no longer in a position to honor his former understanding with *Hampton's* not to approach other publishers.⁶¹ The situation has changed, he explained, since the very future of the magazine was now in doubt.⁶² He would only proceed, he told his great friend the University of Wisconsin economist John R. Commons the following day, if offered "a bond or some form of guarantee which will insure payment for the articles."⁶³ On 9 March the Senator drafted a letter to Benjamin Hampton, in which he stated that the future of the progressive cause and the parlous state of his personal finances dictated that it was no longer possible for him to go ahead with the articles without a cast-iron guarantee that they would be published consecutively, and that he would receive his first payment of \$1,500 on delivery of the first article on 20 July.⁶⁴ The letter, the stringent terms of which had been crafted with the precise purpose of forcing Hampton to withdraw from his contract with La Follette, was amended by Roe before being mailed on 15 March.⁶⁵ Despite his strong sense of personal moral obligation toward Hampton, the Senator was clearly now convinced that *Hampton's* magazine was dead in the water.⁶⁶ Any change of ownership, he believed, might jeopardize

the publication of the articles or lead to them being presented in an unflattering way.⁶⁷ In a comment that gives a flavor of the melodramatic, almost paranoid, cast of La Follette's mind, he warned Roe of the need "to guard against the series passing into hands hostile to the series."⁶⁸ He was ready now to make terms with *American Magazine*, he told another correspondent, the Kansan writer and newspaper editor William Allen White.⁶⁹

Closing out the negotiations was a tortuous process, but on 8 July, La Follette finally wrote to Benjamin Hampton explaining that he had signed a contract with another magazine.⁷⁰ The Senator accepted *American Magazine*'s less lucrative financial terms in return for Ray Stannard Baker's ghostwriting services.⁷¹ It was this guarantee of practical assistance that clinched the deal: Baker promised to stay with La Follette in Washington, DC to convert the Senator's "basic material"—he claimed already to have 40,000 to 50,000 words—into a disciplined, fast-paced narrative.⁷² "He has the grasp and the vision to see the bigness of the thing," La Follette wrote of his new collaborator.⁷³ Together, through the summer of 1911, more than a year after Judson Welliver's original approach, Baker and La Follette set to work.

(Ghost)writing reform

Relationships between writers and ghostwriters vary enormously in their character, in the fluctuating dynamics of their evolution over time, and in their logistical and practical operation. To say that Baker was La Follette's ghostwriter, therefore, is to stop well short of explaining the complex particularities of their joint endeavor, and to risk giving the false impression that the Senator played a passive role in the writing of his own life. It is also to overlook the importance of others—family, friends, expert advisors, publishers—who helped bring the book into being. La Follette, for his part, worked exceptionally hard to write his autobiography in a way that satisfied him, even when this work threatened seriously to

impede his broader political goals: his contribution was substantial, sustained, and, as one might expect, intensely personal. In essence, however, writing and publishing *La Follette's Autobiography* was a collective enterprise which made considerable demands upon the emotional as well as the political, professional, and financial resources of its collaborators.

In 1910, Ray Stannard Baker was still seeking the muse he would eventually find in Woodrow Wilson, the subject of his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, published between 1927 and 1939.⁷⁴ Indeed it was while working on *La Follette's Autobiography* that Baker overcame his distrust of the Democratic Party and decided that since Wilson belonged to the progressive “Bryan faction” of that Party, he should have his vote in 1912, despite feeling that it was the Socialist Party platform that most nearly expressed his own political position.⁷⁵ Baker's first contact with La Follette came in July 1910, when he was preparing a piece for *American Magazine* on the “The Insurgents” and their role in enlivening and disrupting the politics of the United States Senate.⁷⁶ Baker's notebooks reveal, however, that while he was attracted to La Follette's “great energy, deep conviction, and fighting capacity,” he retained sufficient critical distance to appreciate the Senator's limitations.⁷⁷ After watching him speak in the Senate in July 1911, for example, he wrote that La Follette “did not seem to me to be marked with that largeness, dignity, and measure of power for which one looks in the highest statesmanship.”⁷⁸ He noted nevertheless that La Follette was the “one [Senator] down here I like and admire most,” the man who was “nearest to the people.”⁷⁹ “[I]t is too much to ask of our leaders that they be immaculate White Giants,” he wrote, adopting a sage tone: “Almighty God carves out his ends with dull tools—always.”⁸⁰

Baker and John S. Phillips, the owner of *American Magazine*, were at first delighted with La Follette's work-rate and cooperative attitude. “It's great, the way the Senator has gotten into the saddle!” Phillips wrote to Baker in August 1911.⁸¹ “If he only had the proper reporting in the press, he would appear to the country the greatest man in politics now.”⁸²

Phillips urged Baker to use his literary craftsmanship to bring La Follette's dictation to life, urging him to strike a balance between lively reminiscence and contemporary political commentary.⁸³ The problem for Baker, however, was that the Senator overloaded him with material, giving him reams of dictated notes which were tens-of-thousands of words over-length, while at same time requesting numerous revisions.⁸⁴ La Follette furnished much of the raw material for the articles in the form of transcripts from his dictations and the interviews he gave to Baker at the beginning of their collaboration; but he was also an assiduous editor who read and critically interrogated every word of his autobiography. He requested substitutions of entire pages of Baker's chapter drafts while also picking up on minor detail, for example his comment that the Wisconsin Chief Justice did not have "stiff reddish hair," but in fact "wavy auburn hair."⁸⁵ In November 1911 he cancelled speaking engagements to give him more time to write before Congress reconvened the following month.⁸⁶ Determined to get the story—his story—right, he worked on proof revisions long after deadlines had passed, infuriating his collaborators.⁸⁷ He found it difficult, evidently, to relinquish control of the telling of his own life-story and indeed was reluctant to bring the process of working on the articles to an end, asking Phillips whether he might be permitted to extend the series beyond the agreed number of 10 articles. The Senator's request was firmly declined.⁸⁸

The conflicting demands made on him by Phillips and La Follette placed Baker in an awkward position. Phillips feared that the Senator's *penchant* for excessive detail would weaken the autobiography's narrative force. Baker's job, according to Phillips, was to "furnish some perspective and proportion."⁸⁹ La Follette, on the other hand, continued to bombard him with material, while also insisting that Baker's depiction of his struggle against special privilege was not being rendered in sufficiently Manichean terms: "You do not make stand out the diabolical character of the plan to destroy the administration by falsehood and

treachery,” complained the Senator in a reference to a section on his service as Governor of Wisconsin.⁹⁰ Sandwiched between his employer and the subject of his labors in this way, Baker was remarkably calm in his dealings with La Follette.⁹¹ Baker’s correspondence with Phillips makes plain, however, that both men were perplexed and annoyed by La Follette’s delaying tactics, and by his tendency to pick fights over minor disagreements, whether they referred to the content of the manuscript or to contractual matters.⁹² In this context, La Follette’s soubriquet—“Fighting Bob”—takes on a new aspect: his famously combative political style was, it seems, mirrored in his personal conduct. As early as September 1911, an infuriated Phillips was pledging to Baker that he would “send a few hotshots into the Senator,” if delays continued.⁹³ Later that same month, Phillips wrote in a similar vein at greater length. “Lord, I know what troubles you have,” he stated, empathetically: “I know that man and you are putting it through with a patience and skill that amazes me. Of course he is an extraordinarily interesting creature, a wonderful man, or none of us could stand for his method of getting out material.”⁹⁴

Baker survived his collaboration with La Follette relatively unscathed. The Senator’s reluctance to release article proofs, his inability to settle contractual differences without an almighty battle, and the death, in May 1912, of Baker’s father, all caused further strains and delays; but Baker agreed nevertheless to spend part of that summer helping La Follette write three new chapters on the 1912 campaign.⁹⁵ The new material was required so that the autobiography could be marketed as being something more than a mere reissue of the *American Magazine* articles, but its value for La Follette was therapeutic as well as financial. As his presidential hopes receded through the early months of 1912 he became ever more determined to place in print for perpetuity his view that Theodore Roosevelt was an unprincipled, power-hungry opportunist: “I want in the last chapter to write the history of this d d campaign,” he told his Gilbert Roe, his anger spilling over.⁹⁶

Publishing the autobiography as a book, however, was not a straightforward business. Leading publishing houses contacted La Follette about issuing the autobiography in book form even before the first *American Magazine* articles appeared.⁹⁷ But these dealings were complicated by uncertainty about whether to negotiate with the Senator or with his ghostwriter and, more serious still, by the problem of how to meet La Follette's demand that the full autobiography be distributed cheaply to subscribers to his magazine, *La Follette's Weekly*.⁹⁸ Walter Page of Doubleday, Page & Co. solved the problem by suggesting that two editions be produced: a cheap "at cost" version ("a manufacturing job") for La Follette's subscribers, and a more expensive one to be targeted at the book trade.⁹⁹ Interestingly, Page made this proposal not to La Follette but to Baker, whose hugely popular adventure stories—written under the pen name David Grayson—he had been publishing since 1907.¹⁰⁰

It took several months for La Follette to agree contractual terms with Walter Page, misdirecting energy that would in all likelihood have been better channeled towards his faltering presidential campaign. Negotiations begun in September 1911 were not concluded until the end of February 1912.¹⁰¹ Throughout the process, the degree of the Senator's freedom to sell cheap editions to his subscribers was a particular sticking point.¹⁰² The underlying problem, however, was La Follette's distress at the disintegration of his political hopes as Theodore Roosevelt, playing an astute waiting game, gradually displaced La Follette as the leading Republican progressive. He was anxious, too, about the health of his daughter, Mary, who had been unwell and was scheduled to undergo dangerous surgery to remove tubercular glands from a site adjacent to her jugular vein.¹⁰³ The political and emotional strain La Follette was experiencing at this time became manifest in humiliating fashion on 2 February 1912—the day before Mary's operation—when he made an ill-judged and ill-mannered attack on the press during a speaking engagement in Philadelphia. He spoke for far too long, refused to divert from his script even when it was obvious that his prepared remarks

were not appropriate for a late night speech, and, distracted by a restless and inattentive audience, repeated himself on numerous occasions when he lost his place.¹⁰⁴ Unsurprisingly, given that the speech was made to the Periodical Publishers Association, La Follette's performance was widely reported, and in extremely unflattering terms. News stories referred to his "collapse" and "mental breakdown."¹⁰⁵ His campaign was effectively over: "Poor La Follette," Felix Angus wrote in the *Baltimore American*, "[h]e has killed his chances."¹⁰⁶ The Senator's anxious state is clear from letters he wrote to his long-suffering confidant, Gilbert Roe, about the Doubleday contract shortly after his Philadelphia speech. "I shrink from giving you so much annoyance and taking so much of your time," he wrote on 17 February 1912, "but ... [the contract] seems to me to be waiting in ambush for me just now, no matter in what direction I turn, so I am ready to shoot at sight on the snapping of a twig."¹⁰⁷

Following what he termed his "flunk" in Philadelphia, La Follette wrote letters of reassurance to friends and political allies, for example telling Minnesota congressman Charles A. Lindbergh, who had written expressing his concern for the Senator's health, that he was "made of iron" and could "stand any amount of work."¹⁰⁸ Remarkably, the Senator almost certainly believed this; he was singularly incapable of accepting his physical and psychological limitations. "Am absolutely all right physically," he informed Clarence Jones.¹⁰⁹ Whatever La Follette chose to believe, it is clear that by the summer of 1912 he was in political terms a weakened figure. Indeed it was not until 1924 that La Follette was able to recover sufficient ground politically to be in a position to emulate Theodore Roosevelt by making a third-party campaign for the presidency as a candidate for the Progressive Party.¹¹⁰ Ray Stannard Baker continued to work on the *American Magazine* articles until the last piece was published in July 1912, but thereafter La Follette was forced to rely on friends and family to help him complete the book manuscript. His son-in-law, the playwright George Middleton, dutifully read the proofs, as did his old friend at the University of Wisconsin, the

distinguished labor economist John R. Commons, who from the beginning of the entire project had furnished statistics, offered advice, and acted as a critical reader.¹¹¹

In 1913, with the aid of these friends, La Follette managed eventually to have his autobiography published, though by this time Walter Page of Doubleday, Page was no longer involved. Exhausted by arguments over their contract and then by squabbling over how to respond to threats of legal action from Gilson Gardner (a journalist and Roosevelt supporter) and Francis E. McGovern (a former Wisconsin governor) over their portrayal in the autobiography, Page and La Follette finally decided to agree on the only thing they could agree on at this point—to cancel the contract. Ironically, *La Follette's Autobiography*, which as we have seen was conceived in part as a means of improving the Senator's financial situation, was ultimately published by the Robert M. La Follette Publishing Company, which, as Nancy Unger notes, entailed mortgaging Maple Bluff Farm in order to purchase the printing plates.¹¹²

La Follette's Autobiography was in some respects an abject failure. It did not improve the Senator's finances, tended if anything to aggravate rather than alleviate his health problems, and failed to secure him a presidential nomination. It was, however, for the most part well-received. "It will take its place among the great political memoirs," declared the *Burlington Free Press*, in an example of the many positive reviews La Follette recorded for marketing purposes.¹¹³ Willis Thompson of the *New York Times* devoted three columns to the book, praising the "simplicity and force" of its narrative which made it "as interesting as a novel."¹¹⁴ The *Indianapolis News*, a conservative Republican newspaper usually hostile to La Follette, compared it to Wilson's *New Freedom* for the insight it gave into the "political fermentation through which the American people are passing."¹¹⁵ *Political Science Quarterly* recommended it to "those who wish to learn something of the shadier practices of party politics."¹¹⁶ Ray Stannard Baker, looking over what was in part his own handiwork,

remarked, somewhat immodestly, on “the fine sincerity of the thing,” asserting that it would “become one of the standard autobiographies” of the progressive era.¹¹⁷ Some reviewers felt that the sour tone of the final chapters spoiled the book, and a number of Roosevelt’s close associates attacked it in public, describing its portrayal of their hero as self-serving, dishonest, and inaccurate.¹¹⁸ Other readers, such as Charles A. Beard, writing in the letter with which this article began, expressed solidarity with La Follette’s anti-Roosevelt perspective: “Your analysis of Roosevelt,” he wrote, “is true to the last degree and confirms the opinion I have always had concerning that shifty gentleman.”¹¹⁹

Conclusion

La Follette’s Autobiography is not an altogether reliable guide either to the events it describes or to the life of its subject. It is in this respect hardly exceptional: autobiographies are necessarily subjective, their value for historians resting substantially upon the prejudices and distortions they wittingly and unwittingly reveal. Historians can profit, however, from studying why and how particular autobiographies came into being, and from examining how they were written, published, and received. Autobiographies of reform, such as *La Follette’s Autobiography*, are peculiarly susceptible to this approach, it can be argued, since they make manifest—each in their own way—the complex connections between, on the one hand, the individual lives they strive to portray and, on the other, the purposive political projects in which those lives are themselves embedded. Indeed, La Follette himself saw his autobiography in these, or at least related, terms. As we have seen, he wrote what eventually became *La Follette’s Autobiography* in part for financial reasons and in part because he thought that writing would not tax his health as much as public speaking, with all the effort and travel that involved; but he also wrote it because he wanted to find a new means by which to demonstrate—even to embody—his commitment to progressive reform. This is

why La Follette—or at least Ray Stannard Baker writing for La Follette—began his autobiography by insisting that he was writing not “for the sake of writing,” nor with any “literary intent,” but rather “for the express purpose of exhibiting the struggle for a more representative government which is going forward in this country and to cheer on the fighters for that cause.”¹²⁰ The autobiographies written by La Follette and his progressive peers exhibit that struggle in manifold ways, but all deploy this versatile mode of writing—poised precariously as it is between fictional and non-fictional forms—as a means of negotiating the fascinating inner and outer histories of progressive reform.

As this study has made clear, for “Fighting Bob” La Follette, “exhibiting the struggle” by autobiographical means was no trivial matter. Nor, as we have seen, was it solely a product of raw political calculation linked to the race for the 1912 presidency. It was a project, rather, to which the Senator committed himself body and soul, even when it was to the detriment of his wider political goals. *La Follette’s Autobiography* alerts its readers quite deliberately to the importance of passion and human feeling in politics through its emphasis on the connection between personal and political experiences, and in its insistence that moral indignation, outrage, and anger substantially shaped its subject’s life-choices, political outlook and decision-making. This dimension of what it meant to live a progressive life—a life in which the politics of motion and emotion were inseparably intertwined and fully involved—was also evident, it is suggested here, in the process by which *La Follette’s Autobiography* was conceived and written, sustained as it was throughout by the Senator’s remarkably supportive and loving political family, by the intense devotion and loyalty of his friends, and by the admiration, affection, and sorely-tested tolerance of his hard-working collaborators in the progressive world beyond. By studying that process, making use of and interrogating autobiographies of reform such as La Follette’s, historians can achieve a fuller,

and perhaps more human, understanding of what Charles A. Beard termed “the inner history of the progressive movement.”¹²¹

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Notes

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¹ Charles A. Beard to Robert M. La Follette (hereafter RML), 13 May 1913, Special Correspondence: Beard, Charles A., Box B73, Robert M. La Follette, Sr. Papers, The La Follette Family Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as RML Papers).

² Ibid.

³ Beard, *An Economic Interpretation*.

⁴ Charles A. Beard to RML, 13 May 1913, Special Correspondence: Beard, Charles A., Box, B73, Robert M. La Follette, Sr. Papers.

⁵ La Follette, *La Follette's Autobiography*. For an illuminating study of the relationship between the personal and political in Beard's life, emphasising how the idea of family helped to constitute and shape the project of progressive reform, see Rauchway, *The Refuge of Affections*, 61-90.

⁶ Charles A. Beard to RML, 13 May 1913, Special Correspondence: Beard, Charles A., Box, B73, RMLPapers.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The idea that progressive reform entailed self-transformation as well as changing the lives of other selves is, however, discussed in McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 77-117. See also Rauchway, *The Refuge of Affections* and, on selfhood and autobiographical writing, Lasch, *The New Radicalism*.

⁹ Roosevelt, *An Autobiography*; Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*.

¹⁰ For the role Debs' writings played in promoting the myth that he underwent a revelatory conversion to socialism while in jail in Woodstock in 1895 see Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 149-52. See also Debs, *Debs*. For Kelley, who died before she was able to get far with her autobiography, see Sherrick, “Their Fathers' Daughters.”

¹¹ Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*; William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White*.

¹² Lasch, 271.

¹³ Nancy Unger notes that 40,000 may be a generous estimate since many copies were distributed below cost to subscribers to *La Follette's Weekly*, the Senator's magazine. See Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 229.

¹⁴ Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 292.

¹⁵ Allan Nevins, “Foreword” in La Follette, *La Follette's Autobiography*, v.

¹⁶ Ibid., vii.

¹⁷ Unger, “*La Follette's Autobiography: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly, and the Glorious*,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10. 3 (July 2011): 354-361.

¹⁸ Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 27.

¹⁹ Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 12-13, 27, 76-77, 78, 229; Thelen, *Insurgent Spirit*, 16, 96.

²⁰ For La Follette's version of the Sawyer incident see his *La Follette's Autobiography*, 60-76. The fullest accounts of the La Follette-Sawyer clash are Current, *Pine Logs and Politics*, 261-264 and Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership and Midwestern Politics*, 146-152. For contrasting treatments see also Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 100-103, Thelen, *Insurgent Spirit*, 18-21, and Weisberger, *Love and Politics*, 28-31..

²¹ Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership*, 146.

²² La Follette, *La Follette's Autobiography*, 61-62.

²³ Brøndal, *Ethnic Leadership*, 146.

²⁴ On conversion narratives in progressive autobiography see Kennedy, *Birth Control in America*, 17-18 and Rauchway, *Refuge of Affections*, 70-71.

²⁵ Testi, "The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity" *Journal of American History* 81 (March 1995): 1520.

²⁶ Addams, *Twenty Years*, 60-74.

²⁷ Addams, *Twenty Years*, 63.

²⁸ Addams, *Twenty Years*, 63-64.

²⁹ Addams, *Twenty Years*, 64.

³⁰ Addams, *Twenty Years*, 63.

³¹ Addams, *Twenty Years*, 72-74.

³² Only fragments of this story have appeared in print to date: See Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 186, 201, 209-213, 228-230, Thelen, *Insurgent Spirit*, 88-89, 96, and Weisberger, *Love and Politics*, 76.

³³ The first full biography of Robert M. La Follette, Sr. was an eloquent expression of the importance of affective ties in the La Follette family in that it was a family production, written by La Follette's wife, Belle, and daughter, Fola: Belle Case La Follette and Fola La Follette, *Robert M. La Follette*. The recent turn toward acknowledging and exploring the personal, psychological, and emotional substance of the political environment in which the La Follettes operated is evident in Weisberger, *Love and Politics* and Unger, *Fighting Bob La Follette*.

³⁴ Historical treatments of Robert M. La Follette, Sr. and the progressive era written from the late 1950s to the 1980s were markedly suspicious of La Follette's motives, skeptical about his peculiar brand of moral politics, and more interested in structural and organizational change than in the role of emotions in constructing the politics of reform. David P. Thelen's work best illustrates this tendency in particular relation to La Follette. See Thelen, *Insurgent Spirit* but also his *The Early Life of Robert M. La Follette, 1855-1884* and *The New Citizenship*. For the wider historiographical framework within which such interpretations of La Follette's political career were produced see Hays, *Response to Industrialism*, Kolko, *Triumph of Conservatism* and Wiebe, *Search for Order, 1877*.

³⁵ For introductions to the emotional turn and history, see Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History" and the summer 2009 special issue of *Slavic Review* dedicated to the history of emotions. For contrasting approaches to emotion in history compare Stearns and Lewis, (eds.) *An Emotional History* and Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*. For the influence of theoretical perspectives drawn from anthropology, philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and other disciplines on recent work on emotions and social movements see the introductory essay in Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, eds., *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, 1-24 and also Gould, *Moving Politics*, 1-47.

³⁶ Bernard Weisberger mischaracterizes the book in this way in *Love and Politics*, 76.

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- ³⁷ Note by Fola La Follette preceding Welliver memorandum, Speeches & Writings file: Autobiography, Miscellany, Circular, Box B249, RML Papers.
- ³⁸ Judson Welliver, Memorandum of some general ideas about proposed series of articles by Senator La Follette, Speeches & Writings file: Autobiography, Miscellany, Circular, Box B249, RML Papers.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Judson Welliver to RML, 10 June 1910, Special Correspondence: 1910 Welliver, Judson, B65, RML Papers.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ La Follette, *La Follette's Autobiography*, 321.
- ⁴⁴ RML to Gilbert E. Roe (hereafter GER), 9 July 1910, Letters sent July 1910, B104, RML Papers.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ RML to Clarence Jones, Folder: Letters sent July 1911, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁴⁷ Unger, 80.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 80, 82.
- ⁴⁹ RML to Judson Welliver, 9 July 1910, Letters sent, July 1910, B104, RML Papers.
- ⁵⁰ John J. Hannon to Benjamin Hampton, 21 July 1910, B104, RML Papers.
- ⁵¹ RML secretary to Benjamin Hampton, 30 Sept. 1910, Letters sent, Sept. 1910, B104, RML Papers.
- ⁵² Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 192.
- ⁵³ RML to Benjamin Hampton, 16 Dec. 1910, Letters sent Dec. 1910, B105, RML Papers.
- ⁵⁴ See for example: RML to Theodore Roosevelt, 27 Dec. 1910, Letters sent Dec. 1910, B105, RML Papers.
- ⁵⁵ RML to Theodore Roosevelt, 19 Jan. 1911, Letters sent Jan. 13-30, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁵⁶ For a helpful and judicious appraisal of the 1912 presidential contest, see Gould, *Four Hats in the Ring*.
- ⁵⁷ RML to John S. Phillips (hereafter JSP), 13 Feb. 1911, Letters sent Feb. 1911, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ RML to Louis D. Brandeis, 17 Feb. 1911, Letters sent Feb. 1911, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁶¹ RML to GER, 7 March 1911, Letters sent March 1911, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ RML to John R. Commons, 8 March 1911, Letters sent March 1911, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁶⁴ RML to Hampton, 9 March, 1911, Letters sent March 1911, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁶⁵ RML to Hampton, 15 March, 1911, Letters sent March 1911, B106, RML Papers. See also JSP to Ray Stannard Baker (hereafter RSB), 23 May 1911, Reel 28, Ray Stannard Baker Papers Library of Congress. Washington, D.C. (hereafter RSB Papers).
- ⁶⁶ RML to GER, 21 March 1911, Letters sent March 1911, B106, RML Papers; RML-JSP, 29 March, Letters sent March 1911, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁶⁷ RML to GER, 21 March 1911, Letters sent March 1911, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ RML to William Allen White, 24 April 1911, Letters sent April 1911, B106, RML Papers; RML to JSP, 29 March, Letters sent March 1911, B106, RML Papers; RML to GER, 17 May 1911, Letters sent May 1911, B106, RML Papers.
- ⁷⁰ For the problematic negotiations, see: Ida Tarbell to RSB, 28 June 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers; RML to GER, 4 June 1911, Letters sent June 1911, B106, RML Papers; RML to

GER, 8 June 1911, Letters sent June 1911, B106, RML Papers; RML to GER, 23 June 1911, Letters sent June 1911, B106, RML Papers; RML to GER, 28 June 1911, Letters sent June 1911, B106, RML Papers. For the letter terminating the *Hampton's* contract see RML to Hampton, 8 July 1911, Letters sent July 1911, B106, RML Papers.

⁷¹ RML to GER, 8 June 1911, Letters sent June 1911, B106, RML Papers.

⁷² RML to GER, 23 June 1911, Letters sent June 1911, B106, RML Papers.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Baker, *Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters*, 8 vols.

⁷⁵ Baker notebooks, 8 Aug. 1912, Reel 10, RSB Papers.

⁷⁶ RSB to RML, 29 July 1910, Special Correspondence: Baker, Ray Stannard 1910, Box B63, RML Papers.

⁷⁷ Baker notebooks, 27 July, Reel 10, RSB Papers.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ JSP to RSB, 2 Aug. 1911, Reel 28 RSB Papers.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ JSP to RSB, 5 Sept. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers.

⁸⁴ JSP to RSB, 5 Dec. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers.

⁸⁵ RML to RSB, 22 Aug. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers.

⁸⁶ RML to Mrs. Borden Harriman, 6 Nov. 1911, Letters sent Nov. 1911, Box 107, RML Papers; RML to Ben B. Lindsay, 14 Nov. 1911, Letters sent Nov. 1911, Box 107, RML Papers.

⁸⁷ See, for example, RML to RSB, 26 Jan. 1912, Letters sent, Jan. 1912, Box 108, RML Papers.

⁸⁸ JSP to RSB, 9 Oct. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ RML to RSB, 9 Dec. 1911, Letters sent Dec 1-30, Box 107, RML Papers.

⁹¹ For an instance of Baker's tact and gentleness in dealing with La Follette, see RSB to RML, 13 Dec. 1911, Special Correspondence: Ray Stannard Baker 1911, Box 65, RML Papers.

⁹² For evidence of contractual difficulties see, for instance, RML to GER, 8 July 1911, Letters sent July 1911, B106, RML Papers.

⁹³ JSP to RSB, 16 Sept. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers.

⁹⁴ JSP to RSB, 21 Sept. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers.

⁹⁵ RSB to RML, 25 Jan. 1912, Special Correspondence, Ray Stannard Baker, Box 71, RML Papers; RML to RSB, 26 Jan. 1912, Letters sent, Jan. 1912, Box 108, RML Papers; Jessie B. Baker to Nellie Dunn, 20 May 1912, Special Correspondence, Ray Stannard Baker, Box 71, RML Papers.

⁹⁶ RML to GER, 17 Feb. 1912, Letters sent Feb. 1912, Box 108, RML Papers.

⁹⁷ For early correspondence of this sort, see George Brett (MacMillan Co.) to RSB, 18 Sept. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers; RSB to RML, 1 Oct. 1911, Special Correspondence: Baker, Ray Stannard 1911, Box 65, RML Papers; Walter Page to RSB, 20 Sept. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers; Brett to RSB, 28 Sept. 1911; Page to RSB, 5 Oct. 1911; Page to RSB, 13 Oct. 1911; D. Appleton & Company to RSB, 4 Nov. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers.

⁹⁸ Walter Page to RSB, 20 Sept. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ The first of Baker's writings as "David Grayson" was *Adventures in Contentment*. The last of the nine volumes he published under this name appeared in 1942, four years before his death, as *Under My Elm*.

¹⁰¹ Walter Page to RSB, 20 Sept. 1911, Reel 28, RSB Papers; RML to GER, 21 Feb. 1912, Letters sent Feb., Box 108, RML Papers.

¹⁰² RML to GER, 9 Dec. 1911, Letters sent, Dec. 1-30, Box 107, RML Papers.

¹⁰³ Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 202.

¹⁰⁴ For contrasting accounts of the Philadelphia speech and its reception, compare Belle Case La Follette and Fola La Follette, *Robert M. La Follette*, I: 400-408 with Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 202-14, and Weisberger, 137-139. For La Follette's version of the fiasco, see La Follette, *La Follette's Autobiography*, 256-260.

¹⁰⁵ Unger, *Fighting Bob*., 206.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 205.

¹⁰⁷ RML to GER, 17 Feb. 1912, Letters sent Feb, Box 108, RML Papers.

¹⁰⁸ Weisberger, *Love and Politics*, 137. RML to Charles A. Lindbergh, 20 Feb. 1912, Letters sent Feb., Box 108, RML Papers. Charles A. Lindbergh was the father of the aviator of the same name.

¹⁰⁹ RML to E. Clarence Jones, 20 Feb. 1912, Letters sent Feb., Box 108, RML Papers.

¹¹⁰ In 1912 Roosevelt won 27.4% of the popular vote, receiving a total of 4,122,721 votes; he carried 6 states, gaining 88 Electoral College votes. In 1924 La Follette won 16.6% of the popular vote, receiving a total of 4,831,706 votes; he carried only one state (his own), gaining 13 Electoral College votes.

¹¹¹ RML to George Middleton, 13 May 1912, Letters sent May, Box 108, RML Papers. There is a rich trove of correspondence between La Follette and Commons in the RML Papers. For examples of Commons' assistance with the autobiography see RML to Commons, 1 Aug. 1911, Letters sent August 1911, B106, RML Papers; RML to Commons, 26 Sept. 1911, Letters sent Sept 1911, Box 106, RML Papers; RML to Commons, 3 Oct. 1911, Letters sent Oct. 1911, Box 106, RML Papers.

¹¹² Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 229

¹¹³ Reviews, Speeches and Writings file: Autobiography, Box 249, RML Papers.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Unger, *Fighting Bob*, 229.

¹¹⁹ Charles A. Beard to RML, 13 May 1913, Special Correspondence: Beard, Charles A., Box B73, RML Papers.

¹²⁰ La Follette, *La Follette's Autobiography*, ix.

¹²¹ Charles A. Beard to RML, 13 May 1913, Special Correspondence: Beard, Charles A., Box, B73, RML Papers.

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