Scribner's Monthly
and the “Pictorial Representation of Life and Truth” in Post-Civil War America

Robert J. Scholnick
College of William and Mary

I

A revolutionary event in the history of reproducing images in periodicals took place in 1880 when Stephan Horgan printed a photograph, “A Scene in Shanty Town,” in the New York Graphic. As the cultural historian Neil Harris has pointed out, with the new half-tone technology the viewer's "illusion of seeing an actual scene, or receiving an objective record of such a scene, was immeasurably enhanced." In the decade before the coming of the half-tone engraving process in 1880, the most important improvements in the art and technology of reproducing images in periodicals took place at Scribner's Monthly, which was founded in November 1870 by Dr. Josiah Gilbert Holland as a rival to Harper's Monthly, which then dominated the market for middle-class magazines. Especially through its development of techniques for applying photographic processes to wood engraving, Scribner's greatly enhanced the quality of its illustrations and in the process attracted a new class of readers to periodical literature. By the end of the decade it rivaled the mighty Harper's in circulation, and the editors, as Holland wrote in June 1881, who "never printed or sold less than forty thousand copies a month," were now preparing for "an edition of one hundred and fifty thousand copies, and the consequent production of two sets of plates and double sets of machinery." Holland credited the magazine's "superb engravings, and the era it introduced of improved illustrative art" with being responsible, "more than anything else," for its extraordinary popularity. In the process, Scribner's transformed magazine-making.

This success would not have been possible if Scribner's had not at the same time developed a visual language which taught a broad spectrum of Americans new ways of seeing and comprehending a rapidly changing America. Before their very eyes, as it were, the magazine's readers saw America expanding geographically while becoming increasingly industrial, technological, and cosmopolitan. Through its ability to combine image and text, Scribner's showed a broad spectrum of Americans how to comprehend a world of change.

As we might expect from a magazine that brought technological innovations to every aspect of its own operations, Scribner's devoted numerous articles to explaining and illustrating the new mechanical processes that were transforming every aspect of American material life. Itself a graphic "illustration" of one of its central messages—that new technologies for communicating information were changing the world—Scribner's convinced its protected, often isolated and provincial subscribers that to read this magazine with its inviting images was at the same time to learn to "read," to see and comprehend, the larger world. One purpose of this "reading" of some of the ways that the innovative Scribner's "framed" and represented the world is to gain an essential perspective on how its vast readership came to view and respond to change. And this will help us to think about the role of such a periodical as a mediating presence in American life.

From the first, Dr. Holland and his associates, the publisher Charles Scribner and the business manager Roswell Smith, realized that if Scribner's were to establish a new kind of magazine-making, it would be necessary to improve qualitatively the methods of reproducing illustrations and to find new ways of relating those images to the lives of ordinary Americans. Its title page proclaimed Scribner's Monthly to be "An Illustrated Magazine / For the People." A minority owner, Scribner had long desired to create a magazine which, as he wrote, "is handsomely illustrated, beautifully printed, and that shall have as contributors the best authors of the day. I should like to make it different from any now published and to reach also other classes of readers." Smith and Holland, who together controlled more than fifty percent of the assets and operated the magazine, were prepared to spend lavishly on illustration so as to appeal to "other classes of readers."

Today Josiah Gilbert Holland may be remembered best in connection with his own and his family's friendship with Emily Dickinson, but at the time he established the magazine in 1870 he was a force of enormous power in American life. Better than anyone else, it seemed, he could articulate the aspirations of a broad spectrum of middle-class Americans. A prolific, moralistic, and sentimental poet, novelist, essayist, lecturer, and author of books of advice, Holland was satirically dubbed by his more sophisticated contemporaries as ""Tupper Holland" in comparison with Martin Farquhar Tupper, a commonplace English writer," yet he may well have been the most successful writer in America. Such was his prominence that any magazine he edited would inevitably be associated by his vast following with his powerful personality. A non-doctrinaire but fervent Christian, Holland, as Edward Eggleston wrote in a memorial notice in the magazine following his death, was "the most popular and effective preacher of social and domestic morals in his age" (23:164; Dec. 1881). At the time that Eggleston's notice appeared, the magazine, through a change in ownership, had become The Century Illustrated
American Periodicals

Magazine. With the death of Holland, what one of his critics had conceded should be termed the "Holland age of letters" had come to an end. 4

We may assume that when he established Scribler's Monthly of Holland's devoted followers, the buyers of his books, were not regular readers of the literary periodicals. On the tenth anniversary of Scribler's Monthly he recalled that

When we began . . . "magazine literature," as it was called, had a distinctive character into which it had settled as into a rut. The traditions and influence of the old "Knickerbocker" had not been outlived. The quadrals and monthlys, which within a few years have shaken off their lethargic ways, were devoted to ponderous, or dull, or conventional performances, without any vital connection or sympathy with the current topics of thought or phases of social life. Now all this has been changed. (21:151; Nov. 1880)

Impatient with the standard periodical fare, Holland sought to attract a new class of readers by insisting that the magazine directly address the immediate concerns of this potentially large audience for periodical literature.

One way to do that would be with illustrations, through which Scribler's Monthly could communicate in image as well as with words. Dr. Holland’s "vision" of America to his many followers. As he explained in the first of his monthly "Topics of the Time" columns,

The feature of illustrations has been adopted to meet the thoroughly pronounced popular demand for the pictorial representation of life and truth, and in the well-assured belief that there is no person, young or old, learned or illiterate, to whom it will be unwelcome. With this popular auxiliary we shall try to make a magazine that is intelligent on all living questions of morals and society, and to present something in every number that will interest and instruct every member of every family into which it shall have the good fortune to find its way. (1:106; Nov. 1870)

Here is a startling innovation: Scribler's Monthly—ostensibly a serious literary magazine—one which over the decade would publish such writers as John Burroughs, Edward King, Edward Eggleston, George W. Cable, Henry James, William Morris, Christina Rossetti, Helen Hunt, John Muir, Rebecca Harding Davis, and H. H. Boyesen—would appeal as well to non-readers, the "illiterate." It would do so through the extensive use of illustrations, which would respond to the "pronounced popular demand for the pictorial representations of life and truth." So "pronounced" was this demand that if any new magazine were to make headway against such rivals as the New York-based Galaxy—to say nothing of Harper's—it would have to be through the quality, range, and number of its illustrations. 7

But in 1870 one could not speak in an American periodical about "life" and "truth" without raising potentially explosive questions of religious belief and denominational affiliation. As Frank Luther Mott has observed, the "acrimonious weeklies" within the religious press exercised extraordinary power, and virtually every denomination of reasonable size sponsored a magazine charged with denouncing the doctrinal errors of its rivals, to say nothing of the secularists. Such nonreligious periodicals as The Round Table, Nation, and Galaxy felt the sting, and in turn attacked the intolerance that they found in their "religious" rivals. 8 In September 1869, for instance, as part of his series on "New York Journalists," the fearless literary frondeur Eugene Benson, also a painter and art critic, published in Galaxy a slashing indictment of the Independent's Theodore Tilton, whom he pilloried as the worst offender among the religious journalists:

The secular and arrogant man is too active in religious journals; the meek and spiritual man does not write leading articles for the pious press . . . Mr. Tilton's mind, robbed of those conventional verbal masks—cant phrases—is secular; it is immersed in current things. The very conditions of the journalist-mind are incompatible with the conditions of the religious. 9

While the hypocritical Tilton may well have deserved all that Benson dished out and more, Holland took an entirely different position: that a well-edited, thoroughly professional periodical dealing with the "topics of the time" could also respond to the spiritual needs of a large segment of the American population. In part, the success of Scribler's Monthly was based on Holland's ability to create a journal that positioned itself squarely in the center of American civil religion, but removed from a position above the unseemly doctrinal battles that were being waged all around it. Holland, who helped to found a non-denominational Christian church in Springfield, Massachusetts, once remarked, as Edward Eggleston wrote in his memorial notice, that "Formulas mean nothing to me. I receive Christianity through my feelings" (23:165; Dec. 1881). Through his magazine Holland brilliantly brought his practical, heterodox religious vision to the immediate concerns of his vast following, dismissing abstruse theological controversy as quite irrelevant to the real business of living.

While not connected with any particular denomination, Scribler's Monthly assured readers in the first number, would be actively Christian. He decided to name the magazine for the pious Charles Scribner, his long-time publisher, who, he explained,

has been associated for many years with what is purest and best in American literature. This magazine needs no higher aim than to be worthy of the name it bears, and can achieve no better honor than to do its part to maintain the position
which the house represented by it holds before the Christian people of the
country. (1:165-66; Nov. 1870)

Scribner’s Monthly would be safe for Protestant readers.

Holland also assured his readers in the first number that the magazine would
carry its own seal of moral probity, reminding them that “he and those for whom
he prepares this magazine are not strangers. In books, newspapers, periodicals, and
public addresses, he and they have met many times during the last twenty years. In
that period he has experienced much of their kindness, and they have had abundant
opportunity to become acquainted with him. To their generous confidence he
appeals in presenting to them this new enterprise” (1:106; Nov. 1870). Author of
such books as Titcomb’s Letters to Young People, Single and Married (1858),
Holland was a master at applying practical lessons from his Christian faith to the
problems actually faced by ordinary people in daily life. Nothing in any way
immoral or impious could be associated with him. And so Scribner’s would present
an image of “life and truth” acceptable to the Christian family, as certified both by
the Scribner name and the assurance, as was emblazoned on the cover, that this
magazine was “conducted by J. G. Holland.” To take up the editorship, Holland
moved from Springfield, Massachusetts, to New York, but his followers continued
to associate him with the moral values of rural New England. Reflecting the needs
of such individuals in a time of change to anchor their lives securely, the magazine,
especially through Holland’s own “Topics of the Time” essays, contained numer-
ous articles reminding its increasingly urban readers of the rural source of American
values. Holland wrote on such subjects as the importance of emotional fervor in
Christian preaching, the educational and civilizing function of the Sunday school,
and the spiritual meaning of Thanksgiving, a holiday when the young, upwardly
mobile city dweller returns to his parents’ home in the country and finds there the
spiritual renewal that he had needed all along.

But even while Scribner’s reassured readers of its—and their—moral probity,
it identified itself as a modern magazine, one that, in Holland’s words, would be
“intelligent on all living questions of morals and society.” He sought to create a
magazine which clearly addressed social questions, one in which ordinary Ameri-
cans would find considerations of their immediate concerns. In this, Scribner’s
represented a major departure from other literary periodicals, which tended to avoid
controversial topics. While planning the magazine, the forthright Holland remarked
to his associates that

the two subjects in which the people of this country are most interested are
politics and religion, and I don’t intend to cut the magazine off from the re-
sources of popularity and influence which the treatment of these topics will

bring, but without being partisan or dogmatic shall consider them as I would
science or commerce or any other large interest of humanity.10

Each month the editor in his “Topics of the Time” columns published several essays
addressing a range of subjects of interest to his many followers: the need to bring
a higher culture to the countryside, the perils of sectarianism in religion, the
importance of “purity” in art and literature, and the threat of unions. The topic
headings from his second collection of these essays, Every-day Topics (1882),
reveal the nature of his concerns and suggest his point of view: “Religion and the
Church,” “Art,” “Literature,” “Certain Virtues and Virtuous Habits,” “Education
and Industry,” “Town and Country,” “About Woman,” “The Curse of Pauperism,”
of Domestic Concern,” and “Miscellaneous.” Sentimental, strongly nationalistic,
moralistic, politically conservative, religiously liberal, an advocate of temperance
and an opponent of women’s suffrage, and yet a voice for civil rights for the Negro
and the Chinese, Holland applied his vision of the world to the vexing subjects of
society, politics, art, culture, religion, manners, and public taste that were on the
minds of ordinary Americans. As “Timothy Titcomb,” the practical Holland had
found no subject of daily life too small for his attention, and now, as editor he could
not help but make Scribner’s relevant, timely, humorous, and uplifting in all its
parts.

To ensure that the magazine would treat subjects of immediate interest,
Holland cultivated American novelists and short story writers. In November 1875
he announced the “American policy” of Scribner’s, which involved, he recalled in
November 1880, “publishing exclusively American serial stories.”

Concluding that only a few American novelists were being developed, simply
because the works of British writers were brought into a depressing and even a
suppressing competition with them, we discarded the cheaply purchased Eng-
lish serial, and now, for several years, have published no novels save those by
American writers. (2:151; Nov. 1880)

In this, Scribner’s distinguished itself from its rival Harper’s, which made extensive
use of English fiction. In particular, Holland sought out regional writers, reflecting
the magazine’s inclusive nationalism. Scribner’s deserves credit, for instance, for
discovering George W. Cable, whose penetrating short stories of Southern life it
published, as did his novel The Grandissimes. It also featured Edward Eggleston’s
treatments of rural life in the mid-West. Among Scribner’s most popular seriali-
tations were three novels by Holland himself, Arthur Bonnicastle (1873), Sevenoaks
(1875), and Nicholas Minurn (1877). Before his death in 1881 Holland arranged
for the publication of W. D. Howells's explosive *A Modern Instance*, an unsparing treatment of divorce and political, social, religious, and financial corruption, which ran in the magazine after it had become *The Century*, from December 1881 through October 1882.

While fiction and poetry largely by Americans remained staples, *Scribner's* broke new ground by giving increasing space to feature articles. The magazine responded to the hunger of its readers for visual knowledge of the many worlds that such a well-illustrated magazine could open to them: both of America and the geographic realms and exotic cultures beyond the seas, new scientific discoveries and technological innovations, the rapidly expanding cities, the defeated South and the vast West, American colleges, painting and the graphic arts, the great urban centers and cultural monuments of Europe, and the intricacies of nature. These were worlds that could best be comprehended if seen, and this called for extensive illustration.

*Scribner's*, then, presents a fascinating example of a magazine brilliantly moving in two directions at once: back to the reassuring, idealized past of secure moral and religious foundations associated with America's rural roots and embodied by Dr. Josiah Gilbert Holland, and forward, into a new and increasingly cosmopolitan America of industrial progress, large corporations, immigration, urbanization, and even visions of America as a technological utopia. For instance, in "Aereal Navigation," published in February 1879, the New York critic, poet, and broker Edmund Clarence Stedman envisions a nation transformed by the plane or the "aerodël" (17:566-81; Feb. 1879). Or perhaps we can say that *Scribner's* was able to move with its readers into the new because it never surrendered its secure base. Holland's own growing appreciation of the fine arts and music was reflected in the increasing attention of *Scribner's* to the realm of aesthetic experience, so that the magazine became itself a vehicle that Holland and his young associate editor, the poet Richard Watson Gilder, used to conduct readers on a journey into the cosmopolitan urban world of America's first city.

The historian Robert H. Wiebe has observed that small-town life was America's norm in the mid-seventies. Depending upon the lines of transportation, groups of these towns fell into satellite patterns about a larger center, to which they looked for markets and supplies, credit and news. But however much they actually relied upon an outside world, they still managed to retain a sense of living largely to themselves.

Yet, the reality of growing interdependence, urbanization and the transforming power of technology were undermining that sense that American communities possessed of "living largely to themselves." While America in the seventies was, in Wiebe's words, a "nation of loosely connected islands, similar in kind, whose restless natives often moved only to settle down again as part of another island," Americans knew that in a rapidly changing world those islands could not long remain isolated. Even while inhabiting their secure islands, many Americans demanded knowledge of those larger social forces that were bringing them all together. The most genteel of the popular monthlies, *Scribner's* rarely, if ever, directly threatened anyone's island of security, but it did provide well-illustrated articles that made accessible a new, increasingly interconnected, rapidly developing America.

From the beginning the magazine set out to present clear and straightforward explanations and depictions of the technological innovations and the scientific discoveries that were transforming everyday life—or promised shortly to do so. The first number, for November 1870, contained T. Edward Clark's "The Bottom of the Sea," an exposition of the techniques of underwater exploration. Among its many illustrations was a composite depiction of "Man's Conquest of Nature" (Fig. 1) (1:18). In April 1878 *Scribner's* published George B. Prescott's essay on the latest developments in transmitting information, "The Telephone and the Telegraph" (15:848-58). Stedman's "Aereal Navigation" presented an idea that would not be realized for many decades. All the more need, then, to print illustrations that would enable the reader-viewer to comprehend a world where air transport had become routine.

When *Scribner's* began publishing in 1870 there was an embarrassing gap between technical advances in other realms and the awkward methods of reproducing images. The artist first drew the image in reverse on the engraving block. This drawing was then engraved by a specialist, who worked in a restrictive visual idiom. The results were hardly satisfactory. The most talented of the younger engravers chafed under the con fined conditions of the work. As Holland recalled in July 1879, "Drawing upon . . . the block has always been regarded by artists as a cramped business; the freest handling is not obtainable in that way" (18:456; July 1879).

To change all that, the editors selected Alexander W. Drake to establish the magazine's art department. Through his work at *Scribner's* and *Century* Drake would achieve a reputation, as Robert Underwood Johnson wrote, "as the foremost figure in the development of American illustrative art . . . [who] was deservedly called The Father of American Wood Engraving." Drake worked closely with Gilder, who had a strong interest in the fine arts. As the superintendent of illustration at *Scribner's*, Drake could count on the enthusiastic support, encouragement, and, not least important, the deep pockets of Scribner, Smith, and Holland. In Theodore
Low DeVinne, Drake and the editors found the best printer in America, Scribner's and its printer developed an extraordinary partnership because Scribner's "demanded a degree of excellence in its printing which was then unknown, and through cooperation of the publishers with DeVinne, and the latter's installation of heavier presses, the use of hard packing, and the invention of coated paper (by S. D. Warren & Company of Boston, largely at DeVinne's instigation), fine-line wood-engravings, and later half-tone plates were printed with a brilliancy never before achieved." With such resources behind him, Drake brought periodical illustration to such a level of perfection that Scribner's in turn stimulated the development of what became known as the "New School of American Wood-Engraving," which achieved international preeminence. An engraver and teacher of drawing at the Cooper Institute, Drake had as his goal "the truer and more exact reproduction of the work of the artist," rather than its "translation" into the engraver's language. He experimented constantly with the mechanical processes of reproduction, and from the outset the magazine made steady progress in improving the quality of its reproductions. Drake and his associates achieved their great breakthrough when they learned to apply photographic techniques to the engraving process. He discovered that by first making a photograph of the image, which was then transferred to an engraving block that had been sensitized by photographic methods to receive it, the quality and fidelity of the illustrations were markedly improved. No longer would the engraver have to work in reverse under the cramped conditions that had formerly obtained. Drake attracted to the magazine such outstanding engravers as Timothy Cole, Frederick Juengeling, Elbridge Kingsley, William B. Closson, and Henry Wolf. Kingsley recalled that between the years 1870 and 1880, American engravers "got the fever and followed the idea of original work in their separate fields, all endeavoring to make a creative artist out of the former mechanical engraver." Further, since the drawing would not be destroyed in the engraving process, the best artists were now induced to work for the magazine. As so often happens, a technical breakthrough in one area led to improvements in others. Drake and his associates learned new ways of reproducing drawings and then "extended [their] experiments to include...gouache, etchings, crayon work, and paintings in water colors and oils. This gave great variety to the magazine." Engravers of the New American School now

Consequently, Scribner's attracted painters, whose work it learned to reproduce with remarkable fidelity. One of the foreign commentators who took note of the magazine's remarkable achievements was the English art critic Philip Gilbert Hammerton, who in *The Graphic Arts* observed that

The development of delicate and versatile wood-engraving in America is due to the managers of Scribner's...who...gradually reached perfection by paying for many cuts which were never published, and by forming a school of wood-engravers animated by the same spirit. Now...the Americans have far surpassed all other nations in delicacy of execution...Not only do they understand engraving thoroughly, but they are the best printers in the world, and they give an amount of care and thought to their printing which would be considered uncommercial elsewhere.

But such care, Hammerton recognized, was particularly appropriate "in a great democratic community where thousands of people receive a good magazine" which contains "the same variety of prints 'that richer people have in their collections."" Hammerton's praise of Scribner's for bringing high quality reproductions of great art to the people at large at an affordable price would have pleased Holland immensely. In "Our Decennial" for the magazine in November 1880, he remarked that "out of the material published in these twenty volumes, there have been made and published over fifty books [with more on the way], the retail price of which amounts to more than twice the subscription price of the magazine" (21:152).

As a result of its extraordinary attention to illustration, Scribner's became a creative force in every aspect of American art. As Holland wrote, "from the moment Scribner's began to avail itself of the art of photographing pictures upon the wood a great development took place, because that presented at once to the public the work of the best artists. The men who hitherto had been shut away from us could draw and paint their pictures, which could then be photographed upon the block" (18:456; July 1879). The ability to capture in its illustrations the fine gradations of line and tone now made it possible for the magazine to reproduce with extraordinary fidelity the works of a younger generation of American painters, including such impressionists as James McNeill Whistler, William M. Chase, and John Henry Twachtman.

Two important American artists who contributed regularly, Wyatt Eaton and Walter Shirlaw, were responsible, along with the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and Gilder's wife, Hilda deKay Gilder, for the founding of the important Society of American Artists, which served as an outlet for a younger generation of American artists, many of whom had painted in Europe, where they had absorbed Impressionism. In New York these painters felt slighted by the established National Academy
of Design and so set up an organization of their own. Appropriately, the idea for a New Society came during a gathering in November 1877 at The Studio, the Gilders' New York home, an important meeting place for both aspiring and established writers and artists.26 Quite naturally, then, Gilder was able to bring the best artists to the magazine. And he worked assiduously with Drake to ensure that their work was reproduced with the utmost fidelity in Scribner's, which consequently became the focal point for the new generation of American artists.

III

Holland's purposes in supporting his magazine's attention to the fine arts diverged from the cultivation of beauty for its own sake of his young associates. He continued to insist on the centrality of a moral purpose in art, arguing that art can never be an end in itself. He repeatedly warned against confusing art with morality, writing in "Art as a Steady Diet," January 1877, that the advocates of the "new gospel" of "art and art ideas" which, ironically, his own magazine did much to stimulate, were in danger of not recognizing that "Art is no leader and no king; and the soul that undertakes to live by being the servant of this servant, will certainly win inadequate wages and die of starvation" (17:438-39; Jan. 1877).

Further, he saw the work of art as an expression of the national spirit, in this case the expanding power of America, and so in an essay on "Petiteness in Art," he urged American painters to create in the "larger and more dignified style" that he had seen in Europe, where he had spent a long Sabbatical before taking up the editorship. Such a large style would be entirely appropriate for the newly prosperous and expansionary America:

We sincerely hope that next year we shall have, in all our exhibitions, an advance in the subjects treated, so that petiteness in size of pictures may be somewhat abated for by dignity and interest of topic.... The nation is not only becoming prosperous, but is constantly progressing in the knowledge of art, so that we believe all good artists will find it for their pecuniary advantage to go higher in their work,—higher in excellence and higher in price. If they cannot sell large pictures, they can surely sell those of graver import and more elaborate execution. (20:146; May 1880)

In "American Art" Holland promoted expanded education in the fine arts as an essential component in American industrial competitiveness:

We must have art schools for those who in the common schools have shown special gifts and adaptations for art. Thus, by beginning at the bottom, all those

industries which involve the fine art element will naturally grow up among us, based upon our own designs.... Universal art cultivation is the soil from which will naturally and inevitably spring a thousand interests and industries that will minister to American prosperity, comfort, luxury, and refinement. (13:127; Nov. 1876)

The magazine's cultivation of the fine arts was for Holland of a piece with its promotion of American prosperity.

There was, then, no question in Holland's mind, or those of his readers, that art and industry were intimately related as parts of the larger whole that was America. The magazine's advances in the technology of reproducing images enabled it to serve as both a visual and a verbal matrix in which readers could discover the connections of the diverse parts of America. While Drake, Gilder, and the remarkable engravers and artists who worked for the magazine may have been motivated in developing the new art and craft of artistic reproduction primarily by a desire to do justice to works of art, they applied the new methods to other subjects as well. Scribner's was, then, the site of a direct "artistic and technological transfer," as the illustrations for articles on such subjects as the telegraph and the telephone came from the same shop as reproductions of paintings by Twachtman and Whistler. In fostering a common language of words and images, Scribner's became a place in which the connections—and, implicitly, the failures of connection—that was the America of the 1870s could be traced out.

An "illustrated magazine for the people," Scribner's developed a visual language that would enable the reader to understand the new technological developments in terms of markers associated with well-established American cultural patterns. Edmund Clarence Stedman, for instance, relates his new "acrobats" to the old dream of America as a pastoral paradise. In the new society airships are used as freight carriers which destroy the monopolistic hold of the railroads over the economy and usher in an era of prosperity and universal peace [Fig. 2] (17:586; Feb. 1879). In The Machine in the Garden, Leo Marx has written of literary and pictorial attempts to accommodate the machine to visions of a pastoral America.26 Stedman's article may well be the first attempt to reconcile the airship, symbolic of an even more powerful vision of the triumph of technology in America, with a reassuring pastoral—or should I say nautical?—image. Figure 2 presents pleasant sailboats gliding peacefully beneath the aerobat, which Stedman called the "Hyperion" of New York.

In February 1880, Scribner's published "Edison's Electric Light" by Francis R. Upton, whom it identified as "Mr. Edison's Mathematician" (19:331-44). The magazine was proud to reproduce as a frontispiece for its nineteenth volume a letter from Edison attesting that "I have read the paper by Mr. Francis Upton and it is the
first correct and authoritative account of my invention of the Electric Light,”
people. Upton’s concluding paragraph incorporates the biblical cadences of
Scribner’s religious origins with its faith in the dawn of a new technological age:

Besides the enormous practical value of the electric light as domestic illumination and motor, it furnishes a most striking and beautiful illustration of the conviviality of force. Mr. Edison’s system of lighting gives a completed cycle of forests, that poured upon the rank vegetation of the carboniferous coal beds, and as an invention, after passing in the steam-engine, through the phases of chemical, mechanical and mechanical force, into electricity, which only waits the touch of the inventor’s genius to flash into a million domestic units to illuminate a myriad homes. (19:544; Feb. 1880)

Scribner’s also described the new corporate structures that would be necessary, the magazine asserted, if the promise of the new technology were to be realized. In June, July, and October of 1879, it published a series on “Edison and His Inventions,” but the reality of Edison as a mechanical wizard, upon his ability to organize a large group of specialists and direct them to proceed systematically toward a common goal, Sedgman called for the creation of a large corporation or government entity to bring together the huge amounts of capital and scientific and technological talent necessary for the creation of an aeronautical industry. These articles, which enabled ordinary citizens to see—and wonder at—such inventions as the airship and electric light, presented sympathetically the large corporate structures that already were transforming America.

In celebrating American material progress and technology, Scribner’s became an agent of American industrial capitalism, which, it recognized, had come into competition with the systems of other nations. In “American Arms and Ammunition,” published in January 1880, William C. Church confidently spoke of the superiority of American weapons, as witnessed by the ability of the Turks to defeat the Russians with American-made rifles. But Church warned that the manufacture of large weapons had retarded that side of the arms industry, and so he argued for a policy which would shift the production of larger weapons to private industry:

Had such encouragement been given to our own cannon foundries as was dictated by the imperative requirements of public security, we might have led the world in the manufacture of heavy guns, as much as we have in the manufacture of small arms. Thus would a new industry have been established here and one not less essential to the public security than the manufacture of muskets. (19:452; Jan. 1880)

American companies could successfully compete even with the Krupp foundries in Germany and thus a lucrative industry would be created. Church anticipates the sort of close alliance between corporate weapons manufacturers and the Federal government that has emerged in America following the Second World War. As an essential part of this campaign for support of the American arms industry, Scribner’s published enticing illustrations of such weapons as the Gatling gun and, perhaps equally important, the machine tools for their construction.

While Holland’s own fiction and poetry for the magazine were illustrated, this was not, of course, the case with his “Topics of the Time” essays, which often read like “A Lay Sermon,” to use the title of his essay for Easter, 1880. These essays constituted the magazine’s essential statement on the important questions of race, economics, gender, and religion. But in a sense, the magazine as a whole was an illustration of the positions stated in the “Topics of the Time” columns, which defined the boundaries of subject matter and style for Scribner’s.

As a New Yorker, Holland was well aware of the problems of poverty in “Our Overcrowded Cities,” the subject of an essay in April 1875. But his only solution to the problem of the cities was to make rural life more attractive, to bring it more books, periodicals, and reading rooms, as a way of keeping farmers from migrating to the city in the first place (9:755-56; April 1875). The increasing wave of foreign immigration did not engage his attention. He saw no need of attacking the problems of the city head-on, with laws on housing and sanitation or higher wages for the workers. Urban poverty is not depicted in Scribner’s which, in taking its readers on trips to such cities as Hartford, Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco, went out of its way to shield them from the painful realities of urban America. We have, then, images of prosperous Chicago, where unsuspecting cattle calmly munch away in the uncrowded stockyards [Fig. 3] (10:532; Sept. 1875). By effacing the laborer and the actual killing and rending processes from Chicago’s meat-packing industry, Scribner’s presents a totally sanitized image. The illustrations in Scribner’s define urban America as a place of safe parks, elegant hotels, and prosperous commercial establishments, with nary a hint of poverty, illness, or over-crowding.

The base of Holland’s following was among upwardly mobile, self-sufficient farmers, small businessmen, skilled craftsmen, and professionals. The virtues of thrift and self-sufficiency which he preached appealed to this newly prospering class. But a magazine edited “for the people” could not remain entirely silent in the face of the severe economic dislocations of the times. The first number contained
“Children Who Work,” by Julia H. Holmes, protesting pervasive child labor practices (1867-1871; Nov. 1870). In “Our Commune” published in August 1878, Holland expressed concern about the growing poverty of workers caused by sharp downturns of the business cycle and the heartless actions of corporations that mercilessly drove down wages and fired workers in the face of changing market conditions. Still, in the aftermath of the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, Holland clearly feared that collective action of the workers posed the greater threat, the threat of the sort of social revolution represented by the brief Paris Commune of 1871. While expressing sympathy for the plight of the workers, he recoiled from the revolutionary challenge of the oppressed:

If we need reforms, let them be discussed and submitted to the popular vote. In all legitimate measures of reform, the poor man shall always have the favor and influence of this magazine, but we warn him—if he has any sympathy with “the commune”—that there can be but one end to any violent measures that he may engage in—viz.: his disastrous overthrow. (16:585; Aug. 1878)

And yet, in “The Capitalist and the Laborer,” published two months later, Holland returned to the subject, this time to attack the greed, financial manipulations, and outright thievery of prominent capitalists. This led him to assert that the “overshadowing power of corporations in this country” presented a looming threat to the American social compact:

Corporations must recognize the fact that workmen have souls—that their self-respect must be strengthened, that their minds must be fed, and that they have a moral right to a part of the wealth which their labor, combined with their brains and the money invested, produces. In short, corporations must have souls, and recognize the souls and the wants of the souls, in their employ. The time is gone by when men can be treated simply as brutes without dangerously arousing the brutal element in them. . . . And the rich everywhere are ignorant if they suppose that they can harmlessly set the poor an example of treachery to trust, of greed without conscience, and of a policy that constantly subverts the golden rule. (16:897; Oct. 1878)

Clearly, Scribner’s could not have achieved its success if it had not found ways at least of registering and acknowledging the plight of ordinary workers in the new corporate America. Neither ordinary workers nor plutocrats, the magazine’s readers felt pressure from both ends of the social spectrum. But neither Holland nor the writers and artists associated with the magazine possessed a language—of words or images—or an economic strategy which would enable them seriously to question the processes of mechanization and incorporation that were transforming America in the decades following the Civil War and which were vividly illustrated in its
Fig. 3: Scribner's 10: View in the Chicago Stockyards (Sept. 1875): 532.

Fig. 4: Scribner's 7: Type of the Yellow Race and Type of the White Race (Dec. 1873): 161.
Fig. 7: Scribner's 18: The White Girl (Aug. 1879): 489.

Fig. 8: Scribner's 20: Edgar Allan Poe (May 1880): Frontispiece.
Holland responded in April 1878 with revulsion to "what is very properly called 'the tramp nuisance,"' and he dealt with the problem of homelessness by blaming the "tramps" for their plight (15:882-83; April 1878).

Although conservative economically, Holland was liberal on race. In "The Shadow of the Negro" (20:304; June 1880) he argued that if the Negro were given equal educational and other opportunities, he would demonstrate comparable abilities as the Caucasian. Holland laid primary blame for the deplorable condition of the Negro in America squarely upon the whites, North and South. Similarly, he rebuked his fellow Christians for their barbaric treatment of the Chinese: "No people can hold a large body of men in contempt, and regard them with hatred, and treat them like beasts, without demoralizing themselves. That thing has been tried, and tried in this country, too" (13:415; Jan. 1877).

Yet, throughout Scribner's we find graphic evidence of the racism which permeated American life. In December 1873, for instance, the magazine published "Savage Man," which presented itself as a survey of the major racial types (7:160-71). The essay's title suggests its thesis, a demonstration of the superiority of the white race and the glories of Western culture by way of comparison with the "savage" races. The illustrations are intended to provide convincing proof of this thesis through physiological evidence of the inferiority of the non-Caucasian races compared to the smooth beauty of the Caucasian male [Fig. 4].

The magazine's most important early project was its profusely illustrated series on "The Great South," which ran from November 1873 to December 1874. Holland and Smith invested enormous sums, sending the writer Edward King through every region of the South. King was accompanied by an extensive retinue, including the artist J. Wells Champney, who made over 400 sketches. The "Great South" series was widely acknowledged to be a most successful publication, demystifying the region and establishing the grounds for the reconciliation of the former antagonists. Where possible, King and his artists presented images which likened the South to the North: pictures of imposing hotels, churches, railroads and factories. King and Champney defined a South now ripe for commercial development. Yet King did not ignore signs of backwardness, such as political corruption in Georgia and Alabama and, above all, of the menace of the Ku Klux Klan.

But the racism evident in "The Savage Races" is to be found here as well, since blacks are portrayed more as amusing accompaniments to other activities—never as compelling individuals [Fig. 5] (7:135; Dec. 1873). Of course, there are portraits of the exoticism of the region, such as alligators in the Everglades (9:1; Nov. 1874) and scenes of such romantic old cities as Charleston and Savannah. Yet, with its emphasis on commercial prospects, the dominance of the white man, and the appeal of traditional Southern culture, the series depicted a South that could readily be
reabsorbed into the Union. Holland reported that “in all, about four hundred and fifty pages” had been devoted to the series, which included “more than four hundred and thirty engravings” (9:248, Dec. 1874). “The Great South” conclusively demonstrated the value of illustrations for such a series, which enabled it to define through the language of representation the cultural similarities of the former antagonists. In developing a new graphic language, Scribner’s enabled Northerners and Southerners now to see each other in new ways, encouraging the reintegration of the South into the expanding America which Scribner’s promoted.

From the beginning, reporters and illustrators for Scribner’s traveled the world, bringing back such stories as “Jautis in Japan” (2:241–52, July 1871). The magazine managed to explore all the continents—with the exception of Antarctica. Its illustrations revealed both the exoticism of remote places, such as “An Island on Fire,” Titus Munson Coan’s discussion of the volcanoes of Hawaii (2:561–73; Oct. 1871), and the cultural splendor of the great monuments of European civilization, such as a May 1879 piece on “The New Museum in Rome,” which contained a number of fine illustrations of Roman antiquities (18:1–13). Conceived with illustrations as an essential feature, these articles contributed to the process by which Americans were able to comprehend the historical and cultural meanings of that larger world in which increasingly they were taking a part.

The development of improved techniques of illustration enabled this popular magazine to explore the natural world with a new realism, as in the 1879 series on “Summer Entomology.” The editors explained in introducing the first article, “Tramps after Moths and Butterflies,” that the beautiful illustrations of this article were drawn from freshly collected specimens by the late lamented Sonrel under the supervision of Mr. Charles L. Flint, editor of “Harris on Insects Injurious to Vegetation.” The drawings were all carefully examined, criticized and approved by Professor Louis Agassiz. The engravings, which, it is admitted, have never been equalled in national history work, were all made by Mr. Henry Marsh for the above admirable treatise, which is now published by the Orange Judd Co. of New York. (18:309, July 1879)

The reproductions are impressive, as revealed in the example of the ecceoria moth [Fig. 6] (18:392). Scribner’s presented the natural world as a realm to be studied on its own terms. While its official policy was to avoid artistic Realism, such illustrations contained their own lessons in the objective and careful study of the natural world.

Similarly, through its ability to reproduce works of art with exceptional fidelity, the magazine provided lessons in aesthetic perception. Especially in the closing years of the decade, Scribner’s published amply illustrated articles on some of the best contemporary American painters. For instance, in May and July of 1880, William Cary Brownell knowledgeably described the “Younger Painters of America,” including Twachtman, Eaton, Eakins, and Chase (20:1–15; May 1880; 321–35; July 1880). In “Spring Herbaceous” Clarence Cook analyzed Winslow Homer, Eakins, Arthur Quartley, and Robert Blum (20:161–69; June 1880). Many of these artists also drew for the magazine, so that by the end of the decade Scribner’s had become a major force in contemporary American art. In the reproduction of paintings, the magazine’s art department faced perhaps its supreme challenge: to represent with something like fidelity the work of contemporary artists, where meaning is a function of subtle gradations of color and delicate tonal balances. The magazine’s article on Whistler, for instance, was illustrated with a remarkable fidelity for the time, as reflected in its reproduction of the charged “The White Girl” [Fig. 7] (18:489; Aug. 1879).

Over the course of the decade, then, through a series of gradual steps, Scribner’s had moved a long way from the rather confined narrow Christian moralism that Holland’s after ego, Timothy Titcomb, had advocated.

It is clear, however, that the broadening of Scribner’s could not have been accomplished without a certain conflict, both within the editor himself and between the editor and others associated with the magazine. Holland, we have seen, was pulled in several directions in attempting to respond to the plight of ordinary workers in a capitalist economy. Other kinds of conflict came from unlikely places. In 1877, for instance, Stedman published an enthusiastic essay on Algernon Charles Swinburne as part of his immensely popular series on the Victorian poets. Holland detested Swinburne, and wrote Stedman that your admiration of the man’s wonderful power and skill has blinded your mind to his immoralities and his immoral influence. Perhaps I am squeamish, but I cannot help it. If I were publishing a literary periodical, that only found a literary audience, I would not say a word. We should all understand you, but I publish for the crowd, and they take you for their leader and hold you responsible for all nuances, and moral damage.29

But with Gilder’s support, Stedman refused to modify the essay and Holland had to acquiesce in its publication in his own magazine. In 1880 Holland again had to acquiesce to Stedman, this time allowing the publication of his sympathetic treatments of Whitman and Poe as part of the “Poets of America” series. Holland had attacked both writers and in no uncertain terms in the pages of Scribner’s. He had treated Poe as insane and Whitman as immoral. That Stedman’s essays appeared in Scribner’s lent to both a legitimacy that troubled Holland greatly; after all, he had assured his readers in 1870 that this magazine would be absolutely safe for the entire
family. To make matters worse, the magazine carried attractive portraits of both. Wyatt Eaton's drawing from a photograph of Poe, engraved by Timothy Cole, is particularly compelling. Retaining its pattern of black dots, the image seems to go out of its way to proclaim its photographic origins [Fig. 8] (20:Frontispiece; May 1880). Yet the old moralist Holland was flexible enough to allow publication of both essays.

Holland's own acceptance of Howells's A Modern Instance provides a fitting comment on the end of the "Holland age of American letters."

Having emerged from the depression of 1873 virtually unscathed financially, Scribner's at the end of the decade enjoyed an amazing prosperity and growing international recognition. And so on the eve of the half-tone, the magazine deserves credit for bringing the art, craft, and technology of magazine illustration to new levels of perfection. Through its illustrations, Scribner's prepared for its readers-lookers to be educated, prepared the air, under the sea, through tunnels, into cities, and to the remotest spots of the globe. In the aftermath of the Civil War it became a vehicle for reconciliation of North and South through its publication of Southern writers and especially its "Great South" series, and it continued to present images of the South that would promote the reintegration of the region. In its series of articles on American colleges, Scribner's did not neglect the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, presenting its famous Wren Building, restored to its eighteenth-century Georgian dignity, as an attractive image of higher education in America [Fig. 9] (11:17; Nov. 1875).

Further, from the start it had been Holland's goal to bring a new class of readers to periodical literature. In this, he succeeded so well that he felt the need to defend Scribner's and other popular magazines against charges that periodical literature was depressing the market for books, that reading periodicals had become a substitute for book reading. On the contrary, Holland argued, in "The Reading of Periodicals," the process works the other way, that the periodical, a product, like the newspaper, of new methods of gathering, printing, and disseminating knowledge, recruits to the community of readers those who otherwise could not afford the cost of books or at least initially the time to spend with them:

The masses have neither the money to buy books nor the leisure to read them. The periodical becomes, then, the democratic form of literature. It is the intellectual food of the people. It stands in the very front rank of the agents of civilization, and in its way, directly and indirectly is training up a generation of book-readers. It is the pioneer: the book will come later. (5:636; March 1873)

An agent of democracy, the periodical in America had at last come into its own, leading Holland to claim that "the popular magazine of America is demonstrably better than any popular magazine in the world. . . . That it is truly educating its readers is proved by the constant demand for its improvement" (5:636; March 1873).

Here, then, is Holland's statement of his aims, his apology, his defense of Scribner's. In responding to the charge that his magazine, in catering to the needs of the public at large, was responsible for a debasement of the standards of literary by undermining the culture of the book, Holland insisted that such magazines as Scribner's were actually agents promoting literary by recruiting a new class of readers, many of whom would ultimately become book buyers. And so he argued that newspapers, periodicals, and books should be understood as an integrated, mutually supportive, and dynamic system that inevitably would continue to change as new mechanical means of disseminating images and text were developed.

In the post-Civil War years, Scribner's took the lead in using illustrations as a means of recruiting a new class of readers to the periodical, and in the process it transformed American periodical literature. Of course, the questions which Holland raises in responding to critics of the magazine, questions about the relationship of words to images and the effect on literacy of the new mechanical means of reproducing and distributing both text and images, remain central in the electronic culture of the concluding years of the twentieth century.

Never threatening, always reassuring, never far from the mainstream, Scribner's, on the eve of the half-tone, used the popular hunger for "the pictorial representation of life and truth" to move with its readers along the way to the national prosperity that all desired, and in the process redefined the periodical in America. The embodiment of Josiah Gilbert Holland's vision of American civil religion for the 1870s, Scribner's became a vehicle of national integration, showing its many readers new ways to comprehend and to participate in a rapidly changing America to which, through its brilliant illustrations, it gave graphic definition.

Notes


2Scribner's Monthly 22 (June 1881): 303. Future references to Scribner's will be given in the text and identified by volume, page number, and date.


4Dickinson's friendship with the Holland family may be traced in Theodora Van Wagenen Ward, ed., Emily Dickinson's Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1951).

Charles Scribner’s Sons, (1894) is useful. Edward Eggleston’s memorial notice in Century (1859) contains several figures for his book. The reference to “Tupper Holland” is from (1825). Quoted in (1923) 85.

5 For a discussion of the maia for illustration, see (1981) 81. My study is indebted to John’s excellent analysis of the Century (1951) 242-61.

6 For a discussion of Benson’s career as a critic and a full bibliography of his work, see my “Between Realism and Romanticism: The Curious Career of Eugene Benson,” American Literary Realism 14 (1951): 190-198.

[Figure 1. Scribner’s 1: Man’s Conquests of Nature (Nov. 1870): 18.

Fig. 2. Scribner’s 17: An Atrocity of the Near Future (Feb. 1879): 566.

Fig. 3. Scribner’s 10: View in the Chicago Stockyards (Sept. 1875): 532.

Fig. 4. Scribner’s 7: Type of the Yellow Race and Type of the White Race (Dec. 1873): 161.

Fig. 5. Scribner’s 7: Outside the Court-House (Dec. 1873): 135.

Fig. 6. Scribner’s 18: Cecropia Moth (July 1879): 392.

Fig. 7. Scribner’s 18: The White Girl (Aug. 1879): 499.

Fig. 8. Scribner’s 20: Edgar Allen Poe (May 1880): Frontispiece.

Fig. 9. Scribner’s 11: William and Mary College before the Fire of 1859 (Nov. 1875): 1.

Works Cited


“Art as a Steady Diet.” Scribner’s 17 (January 1877).
Maury, T. B. "Weather Telegrams and Storm-Forecasts." *Scribner's* (February 1871).

Upton, Francis R. "Edison's Electric Light." *Scribner's* 19 (February 1880): 531-44.