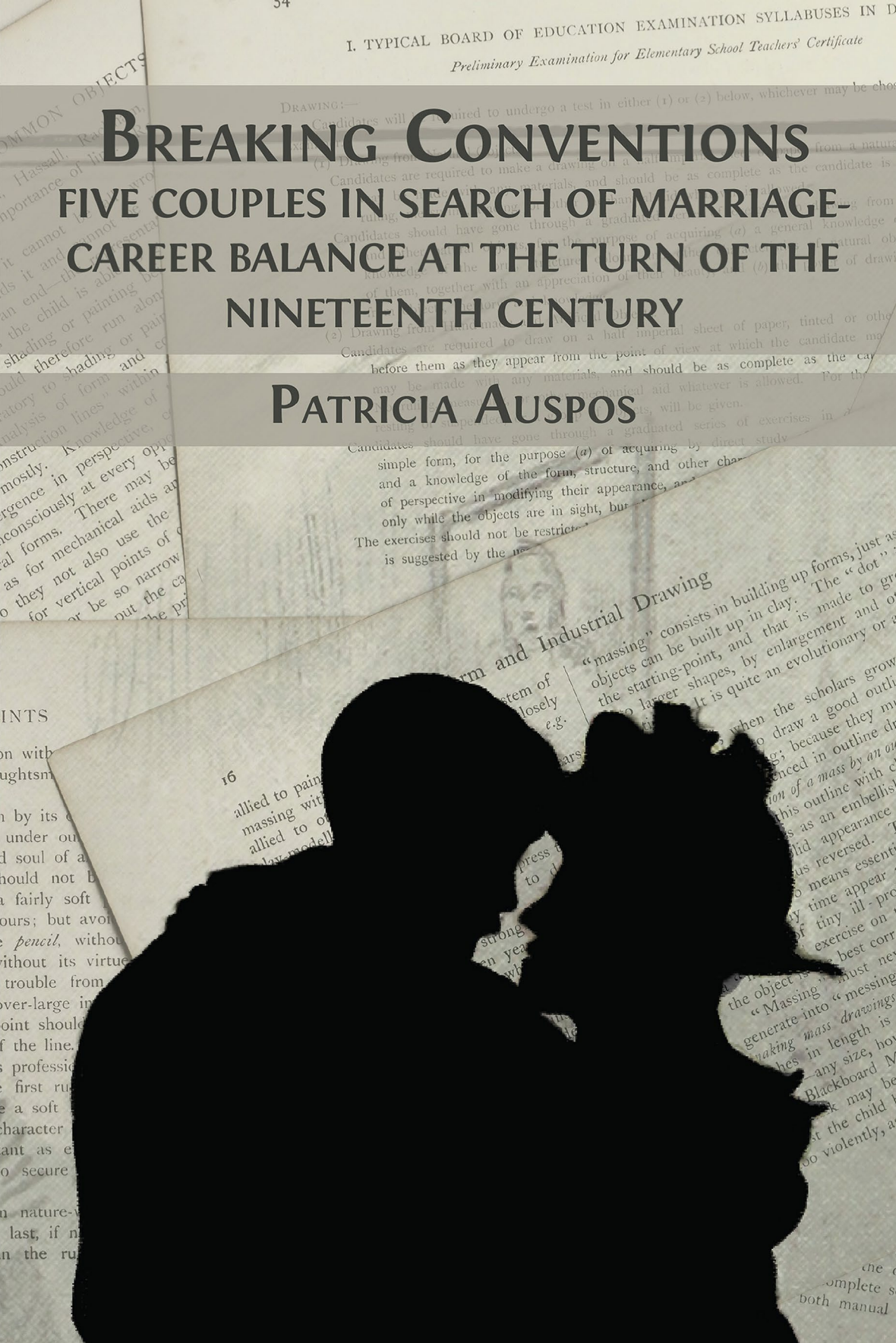
Breaking Conventions

Five Couples in Search of Marriage-Career Balance at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century

Patricia Auspos



https://www.openbookpublishers.com

Patricia Auspos, *Breaking Conventions: Five Couples in Search of Marriage-Career Balance at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century.* Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0318

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0318#resources.

ISBN Paperback: 978–1-80064–835–7

ISBN Hardback: 978–1-80064–836–4

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978–1-80064–837–1

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 978–1-80064–838–8

ISBN XML: 978–1-80064–840–1

ISBN HTML: 978–1-80064–841–8

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0318

Cover images: background image by Annie Spratt. Vintage page sheet background, July 21, 2018, https://unsplash.com/photos/_dAnK9GJvdY. Silhouettes based on a digitised image from page 388 of "A Romance of N'Shabé," December 4, 2013, https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary/11209860083/in/album-72157640584771663/.

Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal.

1. The Making of a Victorian Myth: Alice Freeman Palmer and George Herbert Palmer

Alice Freeman Palmer was a phenomenon in the nineteenth-century academic world. Only twenty-seven when she was named President of Wellesley College in 1882, Alice Freeman became a charismatic president and a talented administrator who reshaped the floundering women's college into a respected institution with a national reputation. In the process, she became "the most distinguished woman educator in the United States."[1] Nevertheless, when she married George Herbert Palmer, a philosophy professor at Harvard University, in 1887, she resigned from Wellesley, at his insistence. Five years later, she became the first Dean of Women at the University of Chicago, leaving George behind in Cambridge for weeks at a time to manage their household.

Yet, Alice's public image was not the pioneering woman who fashioned a dual career marriage for several years against great odds. Instead, her husband and her fellow educators, women as well as men, hailed her as a role model because she gave up Wellesley to marry George. They presented her life as a fairy tale: she, the beloved "Princess" of Wellesley, sacrificed her crown and career for the man she loved and lived happily ever after as queen of his heart and home. According to George's 1908 *Life of Alice Freeman Palmer*, Alice easily made the transition from college president to helpmate wife.[2] She was the

1 Ruth Bordin, *Alice Freeman Palmer: The Evolution of a New Woman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 113.

2 George Herbert Palmer, *The Life of Alice Freeman Palmer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908).

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0318.01

epitome of an angel in the house but still managed to devote herself to volunteer activities that were as satisfying as, and more important than, her position at Wellesley. George's portrait of Alice shaped her public image for many decades. An immensely popular and influential book in its time, it sold more than 50,000 copies, was translated into multiple languages, and inspired numerous accounts of Alice's life, including a comic book version in the *Wonder Women of History* series in 1949.[3]

However, the letters Alice and George wrote to each other and the poetry Alice composed in secret tell a strikingly different story about her work and marriage. They suggest that the transition from president to wife, from college administrator to volunteer worker and behind-the-scenes educational advisor, was not easily made or eagerly sought. On the contrary, Alice spent several years after she married in paid employment, giving public lectures around the country as well as serving as dean at the University of Chicago. During these years, both Alice and George led demanding professional lives, and Alice's earnings made an important contribution to the household finances. Her work took her away from home for extended periods, and in her absence, George ran the household. Alice's professional activities created major tensions in the marriage. George encouraged her, but also incessantly pressured her to work less, so that she could spend more time at home with him. Ultimately, the strain of keeping George happy and meeting her professional obligations proved too much for Alice. She resigned from the University of Chicago, reduced her lecture schedule, and settled into the combination of domesticity and volunteer work that had proven unsatisfying during the first years of their marriage.

When scholars rediscovered Alice in the 1980s and 1990s, they began to challenge George's portrait of Alice and reexamine his role in her life and work. Most agree with him that Alice's influence on women's education expanded after she left Wellesley,[4] but they are quite divided

3 George Herbert Palmer, *Autobiography of a Philosopher* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), p. 138; "Wonder Woman: Alice Freeman Palmer", *Wonder Women of History Comics*, 34 (March-April, 1949).

4 Barbara Miller Solomon, "Alice Freeman Palmer" in *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. by Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1975–1982), III, pp. 4–8 (p. 6); Joyce Antler, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 55–57; Bordin, p. 285; Lois Kenschaft, *Reinventing Marriage: The Love and Work of Alice Freeman Palmer and George Herbert Palmer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

over how to interpret her relationship with George. None do justice to the tensions that Alice's work created in the marriage or her struggle to maintain a professional career in the face of George's profoundly contradictory responses to her desire to work. The distortions in George's biography are the culmination of his efforts to deny these contradictions and make Alice into something she was not. She resisted his vision for some years, but in the end, succumbed, and settled for volunteer work instead of a professional position.

That decision should be seen as a compromise born of defeat rather than a triumphant synthesis or a preferred choice. The Palmers' marriage is best understood as a powerful illustration of how a dual career marriage strained the limits of nineteenth-century ideas about romance, marriage, gender, and professionalism. It was highly companionate, but George's desire to "share" masked his strong need to dominate and control. His sense of identification with Alice was so overwhelming, his desire for "oneness" so intrusive, that she found his loving attention suffocating, and sought employment, in part, to escape from it.

Upbringing, Education, and Wellesley

Alice Freeman's upbringing prepared her for a life of self-reliance, independence, and caring for others.[5] Her mother, Elizabeth, had taught school before she married and was only seventeen when she gave birth to Alice, the first of four children, in 1855. Alice always said that she and her mother "grew up together", but like many high achieving nineteenth-century women, she was closer to her father than her mother. When Alice was seven, James Freeman, a small-scale farmer in southwestern New York, left his farm and family in Elizabeth's care and went to Albany to study medicine at the Albany Medical College. After he graduated, James moved the family from the farm to the nearby village of Windsor, New York where he opened his medical practice.

Alice distinguished herself at the local academy, both as a student and a debater. At fourteen, she became engaged to one of her teachers, a graduate of Yale University. Eager to get more schooling, she broke off the engagement and convinced her parents to use the money they had

5 For Alice's early life, see GHP, *Life*, pp. 17–43, and Bordin, pp. 15–32.

saved for her younger brother's education to send her to college first. Practical considerations as well as a love of learning fed Alice's desire to attend college: she wanted to be able to support herself and her family. She promised that she would use her future income to pay for whatever education her siblings desired and would not marry until they were settled. Believing that co-educational schools were more academically rigorous than all-female colleges, she decided to attend the University of Michigan, which had begun admitting women two years earlier.[6]

Michigan's president James Angell was so impressed with Alice's intelligence and personality when he interviewed her on campus that he personally recommended her for admission. She had been poorly prepared academically, however, and had many academic "conditions" to be worked off. Alice lived up to Angell's faith in her. She quickly made up her deficits, established a solid academic record, and emerged as a student leader who was popular with both male and female students.

Family claims repeatedly interrupted Alice's education at Michigan. When her father suffered a serious financial reversal during her junior year, she spent a semester as the acting principal of a high school in Illinois so she could help support her family. Determined to make up the work she had missed at Michigan, Alice tried to study at home during the summer of 1875, but spent most of her time nursing her father and her sister, Stella. Nevertheless, she managed to graduate with her class in 1876, one of eleven women among sixty-five men.[7] Revealing the oratorical skills she would put to great use later in her life, she gave a stirring commencement speech on "The Conflict between Science and Poetry" that left her audience "spellbound."[8]

President Angell continued to mentor Alice, watching her progress and recommending her for teaching jobs. She taught for a year at a girls' boarding school in Wisconsin before becoming the principal of a public high school in East Saginaw, Michigan. These were hard years for Alice:

---

6 For the history of the University of Michigan and the experience of women undergraduates during Alice's era, see Bordin, pp. 42–45, and Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 50, 89.

7 E. G. Burrows, "Alice Freeman Palmer at Michigan", *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review*, 61 (Summer 1955), 321–28.

8 Arthur J. Linenthal, *Two Academic Lives: George Herbert Palmer and Alice Freeman Palmer: A Compilation* (Boston: privately printed, 1995), pp. 48–49.

her teaching loads were onerous, her health was poor, and money was a constant worry as she struggled to pay off her student debts and send money to her family. She began to work for a master's degree in history at the University of Michigan in the summer of 1877, but another family crisis intervened. After her father was forced to declare bankruptcy, Alice dealt with his creditors, rented a house for the family, and moved them from Windsor, New York to Saginaw.

During this troubled time, Alice received teaching offers from Wellesley College where several of her Michigan classmates were already teaching. Opened in 1875 by Henry and Pauline Durant, Wellesley was committed to developing healthy, vigorous, intellectual women. Determined to hire women faculty at a time when most colleges did not, Henry Durant, Wellesley's benefactor and virtual ruler, recruited widely to find qualified candidates.[9] Alice turned down an offer from Durant to be an instructor in mathematics in 1877, and two more in 1878, one to teach mathematics; the other to teach Greek. She continued to teach at the East Saginaw High School so she could remain with her family and nurse Stella, who was dying of tuberculosis. After Stella's death, in June 1879, Alice quickly accepted another offer from Durant, this time to be a professor of history, a position more in line with her academic interests and preparation.[10]

Alice arrived at Wellesley in the fall of 1879, just after the college graduated its first class.[11] She found the workload demanding and exhausting, but proved to be a popular teacher who inspired students and colleagues alike. She won Durant's respect by refusing to give in to him on a point of principle. When he wanted her to talk to a student about her religious faith with the intention of converting her, Alice refused,

9 Very few American universities offered PhD degrees before the 1880s. The first woman to earn a doctorate from an American university did so in 1877; three more women followed her in 1880. A small number of women pursued graduate training in Europe. By 1900, there were 288 women with doctorates in the US (Solomon, *Educated Women*, p. 134).

10 GHP, *Life*, pp. 78–82. Alice's offers from Wellesley are also recorded in AFP and GHP, "Chronicles of Two Lives", Wellesley College Archives, Alice Freeman Palmer Papers (AFP Papers).

11 Bordin, p. 101. See also Patricia Ann Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden: The Community of Women Faculty at Wellesley* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).

saying she could not discuss religion with a girl she hardly knew.[12] After that, he worked with her on matters of school policy and administration. When he died in the fall of 1881, Alice, his hand-picked successor, was named acting president. The appointment became permanent the following March, a month after her twenty-seventh birthday.

Wellesley was in serious disarray and faced a very uncertain future when Alice took office. The college was operating in deficit; its academic reputation was compromised by its lack of rigor and close connections to evangelical Christianity; the faculty was demoralized, divided, and overworked; the students were unhappy. During her six year presidency, Alice reshaped the college through a combination of personal magnetism, skilled leadership, and astute management.[13] Her students found her "fascinating." One likened her to "a dancing star, all brightness, audacity, and leadership." Another attested, "Under her influence routine and drudgery were transfigured into something heroic." An alumna recalled, "When I saw her, I felt as if I could do things that I never dreamed of before."[14] Alice put Wellesley on a sounder financial footing and strengthened its academic credentials. She raising the entry requirements and academic standards, rationalized the curriculum and course requirements, hired better qualified faculty, and gave the faculty more decision-making authority. She transformed Wellesley from "a domestically oriented, religiously inspired college into a first-rate academic institution" and acquired a national reputation as an academic leader and spokesperson for women's education.[15]

Courtship, 1886–1887

Alice was at the height of her power and prestige as Wellesley's president when George Herbert Palmer, a Professor of Moral Philosophy

12 Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden*, pp. 26–27, citing Lyman Abbott, "Snapshots of My Contemporaries", *The Outlook*, August 24, 1921, 644. GHP, *Life*, p. 98.

13 For details, see Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden*, pp. 26–37.

14 Quoted in Patricia Ann Palmieri, "In Adamless Eden: A Social Portrait of the Academic Community at Wellesley College, 1875–1920" (unpublished thesis: Harvard School of Education, 1981), p. 107. A copy is in the Wellesley College Archives, AFP Papers.

15 Antler, pp. 29–30. See also GHP, *Life*, pp. 124–31; Caroline Hazard, *From College Gates* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), p. 212; Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden*, pp. 36 and 128; and Bordin, p. 113.

at Harvard University, began to court her. They had been introduced at the home of a Harvard professor in December 1884, but it was not until the summer of l886, when they met again at a dinner party, that a serious romance developed. After a few weeks, George was deeply in love with Alice and pressing her to marry him. He wooed her ardently and relentlessly, making it clear that she would have to leave Wellesley if they married.

In place of Wellesley, George offered Alice romantic passion, "womanly" fulfillment in domestic happiness, and the promise of a companionate marriage in which husband and wife would share common interests and activities. But she was loath to give up Wellesley and fearful that she could not be the kind of wife George wanted. Caught between competing loyalties and aspirations, she vacillated for nine months before agreeing to marry him. Unable to meet frequently or openly, George and Alice wrote each other two and three times a week, providing a vivid account of their painful struggle to resolve the marriage-career dilemma.[16]

When they began courting, George was 44, and Alice, 31. He was a widower, but the relationship was Alice's first experience of mature love. Honoring her self-imposed promise to help educate her younger siblings before she married, Alice had rebuffed romantic overtures from a number of fellow students and colleagues during college and her early years of teaching.[17] When she met George, she was no longer under that obligation.

In falling in love with George, Alice was responding to the ardent wooing of a man who attracted her physically, shared her cultural and professional interests and her strong religious faith, and revered her as

16 Transcripts of the Palmers' courtship correspondence, written between May 1886 and December 1887, were prepared for publication by Alice's sister, Ella Freeman Talmage. Many of the letters were published in Alice Freeman Palmer and George Herbert Palmer, *An Academic Courtship: Letters of Alice Freeman and George Herbert Palmer, 1886–1887* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940). I read the transcripts of the correspondence in the Wellesley College Archives, Alice Freeman Palmer Papers, and checked them against the published letters to identify omissions and deletions. Like other scholars, I cite the typed transcripts in the AFP Papers in this chapter. The original manuscript letters, which I have consulted, and transcript copies are available at Harvard University, Houghton Library, 50M-199, George Herbert Palmer Correspondence (GHP Papers). See n"Note 69" below for information on the letters Alice and George wrote to each other after 1887.

17 GHP, *Life*, pp. 37, 69. Bordin, pp. 49–50, 76–78.

the epitome of the ideal woman. Like other nineteenth-century lovers, they read poetry together, went for long walks, exchanged flowers and keepsakes, and wrote often and intensely to each other about their feelings.[18]

George was a man of considerable learning and culture. He taught philosophy, but he had also taught Greek at Harvard, published a well-regarded translation of *The Odyssey*, and served as the curator of a university art collection. He was a confidant of Harvard President Charles Eliot, enjoyed many academic friendships, and was often consulted about faculty appointments at other schools. Throughout their courtship, Alice delighted in discussing her work with George and hearing his opinions and advice. When she arranged for him to give a series of readings from his translation of *The Odyssey* at Wellesley, she wrote to him, "Do you know how much it means to me? You come into my daily life then; you stand by me in my beautiful work here and have a part in it. It seems as if you belong to me in a new way."[19]

George was in robust health when Alice met him, but poor health had repeatedly interrupted his schooling. As a child, he had suffered from headaches and eye problems that required six operations. Forced to leave Andover Academy at the age of sixteen due to weak eyesight and granulated eyelids, he traveled in Egypt for a year with his brother and then worked in the family dry goods store. George's eye problems improved enough for him to enter Harvard College in 1860, but kept him out of the Civil War. He taught high school for a year after graduating from Harvard before entering Andover Seminary, where he studied philosophy as well as theology. Two additional years of study at the University of Tübingen in Germany were interrupted by illness. Back in America, George resumed his work at the Andover Seminary but had to give it up when he suffered what he called a "nervous collapse." He decided to become a professor rather than a minister, and was hired by

18 On courtship rituals, see Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) and Ellen Rothman, *Hearts and Hands: A History of Courtship in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

19 AF to GHP [December, 1886]. AFP Papers.

Harvard University as a tutor in Greek in 1870. By 1883 he was a full professor in the philosophy department.[20]

A year after he was hired by Harvard, 29-year-old George married Ellen Margaret Wellman, much to the consternation of both families. They were distressed by three things: Ellen, age 36, was seven years older than George; she had contracted tuberculosis; and she was a devout Swedenborgian while he and his family were Congregationalist. Both families eventually accepted the marriage, which was exceedingly happy, according to George. He described Ellen in the same formulaic, superlative terms he would use when he wrote about Alice. Ellen was "preeminent in fascination and accomplishments" and "exquisite in all things." They enjoyed "whole-hearted companionship" and always discussed consequential matters. She was an intellectual companion who shared George's interest in philosophy and a supportive helpmate who entered "completely" into his work. They traveled in Europe during the first year of their marriage, but as her health declined Ellen was mostly confined to home; for the last two years of her life, she could not speak above a whisper. After Ellen died in 1879, George moved into rooms in one of the Harvard residence halls.[21]

Temperamentally, the staid, reserved George was a marked contrast to the exuberant, outgoing Alice. He described his family as strict but loving and affectionate, and he remained close to several of his siblings as an adult. But he maintained that it was Ellen who taught him how to enjoy life.[22] Even so, his colleagues in later years were struck by the "order", "strict decorum", "restraint", and "dignity and reserve" of his life. At least one thought that George "had himself almost too well in hand" and "wished that he might occasionally let himself go."[23] Physically, Alice and George were mismatched in a way that upset nineteenth-century

20 George Herbert Palmer, *The Autobiography of a Philosopher* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), pp. 9–10, 17–35. According to a US War Department Order, issued November 9, 1863 and published in *The New York Times* on November 15, 1863, men who suffered from seriously impaired vision and certain permanent diseases of the eyes and eyelids were exempted from the draft.

21 GHP, *Autobiography*, pp. 36–40.

22 Ibid. See also, Bordin, pp. 158–59, and Kenschaft, pp. 41–45. GHP to AF [June 15, 1887], AFP Papers.

23 Harvard University, Department of Philosophy, *George Herbert Palmer, 1842–1933. Memorial Addresses* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), pp. 65, 74, 41.

conventions of masculine men and feminine women. George was short — only five feet, two inches tall — and slight, weighing less than 130 pounds. His face was dominated by a handlebar mustache and bushy eyebrows which almost hid his piercing blue eyes. Nevertheless, George had his own kind of magnetism. A colleague at Harvard noted that he had "a personal force that made its impression" and numerous acquaintances fell under the spell of his magnificent speaking voice.[24] Alice's height is a matter of some dispute, but she appears to have been quite tall for her day, and considerably taller than George.[25] She weighed only 110 pounds when she graduated from Michigan and was down to l00 pounds at her wedding; living with George, she gained 40.

By the time he became involved with Alice, George had demonstrated his interest in and sympathy for women's education. He lectured to the female students enrolled at the Harvard Annex (later Radcliffe College) and insisted that Annex students be admitted to a series of Greek readings he gave at Harvard despite the administration's plan to limit the audience to Harvard men. He also had a history of relationships with intellectually inclined, well-educated, strong-minded women. After Ellen died, he was romantically involved with Mary Whitall Smith. The daughter of the Quaker Reformers Hannah Whitall Smith and Robert Pearsall Smith, Mary was one of George's students at the Annex and twenty-one years younger. Mary's brother, Logan, then a student at Harvard, thought George's enthusiastic response to Mary was unseemly for a professor of philosophy.[26] As George knew, Mary was secretly involved with a London barrister, Benjamin Francis (Frank) Costelloe; possibly she used George's interest to deflect attention away from that relationship. Mary's redoubtable mother, a passionate believer in the need for "perfect equality" between husband and wife, addressed a very long letter to George describing in detail her views on the topic, "On the Authority of a Husband." It is not clear whether she ever gave

24 Bordin, p. 159.

25 Possibly seeking to minimize the differences in their height, George wrote that Alice was of "medium height, a little below average." (Palmer, *Life*, p. 329.) At the time, the average American woman was 5′3″. Records from the Class of 1876 at the University of Michigan put Alice's height at 5 feet 9 ½ inches, although it has been suggested that this could be a misprint for 5 feet 6 inches (Burrows, p. 321). It is hard to judge because photos do not show the two standing together.

26 Logan Pearsall Smith, *Unforgotten Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939).

the letter to George, but she was immediately won over by him when he visited the Smith household in December 1884, the very month Alice and George met for the first time. Hannah was so impressed by George that she told Mary she was perfectly comfortable with the idea of having George as a son-in-law. However, Mary's engagement to Costelloe was soon announced.[27]

Hannah's endorsement notwithstanding, George's campaign to get Alice to resign from Wellesley suggests that he had absorbed many of the gender stereotypes and marital attitudes of his day. Instead of envisioning marriage as a partnership of equals, he seemed to want a wife who would make domestic life her first priority and be a constant helpmate to him. "Have you any such desire to be always at my side that studying how to help me could ever seem to you the greatest of duties, for which others might wait?," he pressed during one of Alice's periods of hesitation. George clearly felt that Alice could not play such a role if she remained at Wellesley. He had seen how Wellesley consumed her time and how their private life took second place to her work. He nobly, if grudgingly, tolerated the demands of her professional work during their courtship, but he was not prepared to devote a lifetime to doing so.

When their relationship reached a crisis point in December 1886, he begged her not to continue sacrificing her personal happiness and womanly nature to her public life:

> Your private life will tend more and more to shrivel, to be hidden, to be unsubstantially sentimental, while your public life goes its way more and more as a matter of business. I am sure you see these dangers. I see them more plainly than you, for I love you — that is I worship a glorious woman in you and believe that she is the one whom you were meant to be […]. You think they are sacrifices which you are justified in making to a great institution. To me they look like suicide.[28]

George feared, too, that the presidency — with its long hours, ceaseless pressure, and constant anxiety — was taking a devastating toll on

27 See Barbara Strachey, *Remarkable Relations, the Story of the Pearsall Smith Women* (New York: Universe Books, 1982), pp. 79–81, and Tiffany L. Johnston, "Mary Whitall Smith at the Harvard Annex", https://berenson.itatti.harvard.edu/berenson/items/show/3030. Mary eventually left Costelloe and their two children to live with the art critic Bernard Berenson. See Chapter 4, p. 296.

28 GFP to AF, December 3 [1886]. See also, GHP to AF, March 16 [1887]. AFP Papers.

Alice's delicate health.[29] He had reason to worry about Alice's health. Her sister had died of tuberculosis, as had George's wife. During her first year at Wellesley, Alice had been forced to take a leave of absence when she developed a tubercular hemorrhage. She remained susceptible to colds and coughs, and during 1886 and 1887, her health was again deteriorating; in the spring of 1887 there was a false alarm about another hemorrhage. Nevertheless, in July 1887, a specialist declared there was no medical need for her to resign from Wellesley.[30]

Professional rivalry may also have contributed to George's desire to woo Alice away from Wellesley. George found Wellesley distinctly inferior to Harvard, but as a college president Alice enjoyed greater prominence and prestige than George did as a Harvard professor. (Neither he nor Alice ever directly acknowledged this, however.) She also made more money than he did: her annual salary was $4,000 in 1887; his was $3,500.[31] Within his own department, George's reputation was eclipsed by the brilliance of luminaries like William James and Josiah Royce. Recognizing that he was not "a system builder" and would therefore never be a great scholar, George devoted himself to criticism instead.[32] He was a popular teacher and published several well-regarded books on ethics as well as a translation of *The Odyssey*, but his own modest assessment of his scholarly talents has been generally accepted.[33] Knowing he was less illustrious than his colleagues at Harvard, it was probably galling for George to consider taking second place to his wife in the academic world. When Alice wrote that she was to receive an honorary degree from Columbia University — the first woman to be so honored by a major eastern university — George heartily congratulated her, but quickly noted, "I can't match your honors, but did I tell you that a month ago the Academy of Arts and Sciences asked me to become a member and that I declined?"[34]

---

29 GHP to AF [July 1886]; [November 15, 1886]; December 3 [1886]; [May 8, 1887] [May 22, 1887]. AFP Papers.

30 AF to GHP [July 10, 1887]. AFP Papers.

31 GHP, *Life*, p. 173.

32 GHP, *Autobiography*, pp. 124–25, 127.

33 Harvard University, *Palmer*, pp. 18, 26, 41. For a full discussion of George as a teacher and scholar and his standing within Harvard, see Kenschaft, pp. 173–81. See also the account of George's career at Harvard and the broad popularity of his courses by his colleague, Ralph Barton Perry, in Linenthal, pp. 435–36.

34 GHP to AF [January 30], 1887. AFP Papers.

George was adamant that Alice would have to give up Wellesley but did not insist that she would have to give up everything outside the home. Indeed, he argued that marriage to him would enhance and broaden her talents rather than diminish them. "[I]n my home you will be stronger for Wellesley, for yourself, and for every good purpose for which the Lord made you, than you can possibly by continuing longer a public functionary," he wrote her in the early weeks of their courtship.[35] George's choice of words — "my home" not "our home" — is telling. Months later, he again reassured her: "I would far rather you never came to me than that you should come and find your great powers in any respect lessened."[36] In his view, Alice would find greater freedom of expression and more outlets for her interests and talents in a home where she would be taken care of, protected from excessive demands on her time, and freed from the care and demands of running an institution.[37] Nevertheless, there was no attempt in the courtship correspondence to define what Alice's new work would be or how she would use her "powers" after leaving Wellesley. George's vision of the helpmate role Alice would play as his wife, and his insistence that he would support both of them financially, made it unlikely he would be eager for her to take on a new career.

Although George asserted that they were both impatient for her to lay down her responsibilities, their courtship correspondence shows that Alice gave up the presidency most reluctantly and only after considerable soul searching. Occasionally, when George pressed hard for a decision, she admitted to feelings of "hunger for a deeper, better life, of *homesickness* [meaning a desire for a home of her own], and dissatisfaction with the round of mere duty."[38] Having taken care of others for so long, Alice very probably looked forward to being tenderly cared for by George.

But at the same time she gloried in her work and knew she was making a valuable contribution to society. "Dear, there are so many things to be done for this College, from without and from within and to

35 GHP to AF, Friday am [summer 1886]. AFP Papers.
36 GHP to AF [December 4, l886]. AFP Papers.
37 GHP, *Life*, pp. 175–77, 181–83.
38 AF to GHP [December 5, 1886]. Emphasis in the original. Similarly, AF to GHP [November 14, 1886]. AFP Papers.

be done at once. Help me to be worthy of them, and wise to know them [...]. It is such good work to do!" she wrote to George.[39] She noted the "fun" she had as a college president, the "continual delight" of the job, how "interesting" she found the variety of responsibilities that made up her work.[40] Nevertheless, she did not justify her reluctance to give up Wellesley in terms of her own personal pleasure. Instead, she struggled to determine whether she was meant to fulfill God's divine plan by serving Wellesley or serving a husband.[41]

Like George, Alice had absorbed contemporary ideals about marriage and wifehood. "I feel, more and more, that [marriage] is the most beautifully blessed thing in all God's universe," she had written to a friend who was preparing to marry in 1878.[42] She understood that marrying George meant not only giving up Wellesley but also submerging her life in his. Long before she met him, she had counselled her friend about the satisfactions and difficulties of being a wife:

> *Keep happy* and grow in keeping another happy. Be unselfish, dear, and learn to *control* the woman's restless hunger. Let it only make you more tender and *sympathetic* and strong [...]. Then you will *feel* always that you are *bound up* together — that *everything* you do is *full* of the other. That it seems to me must be being *married* — and that you know is not the work of an hour — or a year.[43]

Alice had serious doubts about her ability to play that role and be the kind of helpmate wife George wanted. "I am not sure that I could supplement you as you have hoped. Perhaps we are too unlike," she wrote him, intending to break off relations in September 1886.[44] Even after she agreed to marry him, she continued to worry about her suitability for the domestic life ahead. "I hope I shall not try your patience too

39 AF to GHP, November 14, 1886. See also, AF to GHP [September 24, 1886]. AFP Papers.
40 Quoted in GHP, *Life*, pp. 133–34. AF to GHP [May 24, 1887], AFP Papers. Hazard, p. 64.
41 AF to GHP [September 1, 1886]. AFP Papers.
42 AF to Lucy Andrews, August 24, 1878, AFP Papers.
43 Ibid. Emphasis in the original.
44 AF to GHP [September 1, 1886]. See also, AF to GHP [July 27, 1887]. Similarly, AF to GHP [March 14, 1887] [September 15, 1887] [November 17, 1887]; GHP to AF, September 14 [1887]). AFP Papers.

sorely, but ah! me, I wish I were more trained to home helpfulness," she cautioned George after their engagement was publicly announced.[45]

By temperament and experience, Alice did not seem prepared to play either a subordinate or a predominantly domestic role. Her upbringing, college life, and early teaching years had trained her to be self-reliant and self-sufficient. As Wellesley's president, she was the center of an admiring circle of students, faculty, and trustees and wielded virtually absolute power. George observed that her will was law, and reported, "whenever the little president raises her hand, the college hurries to obey."[46] She was accustomed to taking the initiative, making decisions, and seeing her directives carried out. Alice's closest associates and admirers recognized that her sweet and gentle manner masked an iron will and a strong temper, hardly the hallmarks of a submissive temperament.[47]

Neither Alice nor George was oblivious to the implicit power struggle that lay at the heart of their relationship. Their very first exchange of letters, in June 1886, highlighted the tension that would run throughout their marriage: his need to dominate, improve, and protect versus her desire to balance dependence with independence. Apologizing for "trying to steer" her, George admitted, "What I was born for is to set the crooked straight, and sometimes I find myself attempting to straighten what is already much straighter than I could ever make it." Alice replied, "If I did not respond to your wise counsels as gracefully as I should, it must be because I am used to giving advice rather than taking it." Nevertheless, she accepted his invitation to "become a girl again" and accompany him to Harvard's class day, promising that she would be "a most docile child."[48] Throughout their courtship and marriage, George would continue to treat Alice as "the little girl that I protect," someone who needed a wiser and stronger man to make decisions for her and intervene on her behalf.[49]

Images of male conquest and female submission recur throughout the couple's discussions of their relationship. George characterized his

45 AF to GHP [July 27, 1887]. AFP Papers.
46 GHP, *Life*, pp. 138–39.
47 Leila Sarah McKee Memoir, AFP Papers; GHP, *Life*, pp. 138–39; Hazard, p. 209; Lyman Abbott, "Alice Freeman Palmer — A Sketch" in "Knoll Papers", *The Outlook* (January 1916: 112), 86.
48 GHP to AF [June 3, l886]; AF to GHP, June 7, 1886. AFP Papers.
49 GHP to AF [June 15, 1887]. AFP Papers.

courting in terms that suggest assault and plunder: "It is I who have broken through Wellesley walls and on me must fall the blame, if there is to be any," he exulted when their engagement was made public. "Tell people how you have had your home invaded and all your precious treasures stolen, and put them on the track of me the culprit." By suggesting that Alice had been overcome by brute force rather than choosing him of her own free will, George reduced her to an object and enhanced his sense of power. Indeed, his "possession" of her is a metaphor that occurs more than once in his letters.[50]

The power/submission motif figures prominently in the poetry Alice wrote years later about her courtship and marriage.[51] Several of these poems suggest that Alice found pleasure in submitting to a powerful man. In "The Surrender" she wrote of happily relinquishing herself to her "lord" and "king": "He is the lord of my new world,/ And new life has begun./ Take the scepter my king!/ All I am you have won." "Forbidden" expressed the delight a woman feels when her lover disobeys her and continues his pursuit after he has been instructed to stop. In "The Birthday" (which celebrated their betrothal night) she wrote admiringly: "Upon his face I saw such power/ As I had never known till now." In "Meeting" she marveled: "Oh, more than conqueror he seemed that day!" Alice's attitude was not unusual in an era when notions of romantic love cast women as submissive partners to heroic lovers who were their superiors in experience, intellect, and judgment — men who would guide and protect them.

Nevertheless, Alice was not prepared to submit to George in everything. In matters that touched only her private life, she tried to be compliant and accede to George's need to guide and control. When she discouraged him from visiting her at her parent's home in Michigan and he came anyway, she conceded: "I submit gracefully — as usual."[52] After they were engaged, she acquiesced in his decisions about renting,

50 GHP to AF, March 16 [1887]. AFP Papers.

51 George had the poems published in Alice Freeman Palmer, *A Marriage Cycle* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915). See below, p. 88. See also, Antler, p. 56 and Kenschaft, p. 202.

52 AF to GHP [August 16,1886]. AFP Papers.

furnishing, and decorating their first home in Cambridge.[53] She even had her seamstress remake several dresses that George did not like.[54]

But when her beloved Wellesley was at stake, Alice strenuously resisted George's attempts to take control. She repeatedly ignored his advice to work less, although she apologized for her "obstreperous ways" and for the inconvenience her presidency caused him.[55] Their most heated debate occurred when she insisted, for the sake of her work, on keeping their engagement a secret when George wanted to make it public. Their protracted exchanges show how determinedly Alice could hold her own against George when she chose to, how manipulative and patronizing he could be, and how willfully he ignored her forcefully expressed views when they conflicted with his.

When Alice finally agreed to marry George, in late January 1887, he wanted to announce their engagement immediately. She resisted, citing the negative effect the publicity would have on her and Wellesley. A month later, George pressed harder, but Alice held firm. She could not make a public announcement before going to Michigan to tell her parents in person. Nor could she work effectively if she had to attend to "the letters, the calls, the looks, the newspaper articles" which would follow a public announcement. Her advice to George reflected her own strength of character: "Dear, don't *allow* people to question you!"[56] George addressed his next letter to "dear perplexed Alice." He wanted to "throw my arms about you and protect you from all these troubles." Despite insisting that he would do whatever Alice wanted, he continued to ignore her clear articulation of her position and argued his own views.[57] Writing at two o'clock in the morning, she angrily responded,

> I do not see how it is *possible* to get through the spring term without doing the College some shameful injustice, or breaking down for lack of sleep. I don't like to emphasize *my* burdens here, but the unvarnished truth is that I have more than I *can* do well now without taking half my nights, and I am doing you no kindness by putting myself in the

53 AF to GHP [March 14,1887], [September 15,1887]; GHP to AF [September 15, 1887]; September 22, 1887; October 11, 1887; November 2, 1887. AFP Papers.
54 AF to GHP [October 4, 1887]; GHP to AF [December 19, 1887]. AFP Papers.
55 AF to GHP [December 5, 1886]; AF to GHP [March 13, 1887]. AFP Papers.
56 AF to GHP [January 17, 1887]; AF to GHP [February 24, 1887]. AFP Papers. Emphasis in the original.
57 GHP to AF [February 23, 1887], GHP to AF [February 25, 1887]. AFP Papers.

> position which I cannot fill without injuring my health. And this plan does not seem to me feasible, from the health and home standpoint. Your case is different from mine, as you say. *Six hundred* people meet me in close relations every day, and my time is largely at their mercy.[58]

Alice proposed that she make an extended trip home to tell her parents, work on Wellesley affairs from Michigan, and inform a few people confidentially after her return. George concurred, and noted, both disingenuously and defensively, "My own life would be much less disturbed by allowing the matter to remain secret until summer. In urging you to disclose it I have had no thought of gains of my own."[59]

The question for George was not whether Alice would leave Wellesley, but when. Even after she agreed to marry, Alice was not completely reconciled to giving up Wellesley. In April, before anybody at Wellesley was told about the engagement, she and George discussed whether he could become president of Wellesley. The college's sectarian ties and low salary scale made it impossible to attract "a first class man" to the faculty and so it was filled with teachers "of second rank", George objected. In short, Wellesley was not good enough for him.[60] Moreover, he considered the idea an affront to his masculinity. "Nothing may be done looking to my leaving Harvard," he warned Alice. "I am sure you would feel it somehow humiliating to see me marry into a position. You would like to have me stand on my own feet. I do that here [at Harvard], and *you will stand by my side, my strong support*."[61] Once again, George was assigning Alice a helpmate role, not an equal partnership or support for her career. He added the formulaic, "But I will not insist. Do with me as you see fit." But he did not mean it and became increasingly resistant to the idea of leaving Harvard. Whenever anyone — Pauline Durant in May, several of the trustees in September — pressed to bring George to Wellesley, Alice loyally squelched the idea.[62]

Nevertheless, Alice was still looking for ways to stay at Wellesley. In early July, she thought it was possible that she and George could

58 AF to GHP [February 27, 1887]. AFP Papers. Emphasis in the original.
59 GHP to AF [February 28, 1887]. AFP Papers.
60 GHP to AF [April 21, 1887]. Similarly, GHP to AF [September 7, 8, and 14, 1887]. AFP Papers.
61 GHP to AF [April 21, 1887]. Emphasis added. AFP Papers.
62 AF to GHP, May 17, 1887. AFP Papers.

marry in the summer and live in Cambridge in the fall; she could help to "guide affairs" at Wellesley and possibly teach.[63] Later that month she tried, unsuccessfully, to convince George that they should at least live in Wellesley. Enthusiastic about the "perfect cottage" she had found, she eagerly envisioned George commuting to Cambridge while she stayed at home, reading his books, making his dinner, and going to Cambridge to attend his lectures. But it was not to be. George had already started looking for a house in Cambridge.[64]

In September, when several trustees were urging George to become president of Wellesley, he told Alice outright, "there is no question whatever about getting me. I have considered the subject for months, at first with inclinations not averse, and my decision is unalterable."[65] George would not come to Wellesley, but Alice stayed a semester longer as president than he would have liked.

In the end, Alice decided to marry George without challenging his expectations about her role as his wife. "I am confident that life with you would develop me into a nobler, larger character and life than any possible experiences alone," she wrote him shortly after their engagement was announced.[66] She left Wellesley without a clear idea of the work she would do as Mrs. George Palmer. "I am not ready to leave the College. I am not ready to be married. I have made no proper preparation. I have taken no training and my work here is not done. But I walk as happily as a child to a holiday — or any happy girl to meet her lover," she assured George a month before the wedding, reprising the submissive child theme that had marked their first exchange of letters.[67] The actual moment of change left Alice feeling stunned and disoriented. "The College life is all over! and I feel like an empty-handed lonely creature," she wrote George almost in despair two days before their wedding on December 23, 1887. She hastened to reassure herself, "But I have you, dearest! I say it over and over to quiet my heart."[68]

63 AF to GHP [July 10], 1887. AFP Papers.
64 AF to GHP, July 20, 1887. AFP Papers.
65 GHP to AF [September 7, 1887]. AFP Papers.
66 AF to GHP [July 27, 1887]. See also AF to Carla Wenckbach [July 29, 1887]. AFP Papers.
67 AF to GHP [November 17, 1887]. AFP Papers.
68 AF to GHP [December 21, 1887]. AFP Papers.

Marriage and Work, 1888–1892

A year and a half after her wedding, Alice was still disconcerted by the changes in her life. Passing through Wellesley by train on the opening day of the college in 1889, she wrote to George that her "sensations were too mixed for analysis." Yet she insisted she had no regrets. "I would not go back to the old days, sweetheart [...]. You are better, dear, than any college, to be your wife a higher place than 'The Princess' held in the days before you came, and made her a queen."[69] Nevertheless, the still-childless Alice was no longer content to lead a purely domestic life, as she had while she and George set up housekeeping in Cambridge and traveled through Europe during his sabbatical leave in 1888–89.

Their personal papers do not reveal why Alice and George, who were relatively old when they married (32 and 45, respectively), had no children. Alice loved children and was said to regret having none of her own.[70] While staying with her parents in 1894, she reported to George, "Father pathetically asks me where his grandchildren are, and I tell him it isn't my fault, so how do you feel now? When he comes East he may give you a scolding, and you'd better be very meek!"[71] It

69 AFP to GHP, September 7, 1889. Typed transcripts of the letters Alice and George wrote to each other after they married were prepared for publication for her sister, but never published. Typed transcripts of their correspondence from 1888 through June 1895, and from January 1901 through 1902, are in the Wellesley College Archives, Alice Freeman Papers, and Harvard University, Houghton Library, 50M-199, George Herbert Palmer Correspondence. Citations in this chapter refer to the transcripts in the Wellesley Archives for these years. Transcripts of the letters Alice and George wrote to each other between July 1895 and January 1901, available only in the George Herbert Palmer Correspondence, are cited in this chapter. I also consulted the original manuscript letters housed in the Houghton Library.

70 Alice's fondness of children: GHP, *Life*, p. 256; AFP to Robert Herrick, November 1, 1896, AFP Papers; AFP to GHP, December 15, 1901, AFP Papers. Regret in not having a child: Charles Eliot in George Herbert Palmer, *A Service in Memory of Alice Freeman Palmer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), p. 77. Sarah Lord Corson, a great-great-niece of George's, recounted that when her parents told George that they planned to marry, "he was pleased for them but urged them not to have children. There were more important things to do, he said." Email from Sarah Lord Corson to author, October 22, 2022.

71 AFP to GHP, April 25, 1894. A few months later, George wrote approvingly about a married couple he knew who sought medical advice about the potential effects of childbearing on the wife's health before deciding to have a child. GHP to AFP, October 23, 1894. AFP Papers.

is possible that George, who also had no children by his first wife, had a fertility problem. Or he may have feared the effect of childbearing on Alice's health. Alice's letters suggest that he did not much like infants, and one can imagine that he would not have been eager to share Alice with such a potentially demanding family member.[72]

Because she had no children, Alice felt free to devote her time to the education work that was important to both her and George.[73] Elected president of Women's Education Association and to leadership positions with the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (the forerunner of the Association of American University Women), Alice helped shape standards and supports for female college students and graduates. She was tireless in raising money for these national organizations, promoting the cause of higher education for women, and creating educational and employment opportunities for college-educated women. Her influence grew at the local as well as the national level. The governor of Massachusetts appointed her to the State Board of Education and named her to the five-member Board of Managers of the Massachusetts exhibit at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. In charge of planning the state's exhibition on education, Alice made sure it featured women's education as well as men's. The lasting legacy of the Fair, she claimed, was that women were recognized as "human beings" not "peculiar people" who needed special treatment.[74] Alice remained a formidable power on the Wellesley Board of Trustees and numerous colleges and schools asked for her recommendations for female teachers and administrators and sought her advice about college governance and policy.[75]

These activities were not enough for Alice and she expanded her horizons by taking on paid employment in addition to her volunteer

72 Describing her delight in her infant niece, Alice wrote to George: "I don't think you would get tired of her [...] even you would want her for your own. You don't believe it, but you would." AFP to GHP, June 26, 1901. AFP Papers.

73 AFP, "Autobiographical Sketch 1900", written for a Harvard University time capsule, reprinted in Linenthal, pp. 14–16 (p. 14).

74 AFP, "Women's Education at the World's Fair" in *The Teacher: Essays and Addresses on Education*, by George Herbert Palmer and Alice Freeman Palmer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908), pp. 351–63 (p. 353). Originally published in *The Forum*, December 1891.

75 See Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden*, pp. 35–52, for Alice's continuing involvement in Wellesley.

work. In 1889, she began laying the groundwork for a new career as a paid public lecturer; she noted that the spring of 1890 marked the first time she was paid to give a speech. Between 1890 and 1892, she delivered more than one hundred lectures on women's education and women's domestic and public roles to schools, colleges, and women's organizations throughout the country.[76] From 1892 to l895, she served as the first Dean of Women at the University of Chicago, travelling back and forth between Chicago and Cambridge.

During these years, Alice and George were living what would now be called a commuter marriage. These activities expanded Alice's reach and influence as an educator, brought in significant income to the household, and kept Alice away from home for weeks at a time. In her absence, George took on the many domestic tasks: he managed the household and servants, entertained guests, oversaw the annual canning and preserving, supervised the semi-annual moves between Cambridge and Boxford, and took charge of renovating and decorating several houses.

George did not reveal much of this in his biography of Alice, however. The focus of his portrait was the idyllic domestic life he and Alice led after she left Wellesley. He presented her as a lady of leisure who volunteered her spare time to philanthropic and educational causes (an acceptable role), not an accomplished educator who struggled after her marriage to find a professional outlet for her notable talents (a departure from the norm). He said almost nothing about Alice's work as a public speaker or her achievements at the University of Chicago. He emphasized that there was no financial need for her to work outside the home and stressed that most of her lectures and all her other activities after she left Wellesley, except for the Chicago deanship, were unpaid.[77] He also failed to mention how frequently Alice's work took her away from home. Instead, he insisted that her work in no way interfered with the domestic responsibilities that should concern a woman. He wrote:

76 Alice's speaking engagements during these years are listed in AFP and GHP, "Chronicles", AFP Papers.

77 GHP, *Life*, pp. 220–21, 260.

> Her domestic cares were not less than those of ordinary women, nor less exquisitely performed. She did the usual amount of housekeeping, sewing, visiting, receiving guests, looking after the sick and poor, and attending social functions. In the occupations counted specifically feminine she even excelled. Yet after these were all beautifully accomplished there came those public duties to which she gave two thirds of her time.[78]

George was equally anxious to show that Alice's work had not hardened her or made her any less "womanly", although he believed that administrative work generally had that effect on women. According to George, Alice's "gentle" voice and "feminine and self-effacing" disposition distinguished her from the "strong and independent women, much unlike herself" who followed her as presidents of Wellesley.[79] His assessment reproduced unflattering stereotypes of female professionals, and conflicts with the way Alice portrayed herself in the letters she wrote to George about her work. There was nothing self-effacing or inconspicuous about the behavior she described; on the contrary, she revealed herself to be assertive, unyielding, and wholly effective. In short, George's portrait misrepresented Alice by omitting behavior that did not conform to the stereotype of "true womanhood" and ignoring the contradictions between her work life and her domestic life. His idealized portrait fails to capture the compelling complexity of Alice's character and circumstances and the struggle she went through to maintain an independent career.

George falsified himself as well. He presented himself as a conventional nineteenth-century husband who worshipped his wife and devoted himself to protecting and caring for her. He tolerated her outside activities because he shared her sense of duty, but he would have preferred having her all to himself, isolated in domestic bliss. Yet, in reality, George sometimes encouraged Alice to work because of the income she could earn. He also insisted he was happy to take on Alice's domestic role when she was away on business. On two occasions, he even asserted that a wife *should* contribute to the household income and

78 GHP, *Life*, pp. 312–13, 288, 290.

79 Ibid., pp. 231, 344. Similarly, p. 244. When Alice was working on the Women's Education Exhibit for the 1893 World's Fair, George wrote dismissively, "Of course those women's rights people will quarrel with everyone they see." (GHP to AFP, April 24, 1892. AFP Papers.)

not just be a "house body." Nevertheless, he simultaneously undermined her professional life by denigrating the institutions she worked for, repeatedly complaining about her absences, and pressuring her to cut her work short and return home to him.

These discrepancies challenge easy explanation. They reveal the huge fault lines that Alice's work created in the Palmers' relationship and the almost schizoid way they dealt with it. Accommodating Alice's work forced both Alice and George into roles that were antithetical to their deeply held notions about romance, marriage, gender, and power. And yet, they did not want to acknowledge this, even to themselves. As a result, they told contradictory stories about their relationship, their views on women's work, and the effect of Alice's work on their marriage — not just to the outside world, but also to each other. They also told conflicting stories at different points in time. The contradictions cannot be fully explained without understanding the stresses and strains that resulted from their effort to fit two careers into what was otherwise a very traditional relationship.[80]

Alice displayed great ambivalence about her lecturing. She delighted in the work and welcomed the opportunity to travel to new places, tour schools and colleges, renew old friendships, and forge new ones. She gloried in the acclaim that greeted her wherever she went. She wrote happily to George that she was introduced at the University of Michigan as "the most distinguished graduate of this or any other university" and was described as the "most talked about woman in Chicago."[81] On the lecture circuit in 1892, she was the guest of honor at "the most glorious reception ever heard of", featured in a local paper every day for a week, hosted as the guest of honor at a series of "elegant dinners and receptions", and toasted by the governor of Minnesota.[82]

And yet, she insisted she could not fully enjoy the work because she was so often away from George. She repeatedly resolved to give up

80 For a different view of the Palmers' marriage, see Kenschaft. My reading of George's personality and behavior is closer to Roberta Frankfort's characterization of him in *Collegiate Women* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), pp. 17–25, which discusses their courtship, but not their marriage.

81 AFP to GHP, May 31, 1890. AFP Papers.

82 AFP to GHP, April 22, 1892; AFP to GHP, April 26, 1892; AFP to GHP, April 29, 1892. AFP Papers.

the lecturing so she could stay at home with him. "Oh! my dear, this is miserable, simply miserable! [...] I wish all the world would leave us alone — I want nothing but you, just you! Next year we can make the house an excuse for shutting ourselves up together!" she vowed in the midst of her first successful lecture tour.[83] A month later, she promised, "One thing is certain. This year ends my public speaking career! I am going to play 'All the comforts of home awhile, and be only your wife.'"[84] She assured George, "[T]o be with you. That's all I want in this world. If people would let me be simply a selfishly happy wife, there is no doubt about the bliss of that state — never to be away from my beloved one, and to have time to think of him all I want when he is at work, and to talk to him all the rest of my life."[85] The following year, in the midst of yet another lecture tour, she resolved, "This is a foolish business. I am going to settle down and write instead of flying around the country."[86] In April 1892, she was again on the lecture circuit and again insisting, "I think I won't try this again."[87]

But Alice did not stop lecturing and did not stay at home. On the contrary, she increased the number of lectures she gave and the amount of time she was away from home. This suggests that despite her protests, Alice was eager to work, and eager to work away from home. The question is, why?

The Palmers enjoyed a deep intimacy that was both emotional and physical. But this intimacy came at a steep price for Alice. Their domestic life was framed by his idealized notions of womanhood and romance and her belief that a woman she should defer to her husband. This was both appealing and distressing for her. Despite the Palmers' rapturous descriptions of their mutual devotion and their unhappiness at being apart from each other, both had difficulty adjusting to marriage. The tensions created by George's need to dominate and Alice's desire for independence not only persisted but seemingly increased after they married. Their letters refer to "clashes" and "frictions." Each repeatedly

83 AFP to GHP, May 17, 1890. AFP Papers.
84 AFP to GHP, June 4, 1890. AFP Papers.
85 AFP to GHP, June 5, 1890. AFP Papers.
86 AFP to GHP, December 1891; similarly, AFP to GHP, November 12, 1891 and GHP to AFP, December 18, 1891. AFP Papers.
87 AFP to GHP, April 29, 1892. AFP Papers.

resolved to become a "better" wife or husband.[88] Instead of slipping easily into the domestic life that George depicted so movingly in his biography of her, Alice sometimes needed to escape from it and his efforts to control her life, efforts legitimized by his desire to achieve "oneness" with his beloved.[89] Work that took her away from home gave her opportunities to do that.

George's sense of oneness meant the establishment of the husband's hold over his wife rather than a genuine merger of two distinct personalities into a new, shared identity. Like many men of his time, he believed that a woman underwent a radical transformation under the influence of a lover or husband. When a young friend became engaged, he looked forward to seeing how the previously "unconquered girl" would be "shaped, adjusted, satisfied" by her fiancé.[90] During his own courtship, he had been pleased to see that Alice's letter writing style had changed in response to his influence, and he imagined that she was now only "partially [her]self when alone."[91] Alice's vision of oneness, in contrast, meant a companionship of equals.

Early in his courtship, George described the type of companionship he looked for with Alice: "a oneness of living, so that I may see all my thoughts through the mind of another and have all my drudgeries and successes transfigured and purified by making them yours." He hoped that he and Alice would become "as united in mind as in heart." Several months after they married, he elaborated, "I want you with me in all my thinking, in my scrutiny of the world, and in my intellectual enjoyment of it — just as truly as in my affections."[92] The repeated use of "me" and "my" are striking: *she* was to become a part of *him* and reflect his ideas

88 For example: GHP to AFP, April 26, 1889; September 8, 1889; June 17, 1891; September 25, 1892; April 6, 1894; October 7, 1894; AFP to GHP, April 30, 1892 and January 1, 1895. AFP Papers.

89 See Introduction, p. 12. Numerous historians document that nineteenth-century lovers experienced such a powerful sense of mutual identification that they felt they shared a common identity and sought to become "two souls in one." See Lystra, p. 42, and Stephen Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 133.

90 GHP to AFP, October 17, 1894. AFP Papers.

91 GHP to AF, March 18 [1887]. AFP Papers.

92 GHP to AF, Thurs am [July 1886]; GHP to AFP, April 29, l888. AFP Papers.

and values. He would prove indefatigable in his efforts to mold Alice to his tastes.[93]

George's perfecting and controlling drives were especially evident during the selection, renovation, and decoration of the Palmers' homes. He fussed over the details of their domestic accommodations to a degree that sometimes amused and sometimes exasperated Alice. He repeatedly ensured that the major decisions about the rental or renovation of a house were made in Alice's absence. In 1890 while Alice was away visiting her parents, he abandoned the plan that he and Alice had agreed on for their next year's lodging and rented a different house instead.[94] She was concerned that his drive to achieve perfection would inconvenience their landlords, but she acquiesced, "You are to decide what you believe to be the wisest, and I shall be content."[95] She thereby set a pattern that would persist.

In 1891, George drew up plans and hired a carpenter to add a piazza to their country home while Alice was on a lecture tour.[96] It held 1,000 books and George used it as an outdoor study. In 1893, he negotiated the rental of a large house inside Harvard Yard ("the Quincy Street house") and then devoted several years and several thousands of dollars to renovating and decorating it. All the initial work was planned and executed while Alice was away from Cambridge. He explained to her, "I only hope I shall not commit you to things which if on the spot you would not approve. There are some grave decisions and I am obliged to incur them alone. It would be of no use writing to get your opinion, for they generally turn on the best compromise to be made between the opposing difficulties which close study of the conditions disclose."[97] On sabbatical in Europe in 1895, George spent the first two

93 George's notion of marital "oneness" did not require him to accompany Alice on her semi-annual trips to her parents in Michigan. He rarely went with her (often pleading lack of funds), and did not seem to have developed strong ties with her parents. He often expressed annoyance at the time and trouble Alice devoted to them.

94 AFP to GHP, May 22, 23, and 29, 1890. AFP Papers.

95 AFP to GHP, May 29, 1890. AFP Papers.

96 GHP to AFP, June 7, 1891. AFP Papers.

97 GHP to AFP, January 8, 1894. AFP Papers.

hours after their arrival rearranging all the pictures and chairs in their rented apartment in Paris.[98]

It was not unusual for late nineteenth-century middle-class American men, especially men who were interested in developing more companionate relationships with their wives, to take an interest in household decoration.[99] But the way George took over the decision making shows how patriarchal attitudes and behavior could persist in even the most companionate of marriages.[100] Setting up a home was something that George did *for* Alice rather than an activity that engaged them both. "Home is the place I have made for you," George boasted. He prided himself on his ability to create the surroundings that best expressed Alice's unique personality. "[The house] was built for you and thoughts of you shaped every transformation," he wrote to Alice. "No rooms in which I have ever met you are more distinctively yours," he maintained after he designed an office and waiting room for her in the Quincy Street house.[101] But the heart of the house was George's library, which displayed his art and his first editions of English literary classics.[102]

98 AFP to Robert Herrick, September 23, 1895. University of Chicago, Hannah Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, Robert Herrick Papers (RH Papers).

99 See Margaret Marsh, *Suburban Lives* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

100 A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth Century Married Life* (London: Routledge, 1992) develops this theme in relation to British marriages.

101 GHP to AFP, January 5, 1894; [March 31, 1894]; April 12, l894. AFP Papers.

102 Palmer, *Life*, p. 222; AFP to GHP, April 7, 1894; GHP to AFP, April 12, 1894. AFP Papers. George loved the house, in part, because it was the only residence inside Harvard Yard other than the President's house. George's obituaries note that the renovations cost $5,000 and were opposed by President Eliot, who warned that the university would soon need the house for other purposes. Nevertheless, George lived in the house until his death in 1933 ("G. H. Palmer Dead", *The New York Times*, May 8, 1933, p. 15; "George Palmer, Philosopher at Harvard Dead", *Herald Tribune*, May 8, 1933). The renovations cost more than George's annual salary at the time they were undertaken.

Fig. 1 Alice and George in George's library in their Quincy Street home. Wellesley College Archives, Alice Freeman Palmer Papers. Unknown photographer. Courtesy of Wellesley College Archives, Library & Technology Services.

Very likely, Alice was happy to have George occupied with something he enjoyed while she was off lecturing or at the University of Chicago. Quite possibly, she was happy not to squander her energies on so many domestic details. Perhaps giving in to George on domestic issues provided her with a bargaining chip to get more of what she wanted when it came to her work. Maybe she minded having him fashion so much of her life to his tastes. We do not know.

Even if she had wanted more say, Alice would have been no match for George when it came to house renovation and decoration. She had never decorated a house of her own, and her family had been beset by financial losses and insecurity. When George had visited her parents' home in Saginaw, he and Alice had laughed together over a "ridiculous" portrait that hung in her parents' bedroom. As the president of Wellesley, she lived in a suite of rooms in a student dormitory. George certainly had greater experience and interest in house decoration, and quite possibly

more cultivated tastes. He grew up in a home where taste, refinement, and decoration were valued. Despite a modest income, his family spent "lavish" amounts of money on books, music, and "the dignified furnishings of the home," George recalled.[103] His family's country home in Boxford, about twenty-five miles north of Boston, where he and Alice spent every summer and many weekends, had been in his family for 200 years. It included over 100 acres of land, over half of them woodland. The house in which he and Alice occupied in Boxford was furnished with furniture of "ancient patterns" passed down by his New England forebears.

Alice's role in all this was largely passive. George's sentimental, romanticized vision of Alice in the domestic sphere could have come straight out of Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House", a poem they both admired and read aloud to each other.[104] As the angel in George's home, Alice had merely to grace the house with her presence. George "bowed" before her "perfection"; their home was "a kind of altar reared to [her] particular worship." She was "sweet to the core, fragrant and unperceived as mignonettes [small dainty flowers known for their perfume-like scent] in a sitting room, so unselfish and responsive."[105] Alice drew comfort from George because he was "so good and strong for me when I am weak and restless and full of oppression and pain."[106]

George described himself as a critic who appreciated what was adequate or harmonious and sought to bring it to perfection. He needed "something to begin and improve." Renovating houses gave him that opportunity. (He renovated five over his lifetime.) In Alice he had great raw material, so he sought to improve her too. He chose the books that filled the Palmers' homes and the clothes Alice wore in them. Alice sent her parents her multi-volume set of Charles Dickens' novels because

103 GHP, *Autobiography*, p. 4.

104 AFP to GHP, January 27, 1901. AFP Papers. As discussed in the Introduction, p. 7, Coventry Patmore's long narrative poem, *The Angel in the House*, first published in 1854, retained its popularity throughout the nineteenth century and set the standard for women as self-effacing, subservient wives and mothers.

105 GHP to AFP, June 1, 1890 and September 30, 1892. GHP to AFP, October 23, 1894. AFP Papers.

106 AFP to GHP, May 4, 1888. AFP Papers.

"George didn't like them."[107] When he criticized Alice's newly-made clothes before they were married, she had her maid remake them. He picked out on a new wardrobe for her on their first sabbatical trip to Europe in 1888–89. Years later, Alice dressed in "severe, handsome dresses" because George liked them, even though Alice herself thought they made her look like "a mooly cow."[108] It is hard not to think of her as another prop in the setting of his perfect home, another exquisite object to be possessed and treasured.

In the long run, George felt he and Alice had achieved his vision of marital unity. "She and I had become pretty completely one. Often my way of telling about her is to tell about myself," he proclaimed in his biography of Alice.[109] Alice too felt that she and George had become inextricably intertwined, but her reaction was far more ambivalent than his. While she rejoiced in her marriage and George's tender care, she knew that their "oneness" was purchased at the price of her individuality. Dearly as she loved George, she sometimes found his need to share and the intensity of their life together overwhelming, even suffocating. Work that took her away from home was welcome in part because it offered her an opportunity to be a person in her own right again.

There were hints of this during the Palmers' courtship. Before their engagement was announced publicly, Alice had written George, "Sometimes such great love as ours — yours and mine — sweeps me over that delicate line which decides the deepest joy and pain — and it seems to me my soul breaks away with — is it bliss or anguish? Is it longing or dread? — and flies into some strange unknown world, where I cannot yet go!"[110] Years later, Alice wrote a poem entitled "Myself" which expressed her wish to break the hold of their quiet domestic life, her need to be "alone and free", and her desire to test her own strength against new challenges. The last stanza in particular projects her dissatisfaction with the role of wife that robbed her of an independent existence, the "us" that eroded the "me."

---

107 AFP to GHP, April 12, l892. AFP Papers.

108 AFP to GHP, September 2, 1889. AFP Papers. Lucy Sprague Mitchell, *Two Lives: The Story of Wesley Clair Mitchell and Myself* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953), p. 122.

109 GHP, *Life*, p. 16. Similarly, GHP to AFP, September 5, 1889 and September 30, 1892. AFP Papers.

110 AF to GHP [May 1887]. AFP Papers. This letter is not included in *An Academic Courtship*.

Oh, to be alone!
To escape from the work, the play,
The talking everyday!
To escape from all I have done
And all that remains to do!
To escape, — yes, even from you,
My only love, — and be
Alone and free!

Could I only stand
Beneath pale moon and gray sky,
Where the wind and the seagulls cry,
And no man is at hand,
And feel the free air blow
On my rain-wet face, and know
I am free, — not yours, but my own, —
Free and alone!

For the soft firelight
And the home of your heart, my dear,
They hurt, being always here.
I want to stand upright
And to cool my eyes in the air,
And to see how my back can bear
Burdens, — to try, to know,
To learn, to grow.

I am only you.
I am yours, part of you, your wife,
And I have no other life.
I cannot think, cannot do;
I cannot breathe, cannot see;
There is "us." There is not "me."
And worst, at your touch I grow
contented so![111]

This poem helps to make sense of Alice's willingness to take on work that required her to be absent from home. She accepted it, in part, because it gave her independence and freedom that being at home with George did not. Even George came to recognize that "packing a trunk" was as "necessary" to Alice as renovating a house was to him.[112] It is

111 AFP, "Myself", in AFP, *Marriage Cycle*, pp. 36–37.
112 GHP to AFP, January 15, 1895. AFP Papers.

doubtful, however, that he understood the emotions behind her need to be on the move.

George was as ambivalent as Alice about her work. Given that, by his own reckoning, she had been away from home for a total of two months over a nine-month period when she started lecturing, he was surprisingly enthusiastic about her early success. "I do not approve of your becoming a mere housebody; only of making that first," he explained. Congratulating her on "a very good first year" of lecturing, he urged her to expand her efforts:

> It was of consequence to make a public place for yourself now that the old eminence of Wellesley is removed. This place has been won. You have proved your power apart from office. Now the question will be to use that power with the most potent economy in the future. You will henceforth be welcome everywhere. This summer we will lay our plans about the sort of places to which you will go.[113]

Nonetheless, as his biography of Alice makes clear, George was not a public advocate of professional careers for married women. He supported her work for personal rather than ideological reasons. Historian Karen Lystra has argued that romantic love and the romantic ideal of oneness were powerful forces that helped nineteenth-century men transcend the patriarchal underpinnings of their society and develop more companionate relationships with the women they loved. Identifying so completely with a cherished loved one and vicariously feeling what the beloved felt helped men to overcome their selfish self-interest, according to Lystra.[114] George's support for Alice illustrates this phenomenon. His sense of oneness with Alice was so strong that he was convinced they had forged a joint identity and each was entwined with the other. He understood that lecturing was something she enjoyed, excelled at, and wanted to do. He was willing to let her work because he loved her and wanted her to be happy and use her talents.

Nevertheless, the effects of romantic love are limited and often short-lived. In George's case, self-interest provided an equally powerful and longer-lasting motivation. He was frankly delighted to have the additional income Alice brought home. Impressed by the $25 to $50

113 GHP to AFP, June 2, 1890. AFP Papers.
114 Lystra, pp. 229–37.

fee she earned per lecture, he jokingly threatened to retire and let Alice "carry both the glory and expense of the household" and instructed her not to give any lectures for free. Whenever he was annoyed by her absence, she reminded him that her efforts helped to pay for the house renovations and stock his library with first editions. When she thought about giving up the lecturing, she vowed, "I'll earn the money some other way."[115]

Obviously, the Palmers were not poor. Although George had always insisted that he could support Alice on his salary alone, the income she earned in speaking fees ($1,000 between January and October 1892) was very important to financing the lifestyle he desired. George readily admitted that he was given to extravagance while Alice was by nature exceedingly frugal. His salary at Harvard was $4,500 in 1893, and he earned additional money by teaching at the Harvard Annex and lecturing; the Palmers also had substantial investments.[116] Nevertheless, there were periodic concerns about meeting routine expenses, paying for the extensive and expensive house renovations that George undertook, and saving money for their sabbatical trips. In the spring of 1892, when Alice was on a lecture tour, George wrote frequently about being short of cash, and Alice was getting by on money loaned by her brother and economizing wherever she could.[117]

The benefits he derived from Alice's earnings did not stop George from complaining about her absences and pressuring her to return home. Angry that she prolonged a lecture trip when he had been counting on a "happy Sunday together after this barbaric absence", he accused her of sacrificing their home life so that others could "make money and renown out of you." A week later, he instructed her to refuse all social engagements in New York and return to Cambridge so they could enjoy an extra half-day together.[118]

115 GHP to AFP, May 21, 1890; GHP to AFP, May 23, 1890; AFP to GHP [April 1892]. AFP Papers.

116 GHP to AFP, April 10, 1892; October 17 [1894]; January 17, 1895. AFP Papers. Alice's earnings are recorded in AFP and GHP, "Chronicles", AFP Papers.

117 GHP to AFP, April 10, 16, 18, and 23, 1892; AFP to GHP, April 15 and 22, 1892. AFP Papers.

118 GHP to AFP, May 30, 1890 and June 7, 1890. Similarly, GHP to AFP, September 30, 1892. AFP Papers.

By the spring of 1892, when Alice and George were both offered jobs at the newly-founded University of Chicago, there were strains in their marriage. Returning from a western lecture tour and a visit to her parents in Michigan, she wrote to him,

> Off here in the northern forests, it does seem to me that I can never again have an irritable moment, or say an impatient word, or fail to make home happy and well-cared for. I wonder why it is I am so poor a wife, so ineffective and unamiable, when I am really in the home I love so, and long for even in half a day's absence. 'If I could once determine which is me!' I have been thinking a good deal about the year which is nearly over, as I have been traveling so many days and nights. I foresee, dear, that it will seem to you when you come to the summer vacation again, very much the same dreary failure that the other years since we came home from Europe have been. It is not what you want or like and I sometimes think we had better change it all. If only I could change myself! That is what is needed, I know, and I always fancy it will come — but it does not.[119]

Alice's despondency and self-doubt about her domestic life is a striking contrast to the confidence and exuberance she exuded when she wrote about her work. Nevertheless, she was prepared to sacrifice that work to please George. She proposed that, if they did not accept the Chicago offer, they should live for a year in their country home at Boxford. George could commute to his lectures and she would have "ample excuse for resigning from everything except Wellesley"; they could reduce their expenses, and she could devote herself to the "reading and writing" George often urged her to do.

The University of Chicago Deanship, 1892–1895

The offer from the University of Chicago was a generous one that recognized George's talents as well as Alice's. The school was scheduled to open in the fall of 1892 under the presidency of William Rainey Harper. Determined to make his new university the equal of Yale, Harper attempted to attract faculty from elite Eastern schools by offering them

119 AFP to GHP, April 30, 1892. AFP Papers.

unusually high salaries.[120] He wanted Alice to be Dean of Women and Professor of History and George to chair the Philosophy Department. In his *Life of Alice*, George reported that Alice was "from the first against accepting the offer." She did not want to go, according to George, because she was attached to their Cambridge home and his Harvard roots, dubious about the scholarly opportunities available at Chicago, and eager to remain near Wellesley. Moreover, she "perhaps dreaded the wear and tear to which she would be exposed by another absorption in college duties." For all these reasons, George wrote, the Palmers did not want to accept Harper's offer, although their salaries would have been considerably higher than what they were then earning.[121]

The Palmers' correspondence suggests a different scenario, however. It was George, not Alice, who did not want to go to Chicago. She was looking for a way to accept the deanship while he raised a litany of objections centering on his concern that any position at Chicago would be less important and prestigious than what he enjoyed at Harvard. He also feared that the university, which was founded by Baptists, would be too sectarian. Harper made the offer to the Palmers at their house in Cambridge on March 12, 1892. They spent a week in Chicago in early April during George's spring recess. He went home to Cambridge while Alice visited her parents in Michigan, gave a few lectures, and returned to Chicago to carry out her duties as one of Massachusetts' managers for the World's Fair of 1893.[122]

Alice and George discussed Harper's offer at length in their letters while she was away. George had nothing positive to say about the appointment or the university. "I don't want to go," he wrote to Alice on April 14.[123] Throughout the month, he continued to raise objections and warned Alice not to encourage Harper. Alice, meanwhile, was clearly attracted by the offer. The thought of the opportunities it could open for women made her breathless with excitement.[124] While George's friends

120 Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

121 GHP, *Life*, pp. 233–34.

122 AFP and GHP, "Chronicles", AFP Papers. He did not record that she returned to Chicago, but it is clear from the letters they wrote to each other in April, 1892 that she did.

123 GHP to AFP, April 14, 1892. AFP Papers.

124 AFP to Marion Talbot, March 16, 1892. University of Chicago, Hannah Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, Marion Talbot Papers.

advised him not to take the offer, Alice's urged her to accept, believing the deanship offered her a chance to accomplish even more for women's education than what she had done at Wellesley.[125] As a graduate of a co-ed university, Alice was eager to create a supportive community for women within a large university. She was also excited to think that she and George could "be together all the time after morning office hours and have the same kind of work."[126] It was only after the barrage of negatives from George that she wrote, "everyone urges you to come, and somehow I hate to think of it! I don't see how we can."[127] She was still ambivalent at the end of April: "I must say I long to get my hands on the Woman's College, but the next moment I long to stay in our own pleasant place."[128]

In the end, George was unwilling to relocate. When Alice returned to Cambridge on May 5, he informed Harper that he could not accept the University's offer.[129] But Alice continued to explore the possibility of taking the deanship on a part-time basis and leaving George behind in Cambridge. Over the next few weeks, she spelled out the "very strict" conditions under which she would accept the job, based on lengthy conversations with George: She would come to Chicago if she were paid $3,000 per year plus travel expenses, if she could limit her time on campus to ten to twelve weeks per year, and if Marion Talbot, a Wellesley faculty member and close friend, became an assistant dean. Alice insisted that she herself must be recognized as "dean all the time": all matters pertaining to the women's department at Chicago should be referred to her, even though she would be in residence for no more than twelve weeks each year. She told Harper that George was not happy with the proposed arrangement but "would not utterly refuse consent"

125 AFP to GHP, April 26, 1892. AFP Papers.
126 Ibid.
127 AFP to GHP, April 22, 1892. AFP Papers.
128 AFP to GHP, April 29, l892. AFP Papers.
129 GHP, "Chronicles", AFP Papers. Telegram from GHP to William Rainey Harper, May 5, 1892, University of Chicago, Hannah Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, William Rainey Harper Papers. Letter from GHP to William Rainey Harper, May 5, 1892, University of Chicago, Hannah Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, Office of the President, Harper, Judson and Burton Administrations Records (UC, OPHJB), https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-016.pdf. On May 7, 1892, *The Harvard Crimson* published a letter from GHP that explained his desire to remain at Harvard. Reprinted in Linenthal, pp. 95–96.

if her terms on salary, title, and an assistant dean were met. George himself wrote to Harper, in the margin of Alice's letter, "I hope you will return an emphatic 'no' to my wife's proposition."[130]

The salary Alice negotiated was high for an academic, especially a woman academic.[131] George felt that a lower salary "would be below her dignity" but Alice justified it as necessary compensation for the earnings she would forgo in lecturing and writing so that she could give her full attention to the University of Chicago. She wished she could be more generous about her salary, she wrote to Harper, but explained that "it is a very bad time for us [financially]" and the money was needed to meet their expenses.[132]

Harper accepted Alice's conditions. Although there were tussles with Harper over her title and duties, George let her go.[133] She took up her new post at the end of September 1892, a few days before the school officially opened. Though many Bostonians looked down on Chicago as a backwater provincial prairie town, not everyone shared George's reservations about the new university: Harper recruited notable scholars and several former college presidents in addition to Alice to the faculty.[134]

As one of President Harper's most trusted advisors during her first two years as dean, Alice was instrumental in making the University of Chicago a supportive and stimulating environment for women students. She established rigorous academic standards for the female students, ensured that they were fully integrated into the academic life of the

130 AFP to William Rainey Harper, May 28, 1892 and July 16, 1892. See also, AFP to William Rainey Harper, June 25, 1892 and July 6, 1892. UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-016.pdf.

131 See Bordin, p. 233.

132 AFP to William Rainey Harper, May 28, 1892. UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-016.pdf.

133 Alice was angry and dismayed when the university calendar announced she would be "Professor of History" and "Acting Dean." She feared the announcement put her and the university in a false position by not specifying that she would be in residence on a part-time basis. She did not intend to teach history and felt the university should hire women who were better qualified than she to do so. But in the end, she left the wording of her appointment to Harper. AFP to William Rainey Harper, August 3, 1892 and August 26, 1892, UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-016.pdf.

134 Backwater: Marion Talbot, *More than Lore: Reminiscences of Marion Talbot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), pp. 6–7. Scholars and college presidents: John W. Boyer, *The University of Chicago: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 79.

university, and encouraged Harper to hire women faculty members and pay them good salaries.[135]

Judging by the accounts she sent George, Alice tackled her responsibilities with verve and assertiveness. Irritated by the slow pace of work on the women's dormitories, she "simply ordered things done, and made myself generally disagreeable."[136] She noted that her style was a decided contrast to that of the "sweetest-tempered, long-suffering" minister who had been in charge until her arrival. "He seems amazed, and after three days, relieved, by my vigor and temper," Alice informed George.[137] Finding that President Harper was "surprised and hurt" by her objections to his plans regarding the women students, she resolved to "tell him as little as I can, and take every bit of responsibility I dare to assume. I shall take even more in the future, for I will not be responsible for such common and vulgar living."[138] Nor was she shy about confronting Harper directly, or insisting that the university trustees and benefactors change arrangements that had been agreed to before she arrived. Soon she was describing her victories in arguments over building plans, establishing rules of conduct, and staffing the women's dorms. One of her fiercest battles with Harper was over his plan to have Associate Dean Marion Talbot manage the women's dormitory instead of hiring a matron and servants. "I asked plainly if they would expect [male professors] to add to their duties of dean or of Professor the work of a janitor in the men's building, and assured them that we were worth much more to them in other work than in training waitresses and answering doorbells," she reported to George, adding that she had been prepared to resign over the issue.[139]

Alice's accounts belie George's depiction of her as a woman whose "sweet lips" could not form the words "you shall", and who needed him to "fight off oppressors."[140] Far from shrinking from challenges, she thrived on them, as she had at Wellesley. "I *am* glad to be doing this work," she assured George. Sketching the magnitude of the tasks to be done

135 Trusted advisor: Bordin, pp. 250, 258. Environment for women: Gordon, *Gender*, p. 89. See also, Bordin, pp. 241–42.
136 AFP to GHP, September 23, 1892. AFP Papers.
137 AFP to GHP, September 25, 1892. AFP Papers.
138 Ibid.
139 AFP to GHP, September 29, 1892. AFP Papers.
140 GHP to AFP, September 25, 1892. AFP Papers.

and the difficulty of extracting the necessary money from the fiscally conservative trustees, she noted, "But the situation is interesting — and to be *conquered*. I am feeling very well, and cheerful."[141] A year later, her enthusiasm had not waned.[142] When she was back in Cambridge, she missed her Chicago work and was unhappy at not being able to oversee developments personally.[143]

When Alice started at the University of Chicago, George was pleased that she had found her "proper work" that made full use of her talents.[144] He had no regrets, however, about his refusal to join her. "From your letters I get an impression of second rate things all about you, and am glad we chose to stay in Cambridge," he wrote soon after Alice arrived in Chicago. Several weeks later, he commented, "It is as if a lot of green hands had undertaken to sail a ship."[145] The unspoken message was the same as when he refused to come to Wellesley: conditions which were perfectly suited to Alice's talents were insufficient for his.

Alice usually spent a month at the university in the fall and the winter and several weeks in the spring; she came out at other times as needed. George accompanied her for a week or ten days on some of these trips, but most of the time she was in Chicago, he remained in Cambridge. He initially insisted he was "quite ready to stand my full share of the hardship" that her absences would cause.[146] Convinced that they had forged a joint personality, he was confident that she took a part of him with her. "So away or near we are hand in hand," George comforted himself soon after Alice set off for Chicago.[147] While others might think what they saw was "all" Alice, George knew that he himself was "inextricably twined with it."

---

141 AFP to GHP [October 9, 1892], and September 25, 1892. Emphasis in the originals. AFP Papers.

142 AFP to GHP, October 3, 1893. AFP Papers.

143 AFP to Marion Talbot, October 30, 1892, University of Chicago, Marian Talbot Papers. Alice told President Harper that she wanted to do more for him and wished she could be more involved in university affairs when she was not physically present on campus. AFP to William Rainey Harper, December 1, 1892. UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-016.pdf.

144 GHP to AFP, September 25, 1892. AFP Papers.

145 GHP to AFP, September 30, 1892 and October 4, 1892. AFP Papers.

146 GHP to AFP, September 25, 1892; similarly, GHP to AFP, January 3, 1893. AFP Papers.

147 GHP to AFP, September. 30, 1892. AFP Papers.

Time away from each other also increased the sense of romance that was so important to the Palmers. After seven years of married life, George marveled that they had preserved the magic of courtship.[148] "To me you are always a subject of romance," he wrote Alice. "To see your step in the entry or to see you crossing a room is still to get a touch of fairyland." Alice wrote him that she could "never half understand how much I love and admire you until I am too far away to talk about it." He confessed, "I sometimes think these catastrophes [their separations] almost desirable, they reveal so how dearly we love each other. I see your loved figure more in our Boxford fields when you are away than when you are with me."[149] Moreover, he felt the role reversal that took place when Alice was away brought them closer together. "Is it not amusing how we exchange functions?" he asked during the first week she was in Chicago. "You sometimes run a college and I a kitchen, and again I appear as the director of youth and you of servants. It makes our partnership a rich one that we each can comprehend and even perform the other's tasks."[150]

Her first homecoming from the university in October 1892 was "a simple delight" and George sent his thanks for returning her in such good condition, Alice informed Harper.[151] Nevertheless, George's forbearance soon wore thin. Every quarterly trip for the first two years of Alice's time in Chicago involved an exchange of letters in which George angrily pressed her to come home while Alice pleaded that she needed to stay. Their correspondence in 1893 was typical. "I know how busy you are; but feel sure if you should wait to finish your business, I should never see you again," George complained after Alice had been away for ten days in the spring. Two days later, coping with the disruptions caused

148 George explained to his younger cousin, Robert Herrick, "After my wedding mother whispered to me as I kissed her goodbye, 'keep on courting, George' — a sagacious bit of advice, too little thought of." GHP to Robert Herrick, May 24, 1894, RH Papers. As discussed in Chapter 3, Herrick would later have a years-long affair with Elsie Clews Parsons.

149 AFP to GHP, March 1, 1891; GHP to AFP, August 27, 1901. AFP Papers.

150 GHP to AFP, September 23, 1892. AFP Papers.

151 AFP to William Rainey Harper, October 26, 1892. UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-016.pdf.

by a servant's illness, he insisted, "I really cannot wait much longer to see you." Four days later, Alice was back in Cambridge.[152]

Despite his good intentions, George came to resent both the domestic inconvenience and the lack of attention that Alice's absences caused him. He was happy planning menus, hosting friends and family, and orchestrating house renovations and decoration when she was gone, but he did not want to cope with servants' illnesses and feuds, or hire and train new servants.[153] Those tasks should be Alice's job, not his, he felt. And he was affronted when she missed a talk he gave as part of a prestigious lecture series at Harvard.

George acutely missed Alice's companionship. He drew his feeling of self-worth from his surroundings, and when she was not there to agree with and encourage him, he began to question his own importance. Left to his own devices, he suffered "a sense of my own worthlessness, and impotence" and began to feel that his "seeming dignity is a hollow sham."[154] Short partings increased the Palmers' affection for each other, but longer absences undermined their relationship.

The tensions resulted, on occasion, in open conflict. George wrote apologetically after an argument during Alice's first year at Chicago, "I fully recognize how difficult your situation is, pulled as you are in many directions [...]. Do not think I ever rudely blame you[,] darling." Nevertheless, his sense of injury was strong: "But when things seem to me to be drifting in a bad direction and I think I ought to pull you round to consider with me how the hard time may be stemmed, it makes me sore to do it. We are made to enjoy together; and then hard business exigencies arise, requiring us to balance conflicting considerations and to urge opposing claims, and both of us shrink from the seeming clash and by that very act make it greater."[155]

---

152 GHP to AFP, April 24, 26, l893. See also, GHP to AFP, October 5, 1893; GHP to AFP, June 2, 1890. AFP Papers.

153 Illnesses: GHP to AFP, April 26, 1893; new servants: GHP to AFP, June 2, 1890. AFP Papers.

154 GHP to AFP, January 13, 1892 and April 11, 1894. See also, GHP to AFP, January 11, 1894. AFP Papers.

155 GHP to AFP, January 3, 1893. AFP Papers. On December 20, 1892, Alice had written a long letter to President Harper, laying out the personal difficulties (George's teaching schedule and the illness of several of his relatives) that would make it difficult for her to come to Chicago in early January and attend convocation as Harper now proposed. Instead, she hoped to come for several weeks in late January

The part-time arrangement created difficulties in Alice's job as well as in her personal life. Her attempts to schedule her Chicago terms of residence to suit George's schedule annoyed Harper without appeasing George, and she felt that her absences from the university reduced her effectiveness and left her poorly informed about what was happening on campus.[156] Letters were delayed, and people did not always follow up on the instructions Alice left. She did not always agree with President Harper, and let him know it. Over time, he became less likely to consult her about academic appointments and university policy and tended to treated her as more of a fundraiser than an advisor.[157]

Alice was dissatisfied enough to consider resigning from Chicago in the spring of 1894. She toyed with the idea of becoming the superintendent of schools for Boston. Friends urged her to return to Wellesley which was looking for a new president.[158] Yet when she broached the idea of resigning to George, he strongly opposed it. Arguing that it would be difficult to find another position that "could compare in power or dignity" with her work at Chicago, he urged her not to give it up and lectured her about professional responsibility:

> Every species of work has its hardships. And certainly you cannot feel these separations as more keenly than I do. But I do not know an occupation for you which presents so little hardship as this. It brings the least possible damage to ability, health, reputation, tastes. We have our living to make and our future to provide for. From time to time I want you to have a year of rest and I want to take it with you. But I do not want you to sit about the house at the absolute mercy of committees, callers, and alpaca women.[159] […] That is not dignified. We have always held that in the best marriage both husband and wife should have a clear and serious profession and should cooperate in support of the family. If we had plenty of money, I should be unwilling to see you living without connected work. It is unwholesome for bodily and mental health. Rest is important and we can preserve three months for it in the summer, and if

with George. See also, AFP to William Rainey Harper, November 22, 1892. UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-017.pdf.

156 AFP to J. Laurence Laughlin, Thanksgiving Day 1892; December 21, 1892; and June 13, 1894. AFP to GHP, April 19, 1894 and January 15, 1895. AFP Papers.

157 Bordin, pp. 255–56.

158 AFP to GHP, April 2, 1894. AFP Papers.

159 In the late nineteenth century, women of taste and means wore alpaca dresses, made of very soft wool from sheep raised in Peru. George was undoubtedly referring to the women who donated to the many causes for which Alice raised funds.

> we need more can take a year of it a year hence. The mode of your work of course you must settle for yourself. I do not insist on the Chicago post. I only say to you what you would say to Robert [Herrick] or to anyone who wasn't a woman. 'Don't give up a place which offers tolerably good work until you see your way to something better.' Because he is tired of a certain job a man doesn't drop it and trust to luck for the future.[160]

George's advice is startling. Given his complaints about Alice's absences, it is surprising that he did not leap at the chance to have her back home full-time. Moreover, his insistence that both husband and wife should have "a clear and serious profession" and contribute to the household income, along with his dismissal of volunteer work as undignified, make a powerful argument for dual career marriages that is completely at odds with his views when he was courting Alice. It is possible that George's ideas had genuinely developed, either in response to Alice's tutelage or as a result of seeing the effects of enforced idleness on her. But the attitudes he expressed in his biography of Alice suggest this was not the case.

George urged Alice to keep her job at the University of Chicago in 1894 not because, as his letter suggested, he had become an advocate of professional careers for married women in general, but because her salary was needed to pay for the renovations he planned for the Quincy Street house. Throughout the spring, he had been exceedingly anxious about how he would pay the large cost of the work he had ordered.[161] His letter should be interpreted as a challenge to Alice. Very likely, he was echoing what she had been saying to him for years to justify her career. He was, in effect, calling her bluff. The point was not lost on Alice. She agreed, rather unhappily, to remain at Chicago for another year.[162] George responded with relief. He sympathized with her dissatisfactions but insisted, "hard for us both as it is, it is easier than nothing" and launched into another discussion of their precarious financial position.[163]

George's letter was equally paradoxical on a second point. In stressing that he was giving Alice the same advice that she would give

160 GHP to AFP, April 4, 1894. AFP Papers.

161 GHP to AFP, April 3, 1894; AFP to GHP, April 5, 1894. AFP Papers.

162 AFP to GHP, April 7, 1894 and April 15, 1894. She had informed Harper on April 14 that she would stay for just one more year, she wrote to George on April 15, 1894. AFP Papers.

163 GHP to AFP, April 10, 1894. AFP Papers.

to a male colleague, he was telling her that if she wanted a professional career, she should act like a professional — that is, like a man. Yet he himself did not always treat her as a professional. He gave her verbal encouragement in her career but repeatedly denigrated the institutions and causes she worked for, tried to limit the amount of work she took on, and pressured her to return home. No male professional would be expected to interrupt his work and come home because his spouse was lonely, or counseled to cut back his working hours and delegate responsibility to others as George consistently urged Alice to do.

Discouraged by George's reaction, Alice told Harper in April that she was not interested in becoming Boston's School Superintendent. But a month later, after she returned to Cambridge, she was reconsidering. She assured Harper that she was committed to him and the University, but wondered whether he might prefer to use her salary for more important purposes. Reminding him that she would not stay longer than another year, when she and George planned to go abroad for his sabbatical leave, she urged Harper to tell her candidly whether she should remain at the University of Chicago, "especially now that such important work waits me here, if I were free to take it."[164]

Two days later, George sent his own letter to Harper, pressing him to tell Alice what she should do. He stressed the advantages of the Superintendent's job for the Palmers: it would be a permanent position, allow Alice to remain in Cambridge, and pay her $1,000 more than the Chicago deanship. (George was always eager to take advantage of financial opportunities.) But if Harper wanted Alice to stay, George assured him she would continue to work "delightedly" for the University. Harper's advice, scrawled on the back of George's letter was that she should "do both — to take the Boston work on the understanding that we will release her in one year."[165]

There is no further mention of the Superintendent's job in the Palmers' correspondence. Alice stayed at the University of Chicago for another year, but it was not a happy time for her. In late May, 1894, she had an acute attack of peritonitis (a dangerous infection of the soft lining of

164 AFP to William Rainey Harper, May 9 [1894]. UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-017.pdf.

165 GHP to William Rainey Harper, May 11, 1894. UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-017.pdf.

the abdomen) that left her unable to work and travel for several weeks.[166] Increasingly unhappy with President Harper's leadership, increasingly doubtful about her own effectiveness, and missing George more acutely, Alice began to look for ways to shorten her stays in Chicago.[167] George, heavily involved in the Quincy Street house renovations, became more stoical about her absences. He stopped urging her to cut her visits short and admitted that he found their separations far less painful than formerly, when he had been "incapacitated for work."[168]

Alice's letters to George in early 1895 suggest that she came to view her time at the University of Chicago as something of a failure. She was chagrined that her resignation, formally submitted in late December 1894 or early 1895, was greeted with silence from Harper.[169] Her letter of resignation noted that she had come to Chicago more often, spent more time there, and taken less compensation than originally agreed to, but she left with "keen regret" and "most happy memories" of serving with Harper. Others praised her work when they learned she was leaving, but Alice felt she was "not in favor" with Harper, and regretted that they had lost the "mutual confidence" that was essential to her role.[170] They clashed over staffing and academic requirements. He was "very annoyed" with her for having recommended a University of Chicago faculty member for a position at another university; she was put off by his "highhanded" management style and found him to be a "coarse, selfish person."[171] Her experience at Chicago undermined

166 AFP to William Rainey Harper, June 6, 1894 and June 13, 1894. UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-017.pdf. She felt pressured by Harper to resume work before she was fully recovered. AFP to J. Laurence Laughlin, June 13, 1894. AFP Papers.

167 AFP to GHP, April 19, 1894; AFP to GHP [October 9, 1894]. AFP Papers.

168 GHP to AFP, January 11, 1895. Similarly, GHP to AFP, January 11, 1894; September 30, 1894; April 1, 1895. AFP Papers.

169 AFP to GHP, January 3, 1895 and January 8, 1895. AFP Papers. In an undated letter sent to Harper, Alice told him her formal resignation was enclosed and provided him with an account of what she had accomplished at the University of Chicago in collaboration with others. AFP to William Rainey Harper [1895], UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-017.pdf. There is a copy or draft of a resignation letter, dated December 1894, in the GHP Papers.

170 Praise from others: AFP to GHP, January 8, 1895 and January 9, 1985. Not in favor: AFP to GHP, Friday morning [January 4, 1895?]. AFP Papers. See also, GHP to AFP, January 7, 1895. Mutual confidence: AFP to GHP, January 15, 1895. AFP Papers.

171 Very annoyed: AFP to GHP, Friday morning [January 5, 1895?]. Highhanded management: AFP to GHP, January 10, 1895. Coarse and selfish: AFP to GHP,

her professional confidence and made her more eager to return to a warm, supportive home environment. Possibly, too, George's increased willingness to tolerate her absences made her anxious to ensure that she remained central in his life.

Alice left the University of Chicago in April 1895, as she had left Wellesley, with no clear plan for future employment. A few weeks earlier both Palmers had been offered chaired positions at the University of Michigan by President James Angell, Alice's early mentor. George quickly replied that they could not accept. He was unwilling to leave Harvard's prestigious philosophy department, and did not want to forgo the generous pension for which he would soon be eligible, he explained.[172] After her experience at Chicago, Alice must have been reluctant to consider another part-time arrangement, however appealing it might have been to return to her beloved *alma mater*. Her departure from Chicago marks the end of her active professional career in academia and her full transition to volunteer activities supplemented with paid lecturing. But first the Palmers turned their sights to a sabbatical year in Europe.

Creating a Companionate Marriage

During the years that Alice lectured around the country and worked at the University of Chicago, one might conclude the Palmers came close to achieving Alice's ideal of companionate equality. Her work and travels proclaimed her to be an independent person in her own right, with interests and responsibilities separate from George and their home. George had to accept that that his own comfort and convenience

---

January 9, 1895. AFP Papers. Harper continued to disappoint Alice. She rearranged her busy schedule so she could give a speech at the University of Chicago's tenth anniversary celebration in 1901, but she was annoyed that Harper's invitation came just six weeks before the event. (William Rainey Harper to AFP, May 2, 1901; May 21, 1901; June 1, 1901. AFP to William Rainey Harper, May 7, 1901 and May 28, 1901. UC, OPHJB, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ofcpreshjb-0066-017.pdf.)When the university did not award her an honorary degree, George observed, "If you had been half as famous and a man, [Harper] would have done so." GHP to AFP, June 21, 1901. AFP Papers.

172 GHP to James B. Angell, March 31, 1895. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, James B. Angell Papers, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/angell/851644.0004.023/62.

did not necessarily come first. Many of the things George did for Alice were exactly the things helpmate wives did for their husbands in the nineteenth century.[173] When she was away from Cambridge, he answered her correspondence, met with her colleagues, represented her in meetings, and took care of the household. He drafted at least one of her speeches and edited her manuscripts. He prided himself on the role reversal that took place when she was in Chicago because it made him feel closer to her.

From the standpoint of creating a companionate marriage, George's efforts to share were admirable. But from the standpoint of establishing an equal marriage, they are alarming. For George, sharing was likely to mean shaping and molding Alice, doing things *for* her not *with* her, and leading her rather than making joint decisions. The Palmers' ideas of companionate marriage did not directly challenge Victorian norms of male dominance and female submission. On the contrary, George clung to the notion that every woman — even a strong and independent woman — was a child who needed a man's protection and guidance. Both Alice and George worked hard to restore the traditional balance of power that was undermined by her work.

At some level, both Alice and George understood that she had to have considerable autonomy in her professional life. When George felt President Harper was misrepresenting the terms of Alice's appointment at the University of Chicago, he urged her to make Harper rectify the error. But he acknowledged that it was her decision, not his.[174] When she was first considering resigning from Chicago, he advised against it, but conceded, "The mode of your work of course you must settle for yourself. I do not insist on the Chicago post."[175]

Nevertheless, George was as eager to impose his stamp on Alice's professional life as on her domestic world. When she expressed unhappiness with the way she was depicted in an official portrait that was being painted for Wellesley, he set off for New York to see the picture for himself; he intended to fire the artist if the portrait was not

173 See Introduction, p. 7 and M. Jeanne Peterson, *Family, Love and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

174 GHP to AFP, September 24, 1893. AFP Papers.

175 GHP to AFP, April 4, 1894. AFP Papers.

what he and Alice wanted.[176] Because he valued scholarship more than administrative work, and the written word more than the spoken word, George encouraged Alice to commit her thoughts to paper and not just give lectures and serve on committees.[177] Concerned about her health, he persistently admonished her to do less, conserve her energy, and get more rest.

He was particularly insistent — even intrusive — in his attempts to reduce her workload. Very early in their courtship, he — unbeknownst to Alice — lobbied the Wellesley Trustees to create a new position of dean to take charge of all the College's correspondence that required judgement and discretion, freeing Alice from a time-consuming task.[178] After they married, he pressured her not to take on causes and activities he did not think worthy of her, such as reading student theses and raising money for Italian immigrants.[179] When she became Dean of Women at the University of Chicago, he pressured her to resign from all her other activities except Wellesley, including her position on the Massachusetts Board of Managers for the World's Fair.[180] Two years later, he encouraged the Women's Education Association to elect someone other than Alice as its president.[181] Answering her correspondence when she was away, he turned down numerous requests for her to lecture without consulting her.[182] He repeatedly instructed her to reduce the social engagements that were part of her lecture tours and filled her evenings in Chicago, despite the fact that they provided opportunities for the networking and relationship building that were critical aspects of her working life.[183] When he joined her in Chicago (typically, not more than once a year), he instructed her to strictly limit the number of evenings they went out.[184]

176 GHP to AFP, December 16, 1889. AFP Papers.
177 GHP, *Life*, p. 9. GHP to AFP, May 16, 1890. AFP Papers.
178 GHP to AF [July 1886], AFP Papers. GHP to Mrs. Claflin [n.d.], GHP Papers.
179 GHP TO AFP, April 13, 1892. GHP, *Life*, pp. 254–55. Similarly, GHP to AFP, June 7, 1891. AFP Papers.
180 GHP to AFP, April 24, 1892; GHP to AFP, October 19, 1892; February 3, 1893; and November 24, 1893. AFP Papers.
181 GHP to AFP, January 15, 1894. AFP Papers. GHP, *Life*, p. 226.
182 GHP to AFP, February 8, 1893, and November 24, 1893. AFP Papers.
183 GHP to AFP, June 7, 1890; GHP to AFP, April 18, 1894. AFP Papers.
184 GHP to AFP, April 18, 1894; GHP to AFP, January 8, 1895 and January 12, 1895. AFP Papers.

George's attempts to protect Alice from stress and overwork and shoulder responsibilities for her were a way of reestablishing the husbandly dominance that was undermined by her professional life. His efforts were demeaning as well as constraining because they suggested that she was incapable of looking after herself or making wise decisions on her own. The clear implication was that he knew better than she what was right for her. "Every good woman is in danger of over-helpfulness," he wrote in his biography of Alice. "Recognizing this beautiful danger, after our marriage I constituted myself her watchdog and barked violently at whatever suspicious persons I saw approach. It pleases me to think that by such hostilities I cut off a quarter of her labors, the least important quarter."[185] He was undermining Alice's position as a professional trained to be independent and authoritative. But he saw his efforts as expressions of his tender, loving care.

Alice's reactions to George's need to control were complex. In the domestic sphere, she tended to defer to George without argument. Even if she disagreed with him, she acquiesced, using the traditional language of wifely submission and subordination. "You are to decide what you believe to be the wisest, and I shall be content," was a typical response.[186] She was less inclined to follow his lead professionally. George claimed in his *Life of Alice* that "although occasionally chafing under the restraint, she on the whole saw my usefulness [in limiting her activities] and rewarded me with adequate thanks."[187] However, on many occasions Alice simply ignored his instructions and did as she thought best. She stayed longer in Chicago or on a lecture tour than George liked (although not as long as she wanted to stay). She often failed to inform him about her travel plans. She accepted work projects and lecture invitations that he thought were a waste of time. She did not resign from all her other activities when she took the Chicago position in 1892, and she took on a new one: raising money to create an endowment for the Harvard Annex, with the understanding that it would be incorporated within Harvard University and the women students would receive Harvard degrees. (George was equally committed to this project, followed its progress closely, and represented her at meetings on its behalf when

185 GHP, *Life*, p. 319.
186 AFP to GHP, May 29, 1890. AFP Papers.
187 GHP, *Life*, p. 319.

she was in Chicago.)[188] Although Alice sometimes expressed interest in writing more (as George urged) and collaborating with him on a project, she never did. The one time George prevailed upon Alice, a brilliant extemporaneous speaker, to prepare for a lecture as he did — committing every word to paper, with extensive rewriting — rather than speaking from notes as was her custom, she gave the worst performance of her public speaking career. After that, she banned him from attending her lectures.[189]

Nonetheless, Alice never asserted that she had the *right* to make her own decisions or act independently when she and George disagreed. On the contrary, she undercut her displays of independence by the way she justified her behavior. Instead of claiming the prerogative to stay away until her work was completed, she told George that if knew the full circumstances, he would not object. "I am having a chance to do so much just now that I can never do again that you would say 'stay' if you were here," she assured him.[190] After receiving several "petulant" letters from him during her first weeks at the University of Chicago campus, she insisted it was duty rather than pleasure or ambition that kept her in Chicago.[191] She tried to deflect George's annoyance by flattering his vanity and emphasizing her own inadequacies. Noting how frequently the faculty and administration at Chicago observed that George's expertise would have solved many of the university's problems, she wrote, "It would have settled everything if you had come, and [put] everything right. I only fumble at trying to do what you would have been an expert at, and it gives me a great ache over it."[192] A double meaning is unmistakable: not only would it have "settled everything" for the university had George accepted Chicago's offer, it would also have made Alice's life much easier.

Alice was employing a strategy known as "reframing." Reframing occurs when a woman or man violates conventional expectations about gender roles and then redefines the behavior in a way that fits the accepted standards. By allowing gender roles to be simultaneously broken and

188 The women successfully raised the $250,000, but Harvard reneged on the agreement.
189 GHP, *Life*, pp. 257, 259; GHP to AFP, October 18, 1892 and April 21, 1902. AFP Papers.
190 AFP to GHP, October 10, 1893. AFP Papers.
191 GHP to AFP, October 18 and 19, 1892; AFP to GHP, October 21, 1892. AFP Papers.
192 AFP to GHP, October 21, 1892. Also, AFP to GHP, February 14, 1893. AFP Papers.

kept in place, reframing helps to reduce the violator's guilt and also protects her or him from criticism.[193] The concept of reframing helps to make sense of the contradictions that are so prominent in the Palmers' relationship — contradictions between what was done and what was said, and between the implicit and explicit messages embodied in the couple's behavior. The Palmers were reframing when George assumed a manager's role in Alice's work, announcing he would help decide where she would lecture, what activities she should take on, and the terms of her contract with the University of Chicago. Alice repeatedly asked for his advice on troublesome issues of college administration and used him as a sounding board for her ideas. Downplaying her own expertise, she frequently assumed the part of a helpless female vis-à-vis George. "I *need* you so," she wrote him during her first trip to Chicago. "I *can't* discuss all these great questions without you."[194] By asking for George's advice and guidance, belittling her own abilities, and praising his superior judgment and experience, Alice was acknowledging her inferiority and trying to restore the traditional gender-based balance of power. When George expressed interest in editing an article Alice was writing, he implied that she needed his help in order to make her writing sufficiently clear and forceful. The unstated assumption was that he was rescuing her, not merely polishing her material. In contrast, when a nineteenth-century wife performed the same tasks for an overworked husband, it was understood that she was relieving him of activities that were too tedious or too trivial for his concern, so that he could devote himself to more important work.

The way the Palmers handled Alice's earnings was another kind of reframing. What she earned was treated not as "her" money, although she had the legal right to it, but as "his."[195] Alice did not hesitate to note that, when she took on additional work, she was bringing home money to pay for his library and the painters' bills, expenditures that mattered a great deal to George.[196] For her, the money had a different meaning:

193 Lystra, pp. 142–43. Lystra limits her discussion of reframing to the way nineteenth-century courting couples represented their actions in letters to each other, but the concept can be applied to a range of behaviors.

194 AFP to GHP [October 9, 1892]. Emphasis in the original. AFP Papers.

195 Starting in 1855, Massachusetts allowed women the right to control their earnings, own and sell real and personal property, and make wills.

196 For example, AFP to GHP, January 11, 1894. AFP Papers.

it symbolized independence. Returning from a lecture, she proudly announced, "I have $25 in my purse which you did not put in, sir!"[197]

The Palmers also upheld the traditional power dynamic by assigning Alice's work secondary status compared to George's. After she left Wellesley, her work could be seen as less important than his because it was part-time and paid less. George always made it clear that her institutional affiliations and colleagues were far inferior to his at Harvard. Nor would he consider giving up his own prestigious position in order to open professional opportunities for her.

Most significantly, Alice did not try to carry over into her domestic life the kind of independence she exercised in her professional life. At home, she remained the model of a submissive wife. In the domestic sphere, their interactions were neither mutual nor equal. On the contrary, George used his interest in domestic concerns and household routines to shape Alice's tastes and impose his views on her. It was George who made the decisions and George's tastes that predominated in the Palmers' homes. Indeed, Alice may have been all the more willing to cede decision making in the domestic sphere because this arrangement left her freer to work and travel.

In the long run, the Palmers' attempts at reframing were only partially successful, and more successful for George than for Alice. Despite all evidence to the contrary, he continued to see her as the epitome of Patmore's "angel in the house" and refused to acknowledge the ways in which she failed to fit that image. Beset by pressures from two sides, Alice had a much more difficult time. The strain of trying to reconcile the role George expected her to play and the life she actually led was increased by the strain of trying to do a full-time job on a part-time schedule. She eventually succumbed to George's pressure, gave up paid professional positions, and settled into a life in which George and their home took priority over her volunteer activities. After Alice gave up her position at Chicago, she had few defenses against his intrusive devotion. In the end, George's concept of marital "oneness" overpowered her interest in creating a partnership of equals, each of whom contributed different strengths to a mutual life. Mutuality did not translate into a sustainable equality in the Palmer marriage because it

197 AFP to GHP, April 1, 1894. AFP Papers.

was overwhelmed by George's subtle but indefatigable efforts to shape and control Alice. Their marriage suggests that reframing was more effective as a strategy for masking occasional lapses from nineteenth-century gender stereotypes than in legitimizing long-term, on-going behavior that was fundamentally at odds with prescribed gender roles.

Domestic Life and Volunteer Activities, 1895–1902

The Palmers spent the first year after Alice left the University of Chicago traveling in Europe during George's sabbatical in 1895–96. After they returned to Cambridge, Alice devoted herself to a rich and expanding array of volunteer activities with national, state, and local education organizations, consolidating her position as the most influential force in women's education.[198] College presidents from all over the country — as many as four in a single day in March 1900 — came to the Quincy Street house to consult with her. She gave advice about administrative issues, academic standards and appointments, and student life. Using her extensive networks, she helped to place talented women in teaching and administrative positions in colleges and universities across the country.[199] She still gave lectures, mostly in the Northeast, and earned an average of $200 per month in lecture fees between October and March of every year between 1897 and 1900.[200]

As a Wellesley trustee, Alice continued to play a major role in setting the college's academic and administrative policy.[201] As a member of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, she helped raise standards in the state's teacher-training schools and became an effective advocate for public education in the state legislature. She worked on behalf of Italian immigrants and attending legislative hearings on a wide range of social issues that she believed teachers of inner-city children needed to address. As a leader of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA) and the Women's Education Association (WEA), she remained a

198 Influence: Solomon, "Alice", p. 6; Antler, pp. 55–57; Bordin, p. 285.

199 William H. P. Faunce, "Address" in Association of Collegiate Alumnae, *Alice Freeman Palmer: In Memoriam* (Boston: Marymount Press, 1903), p. 37; Antler, p. 55.

200 Lectures and earnings: AFP and GHP, "Chronicles", AFP Papers; AFP to Elizabeth Freeman, August 8, 1897, AFP Papers. AFP to GHP, February 1, 1897; October 13 [1897]; April 26, 1898, GHP Papers. AFP to GHP, December 13, 1901, AFP Papers.

201 Antler, p. 55. See also Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden*, pp. 36–47.

tireless advocate, spokesperson, and fundraiser for women's collegiate education. She worked with the staff of the Massachusetts Statistics Commission to develop data about the post-college life of female college graduates in order to debunk claims that higher education ruined women's health and chances of marrying.

Alice's days were packed with an exhausting schedule of appointments and calls with co-workers, educators, donors, college faculty and administrators; with committee meetings, legislative hearings, and board sessions; and with luncheons and receptions that doubled as business meetings. She shuttled back and forth between Cambridge, Boston, and Wellesley by train and subway. Sometimes she worked into the night and skipped social or cultural engagements so she could prepare a lecture, write a report, or catch up on letter writing. Like many prominent women of her day, she used her position as a hostess to advance the educational and civic causes she worked for. Between October 1899 and March 1900, she scheduled weekly "at homes"; hosted a reception for Radcliffe College's senior class and "a hundred ladies of special distinction"; held numerous suppers and luncheons, and gave five formal dinner parties. She did not shrink from the more humdrum tasks of volunteer work: she and a colleague hand-addressed 500 invitations for a fundraiser, and she advised Harvard faculty wives about acquiring silver tea sets and white tablecloths for college teas. She hemmed curtains while she conversed with callers.[202]

What Alice did not do was to become a champion for highly-educated, professionally-trained, middle-class wives who sought institutional positions or paid employment. She never publicly embraced the identity of a working wife or championed the interests of working wives in the way that she advocated for the needs of unmarried female scholars and teachers. As the chair of the ACA's fellowship committee, and President of the WEA, she raised scholarship money to send American college graduates to European graduate schools, at a time when very few universities in the US awarded the PhD degree. She emphasized that such support could protect women against the claims of a "sick brother" or a "lonely mother" — obligations that young women had

202 Her volunteer activities: AFP to GHP, October 13, 1897, GHP Papers. AFP to GHP, January 30, 1902, AFP Papers. GHP, *Life*, p. 8; AFP, "Diary March 1900" (written for a Harvard University time capsule), reprinted in Linenthal, pp. 157–98.

fewer defenses against than their male counterparts. She personally counselled a Wellesley graduate not to give up her newly launched career in order to care for a widowed brother and his child.[203]

Nevertheless, despite her own experience as a wife who struggled to carry out a demanding job and keep her husband happy, Alice did not seek to protect working wives from the claims of lonely or irritable husbands. Nor did she trumpet the life she lived as a professional and a wife. When she wrote a short autobiography for a time capsule documenting everyday life in 1900, she did not mention her years as Dean of Women at the University of Chicago — a striking omission.[204] Instead of focusing on opportunities for married women's employment, Alice's public addresses and published essays emphasized the unique contributions that well-educated, middle-class wives could make as volunteers for civic and social causes. Identifying these women as "the only leisured class in this country", Alice believed they had an obligation to "take on much of the unremunerated work of society, in education, in charity, in reform."[205] This was the message she wanted married women college graduates to put into practice, and this was the life she modelled after she left the University of Chicago.

In these years, the Palmers' life came closest to the way George portrayed it in his *Life of Alice*. Alice was very busy, but her volunteer activities did not make the same demands on George that her Wellesley presidency and her University of Chicago deanship had done. Despite her many commitments, she performed the expected role of a faculty wife: she hosted George's students and faculty colleagues, joined the requisite social clubs, and listened raptly to George's public lectures and the occasional sermons he preached at the university chapel.[206]

The letters Alice and George wrote to each other when they were apart indicate that the emotional intensity, physical passion, and romance of their early years persisted and gave both of them great happiness. "Our intimacy seems never to have been more tender or trusting than this fall. You never seemed to me more lovely in person

203 Undated letters to unnamed recipients, reprinted in GHP, *Life*, pp. 268–70, 273.

204 AFP, "Autobiographical Sketch (1900)", in Linenthal, pp. 14–16.

205 Alice Freeman Palmer, "What Women Can Do for the Public Schools", *The Independent* 50 (August 4, 1898), 301–04.

206 GHP, *Life*; Charles Herbert, "Mrs. Palmer as an Acquaintance", *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 10, 1902; AFP, "Diary March 1900", in Linenthal, pp. 157–98.

or character, or more exquisitely suited to make life rich and daily rejoicing," George rhapsodized in 1897. His letter crossed with her own paean of happiness, "What a beautiful life we do have! I think of it more and more, especially when I am away from you, and I long to be there again. It is simply exceptional, and I see that it is understood to be so, more and more. No one else is like you dear. No one."[207]

Others saw the Palmers' domestic life as blissfully tranquil. Lucy Sprague, lovingly referred to by Alice as "my only daughter," lived with the Palmers from 1896 to 1900 while attending Radcliffe College. Her portrait of the Palmers' home life highlights what George sketched in detail in his *Life of Alice* — a happy, loving couple united in work and play; evenings spent listening to George reading poetry and plays aloud (another guest marveled that George took all the parts when a Shakespeare play was read); summers and occasional weekends spent working on the grounds of their beloved Boxford home. Although Lucy remembered Alice as frequently "sputtering about something George would or wouldn't do," her account of the Palmers' home life gives no hint of hidden tensions or inner conflicts. She described Alice as a vibrant, capable woman, serious and fun-loving by turns, always ready for a "spree" no matter how busy her schedule. Lucy admired George and the intellectual atmosphere he created in the home, but she found him self-important and sententious, and thought his sister-in-law's nickname for him — "the little Almighty" — notably apt.[208]

Alice seemed to have created a seamless blend of volunteer activities and domestic life, but her characteristic ambivalence is still discernible. Although she extolled the life she and George lived in Cambridge, her accolades can sound flat, formulaic, and platitudinous. "I cannot imagine a happier or more interesting life than we live, in the place of all in the world where we wish to be, doing the work we wish to do," she wrote in her autobiographical summary for the Harvard time capsule in 1900. In contrast to George's rhapsodic accounts of summers at Boxford, Alice's description of her summer activities makes her sound like a

207 GHP to AFP, November 2, 1897; AFP to GHP, November 2, 1897, GHP Papers. GHP to AFP, June 16, 1901; AFP to GHP, June 24, 1901, AFP Papers. On their physical intimacy: GHP to AFP, January 23, 1901 and January 24, 1901. AFP Papers.

208 Mitchell, *Two Lives*, pp. 115, 121–23. All the parts: William Ernest Hocking, "Personal Traits of George Herbert Palmer" in Harvard University, *George Herbert Palmer*, p. 63.

woman who might have had too much leisure time. "In the summers, I have time for reading, writing, sewing and making jellies and preserves, — work of which I am very fond," she wrote. Her account of their life together suggests that she was living in George's shadow and his activities mattered more than hers. "Our interests are the same and we always share each other's work, — though he is essentially the scholar and I am not, but he has a rare gift of taking me into his many sided life." It is only in the accompanying record of her daily activities in Cambridge during March 1900 that the rich array of Alice's undertakings becomes clear, and her verve and vivacity shine through. In these daily entries, Alice the manager, planner, advisor, educator, fundraiser, and public servant, emerges from the shadows and dwarfs Alice the perfect wife and domestic companion.

The old tensions were not entirely resolved. George continued to pester Alice to curtail her activities and was irritated when she was away from home for too long. She continued to defer to him, repeatedly promising to be a "better" wife and apologizing for inconveniencing him with her activities, an unexpected visit from her mother, even a hospitalization.[209] She should be praised for all the things she had refused to do, she assured him: "The speeches I have not made, the meetings I have not presided over, the invitations I have not accepted, would make a long story."[210] Trying to fit her work around his convenience, she hosted an important luncheon on a day he was away so he would not be interrupted.[211] Eager to continue writing an article while George was visiting his brother, she suggested she should stay at Boxford by herself rather than join him. "Do stay as long as you can, and let me stay quietly here and work. Of course it would be much better for me to do so, but I will do whatever you say," she demurred. George assented, but asserted dominance by promising to "pull [the article] into shape" when he returned.[212]

209 Better wife: AFP to GHP, November 2, 1897, GHP Papers. Similarly: AFP to GHP, January 17, 1901 and June 24, 1901. AFP Papers. Mother's visit: AFP to GHP, July 18, 1899. GHP Papers. Hospitalization: AFP to GHP, September 6, 1901. AFP Papers.

210 AFP to GHP, April 12, 1897. GHP Papers.

211 AFP to GHP [August 14, 1900]. GHP Papers. She hosted a large luncheon and many other activities when he was away a few years later (AFP to GHP, January 30, 1902). AFP Papers.

212 AFP to GHP [August 12, 1900]; AFP to GHP [August 13, 1900]); GHP to AFP [August 14, 1900]. GHP Papers.

It was during these years that Alice wrote the poetry that described her courtship and marriage, including "Myself" (quoted earlier, p. 58), which suggests that she embraced the domestic focus of her marriage, but nevertheless lamented the loss of her independence. During her lifetime, these thoughts were deliberately hidden from the world and from George.[213]

In September 1902, the Palmers traveled to Europe for another of George's sabbatical leaves, accompanied by Lucy Sprague, who was helping George on his study of George Herbert, the English poet for whom he had been named. After crossing the Atlantic by cattle steamer, they traversed large areas of England, following in George Herbert's footsteps and gathering material for George's book. In November, in Paris, Alice began to suffer intestinal pains. The diagnosis was "intussusception of the intestine", a rare condition in which the intestine folds back upon itself, like the sections of a telescope. After weeks of illness, Alice was given a few hours to prepare for an operation that she knew was highly risky. Before leaving for the hospital, she instructed George about cancelling her future engagements and giving personal mementos to family and friends. Alice survived the operation but died in the hospital a few days later, on December 6, 1902. George was by her side, holding her hand.[214] She was forty-seven years old.

George arranged for a small memorial service in Paris and had Alice's body cremated, as she wished. He and Lucy returned to Boston by ship, with Alice's ashes, in late December. Lucy recalled that George talked incessantly about Alice throughout the journey. She sometimes fell asleep while sitting with him at night, and when she awoke he was still talking. When they docked in Boston, a weeping band of friends was waiting for them on the pier.[215]

During the next year, college presidents, deans, faculty members, and leaders of the major organizations she had served paid tribute to Alice at memorial services in Boston, Cambridge, and Chicago. Funds were raised to create living memorials (endowed scholarships and fellowships) and

213 Alice showed some of the poems, ones that described their life at Boxford, to George in 1901. She continued to work on them, refused to discuss them with him, and told him not go through the desk where she kept them locked up. See GHP, "Preface" in Alice Freeman Palmer, *Marriage Cycle*, x–xi.

214 GHP to Swinburne Hale, December 12, 1902, quoted in Linenthal, p. 218.

215 Mitchell, *Two Lives*, p. 133.

physical memorials (plaques, busts, statues, a ten-bell set of chimes at the University of Chicago) to perpetuate Alice's name and honor her work. Depicted as a pioneering woman who nevertheless exemplified women's traditional virtues of service to others, Alice was universally praised for being "a womanly woman and a scholarly woman", for "inspiring the best ideals of American womanhood", and for being the "embodiment of [the] welding of intellectual interests and love of home."[216] Caroline Hazard, president of Wellesley when Alice died, stressed that she "opened new doors for women and was among the first to pass through them. She reconciled the new and the old conceptions of women." President William Faunce of Brown University extolled her for being "an admirable synthesis of the older and newer ideals of womanhood." President Charles Eliot of Harvard claimed that Alice's "life and labors" were "the best example thus far set before American womanhood" because she "gave the most striking testimony she could give of her faith in the fundamental social principle, that love between man and woman and the family life which results therefrom afford for each sex the conditions of its greatest usefulness and honor and of its supreme happiness."[217]

Lucy stayed with George in Cambridge for many months and continued working with him on his book, which was published in 1905. She felt trapped by his "subtle ways of limiting my life" and "drained of all capacity to live except as his shadow" but found it impossible to break away from his grasping hold. Her published autobiography records his manipulative efforts to keep her by his side, strategies that seem perfectly consistent with his behavior towards Alice. The unpublished version recounts his attempt to convince Lucy to marry him (he was sixty-one; she was twenty-three) by insisting that otherwise he could not honor Alice's dying request that he "look after Lucy."[218] George's proposal shocked Lucy out of her lethargy and freed her from his influence. Alice's legacy to Lucy was longer-lasting: Lucy had a highly successful dual career marriage with Wesley Clair Mitchell, which is the focus of Chapter 5.

---

216 Association of Collegiate Alumnae, *Alice*, pp. 30, 35, 25.

217 Hazard, p. 208; Faunce in *Alice Freeman Palmer: In Memoriam*, p. 38; Eliot in GHP, *Service*, pp. 80, 76.

218 Mitchell, *Two Lives*, p. 133; Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Unpublished Autobiography in Columbia University, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS#0884, Lucy Sprague Mitchell Papers; Antler, pp. 84–85.

Tending the Flame

George's desire to shape Alice's image was as strong after her death as during her life. Anxious to keep her memory alive, tie himself to it, and introduce her to new admirers, he churned out a steady stream of material about Alice. He was not just the keeper of Alice's flame, but also the guardian of a particular image of her. He wanted everyone to know her as the ideal woman and wife as well as — perhaps even more than — the pioneering college president and university dean.

His privately printed volume of twenty-five portraits of Alice (1904) praised her for showing how "a deepened intelligence and wider knowledge of affairs may heighten the characteristic and ancestral traits of womanhood and greatly add to her charm."[219] The ten Scriptural verses he chose for her memorial carillon at the University of Chicago (1908) acknowledged she was "Great in Council and Mighty in Work" but also extolled her as "a gracious Woman", "Rooted and grounded in love," and noted "the sweetness of her lips increasing learning."[220] George's preface to his first volume of *The English Works of George Herbert* (1905) presented her as the ideal helpmate — an instigator, cheerleader, and muse, all rolled into one. "In reality, the book is only half mine," he wrote. "It was begun at [my wife's] instance, enriched by her daily contributions, sustained through difficulties by her resourceful courage, the tedium of its mechanical part lightened by her ever ready fingers."[221]

George knew that Alice might not have endorsed his efforts to keep her memory alive, but he plunged ahead. Acknowledging how difficult it had been to capture her spirit in his *Life of Alice Freeman Palmer* (1908), he admitted to a friend, "[H]ow angry she would be at my attempt! But if I can make more people love her, I shall not mind her wrath."[222] One reviewer hyperbolized that the book ranked second only to the Taj Mahal as a loving memorial to a dead wife.[223] George even found a way

219 Quoted in Linenthal, p. 551.

220 "Dedication of the Alice Freeman Palmer Chimes", *University Record of the University of Chicago*, 13:1 (July 1908), 9–17 (p. 17).

221 *The English Works of George Herbert Palmer*, ed. by George Herbert Palmer, 3 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1905), I, xx.

222 GHP to Anne Whitney, 20 April 1908, quoted in Linenthal, p. 238, Note 1.

223 A. D. Dickinson, *The World's Best Books: Homer to Hemingway* (New York: Wilson, 1953), p. 265; quoted in Linenthal, p. 256, note 10.

to collaborate with Alice on a book, something they had talked about doing but never accomplished during her lifetime. *The Teacher: Essays and Addresses on Education* by George Herbert Palmer and Alice Freeman Palmer (1908) brought together twelve of George's speeches with four of Alice's.

Finally, George published forty-eight of Alice's poems in a volume entitled *A Marriage Cycle* (1915), despite the fact that she had asked him, in her final illness, to burn the poems after her death. He never considered destroying them, but he initially thought her record of their courtship and marriage was too intimate to publish in his lifetime. But after he consulted "four college presidents, four novelists, four poets, all persons of standing and social experience" and they encouraged him to publish the poems, he changed his mind. George found the quality of Alice's poems uneven, however. Many were very rough drafts, some did not scan, all lacked titles. Ever the critic and improver, he set to work to complete them. But realizing he could not do justice to them, he selected the best, gave them titles, and grouped them into themes. Fearful that Alice's poetry would otherwise be published in a fragmentary and disordered state, George published them, asserting, "To me it belongs to fix their final form."[224]

George used the profits from the sale of his books about Alice to stock his library of 3,000 first editions, most of which he eventually gave to Wellesley, along with $15,000 to create an endowment to pay for their maintenance. When a new edition of the *Life of Alice* was issued to honor Alice's election to the Hall of Fame of Great Americans in 1920, George arranged for the royalties to go to the Wellesley library. His generosity was a fitting effort to make restitution for having taken Alice away from the college, Katherine Lee Bates, a Wellesley graduate and professor, author of "America the Beautiful," pointed out in her introduction to the new edition.[225] George retired from Harvard in 1913, but continued to live in his beloved Quincy Street house until his death in 1933, at the age of ninety-one. His ashes were placed in Alice's memorial in the Wellesley chapel.[226]

* * * * *

224 GHP, "Preface" in AFP, *A Marriage Cycle*, ix–xvii.
225 See Linenthal, pp. 248–50.
226 Ibid., pp. 244–45.

The inevitable question is why George drew such fundamentally misleading portraits of Alice, himself, and their marriage in his *Life of Alice*. In part, he was self-deceptive. He saw in Alice what he wanted to see, and closed his eyes to behavior or beliefs that did not fit his preconceived, idealized image of womanhood. Thus, he ignored or misinterpreted situations that showed how forceful, independent, and authoritative she could be, and the pleasure she took in being in charge. He was particularly unlikely to register behavior that suggested Alice was not entirely happy with him or the domestic life that meant so much to him. If Alice expressed ambivalence about her work, what impressed George were her laments about being away from home, not the evidence that she delighted in her work and continued to accept jobs that kept her away from Cambridge. Such things were too painful for him to recognize, much less acknowledge to the world. George's characterizations were also self-serving. By concentrating on the satisfactions of their domestic life, he justified the marriage and enhanced his own value as the man who made the incomparable Alice Freeman happy. By stressing his role as Alice's advisor and protector, he also made a case for his masculine superiority and his importance in her life.

Alice herself contributed to this false portrait by encouraging George to see her as a woman who fit the mold of true womanhood. In her relations with him, she was essentially self-effacing and submissive. She appealed to him for guidance and advice although she was perfectly capable of administering a college on her own; she stressed how dependent she was on him when in fact she delighted in and longed for independence. When she was unhappy with her life, she blamed herself, not him. If her behavior deviated from expected gender norms, she tried to reframe her actions back into conformity. She did not articulate, except in her poetry, her desire to escape from his all-encompassing "oneness" and face challenges on her own. In short, she did not use her position as a working wife to challenge nineteenth-century norms of male superiority and dominance, and female inferiority and subordination, although she did promote companionate ideals.

Far more than the Palmers' personal relations were at stake in how Alice's image was presented to the world, however. Alice was an important public figure whose significance lay not only in her efforts to expand and improve women's educational opportunities, but also in

the personal influence she wielded as an inspiration and a role model for educated women. For her contemporaries, Alice's great appeal lay precisely in her ability to blend public service with domestic life and maintain her "womanly charm." Her life provided reassurance to those who feared that educated women would not find fulfillment in traditional marriages; she became a model for young women who wanted a college education but feared being labeled "unwomanly." George was not the only one to stress these aspects of Alice's life. He echoed what Alice's fellow educators said about her in memorial services soon after her death.

Like George, Alice's colleagues believed that she had reconciled two traditions of womanhood and made her life a harmonious whole without stress or strain. In doing so, they raised false expectations for the future. In reality, the new and old styles of womanhood and wifehood did not mesh well in Alice's life. Her attempt to build a professional career after her marriage was fraught with contradictions and ambivalence, and created tension and conflict with George. Nor was it easy or wholly satisfying for her to settle into a life of domesticity and volunteer activity. To have stated this publicly, nonetheless, might have been detrimental to the causes for which she struggled.[227]

In an era when white women were just beginning to experiment with nontraditional roles, Alice's life was important as a model for educated and talented women who hoped to find fulfillment by supplementing marriages and motherhood with volunteer activities outside the home. It was important to George — and to Alice — to protect and perpetuate that image in order to advance the movement for women's education. Although she defended women's rights, supported women's suffrage, and fought fiercely for educational opportunities for women, Alice was not a radical and did not advance a feminist ideology. She promoted higher education for women and the involvement of women in public affairs as a means of enhancing, rather than displacing, their traditional roles as wives and mothers. She emphasized that women who went to

227 Jill Ker Conway, *True North: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1994), pp. 151–52, discusses similar disparities in the lives and memoirs of women who were early college graduates and leaders in political and social reform movements during the Progressive Era. See also Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Norton, 1988), pp. 24–25, on the need for women achievers to offer themselves not as models for other women, but as "exceptions chosen by destiny or chance."

college would be better companions to their husbands and better guides to their sons (sons! not daughters!), run their households more efficiently, and bring their moral influence to bear in public service.[228] Although she spent several years as a working wife with a paid income, and pioneered a commuter marriage, Alice never championed professional careers for middle-class wives or talked about the difficulties she and others faced in attempting to blend marriage and career.

To have acknowledged the tensions between her different roles, questioned the happiness of her marriage, or explored the power dynamic between the Palmers would have undermined Alice's value as a symbol of feminine accomplishment. In the end, she, like George, was content to leave it to others to challenge the old stereotypes directly and implement a marital ideal that was egalitarian as well as companionate.

228 Alice Freeman Palmer, "On Women's Duties" (Warren, Ohio: National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1904). See also, Alice Freeman Palmer, "Why Go to College" in *The Teacher*, pp. 364–93 (pp. 364, 383–85).