



PROJECT MUSE®

Edith Wharton's Bible

Sally A. R. Jones

Edith Wharton Review, Volume 34, Number 1, 2018, pp. 62-78 (Article)

Published by Penn State University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/732746>

From the Archives

Edith Wharton's Bible

Sally A. R. Jones, University of Aberdeen

Abstract

Before Edith Wharton's library became available at The Mount, scholars relied on the well-known bookseller notation that her Bible contained "passages marked by Wharton, especially in Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Isaiah." This article makes available a careful investigation of Wharton's annotations in her Bible, revealing not only the specifics of the passages Wharton marked, but also her focus on other sections of the Bible as well, including the books of Job, Joel, Micah, and the Pauline Epistles in the New Testament. Taken as a whole, Wharton's considerable marginalia illuminates theological issues of interest to her, and one in particular—the contemplation of wisdom—is a recurrent theme. For all the many enigmas it presents, and future threads to follow, Edith Wharton's Bible is an intriguing artifact of an interrogation into the mystery of divine and human wisdom.

Keywords

religion, Bible, wisdom, Edith Wharton

In pursuit of archival material related to Edith Wharton's personal spiritual journey, I traveled to The Mount, courtesy of a University of Aberdeen Research Award. The Mount now houses what remains of Edith Wharton's private library of about 2,700 books, many including active notes and markings that reveal Wharton's avid use of them. Of particular interest to me was her collection of Bibles and prayer books, which includes a three-volume set of the 1899 version of the *Biblia Sacra*,¹ two editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*,² and two editions of the Holy Bible. The cover of one of the prayer books is embossed with her brother's name, Frederic R. Jones, and the year 1858, with the interior inscription, "Colin Clark left to him by his godmother Edith Wharton

Easter 1938.” The other prayer book shows considerable signs of wear; it has an embossed cross on the front, with an inscription in the same handwriting, perhaps Colin Clark’s, reading “This is Edith Wharton’s prayer book given to her on her confirmation & used by her as a girl.” The attached cord bookmark of her prayer book marks the Evening Prayer, taken from Psalm 27, where a pencil mark appears beside the final line: “Hearken unto my voice, O LORD, when I cry unto thee; have mercy upon me, and hear me” (Psalm 27:7). Other than another small tick mark in the Catechism,³ the prayer books do not yield any annotations.

The two Bibles in The Mount Library are fascinating, even in their relation to each other. The earlier edition belonged to Wharton’s brother Harry and bears his name, Henry E. Jones, within an embossed diamond design entitled Holy Bible on the front cover.⁴ It also has raised bands with the gold stamped title, Holy Bible, on the spine and closes with a brass clasp. As with the two prayer books, the Bible with a much less embellished appearance, but more signs of wear, belongs to Wharton. Hers has a plain brown leather cover, very well-worn, with the spine bearing the only distinguishing features of raised bands and gold stamped title, Holy Bible (see fig. 1). Both Bibles are gifts from their mother, Lucretia Jones, who inscribed Harry’s “H. E. Jones—from his Mother. May 29th 1859.” The inscription in Edith’s Bible is signed more formally with only her mother’s initials: “Edith Newbold Jones April 29th 1878 L.S.J.” Perhaps Lucretia Jones slighted her daughter with a less-ornamented and personalized gift than her brother’s, or perhaps she was remaining consistent with her scruples about a lady’s name never appearing in print; after all, even the invitation for Wharton’s wedding did not contain Lucretia’s name, only the “daughter of Mrs. George Frederic Jones” (Lee 72). Yet certainly Jones’s choice of a polyglot edition,⁵ featuring many alternative translations and related biblical references on every page would have been an ideal selection for her highly literate daughter. The many markings it contains affirm its usefulness for Wharton.

In *A Backward Glance*, Edith Wharton describes her early introduction to the Bible, recalling with enthusiasm “the long music-drunken hours on that library floor, with Isaiah and the Song of Solomon and the Book of Esther” (70). Most biographers have tended to see Wharton’s religious life as belonging predominantly to this phase of early childhood and a later one in her old age. The various markings in her Bible, however, suggest a vivid interest in scripture which likely extends beyond her “God-intoxicated” childhood (Wharton, “Life and I” 1073–74) into her mature life. Until recently,

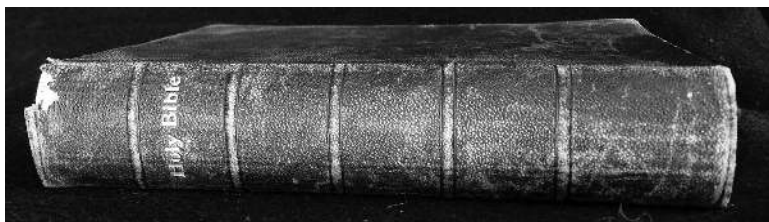


FIG. 1 Edith Wharton's Bible.
Photo by Sally Jones, courtesy of The Mount, Lenox, MA.

when Wharton's library became available at The Mount, scholars relied on the well-known bibliographical catalog of the bookseller George Ramsden, who noted that her Bible contained "passages marked by Wharton, especially in Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Isaiah" (Ramsden 12). Carol Singley and others have carefully explored connections between these biblical books and Wharton's fiction.⁶ Now, a firsthand examination of her Bible not only makes available the intriguing specifics of the passages Wharton marked, but also reveals where she marked other sections of the Bible. It is my intent here to provide an exhaustive description of Edith Wharton's markings as a resource for scholars, giving where necessary some context for the passages she highlights, and at times drawing together thematic patterns that emerge. In a forthcoming work, I will extend my analysis of these themes to trace their echoes in her published writings.

However, the process of recording and interpreting Wharton's very interactive reading technique presents several challenges. One difficulty arises from the complexity of the variants available in this version of the Bible. Marked with superscript notes, these alternatives appear in a slim column set between the two main columns of text on each page. Job 12:3, for example, presents the following: "But I have understanding as well as you; I *am* not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" Superscript notes show the alternative "*an heart*" for "understanding"; I "*fall not lower than you*" for "I *am* not inferior to you"; and "*with whom are not such as these?*" for "who knoweth not such things as these?" Initially for each passage that Wharton marked, I transcribed the primary wording and also any alternatives referenced in the center column, but it made the transcription very complicated. Ultimately, as Wharton did not mark any of these variants, I decided to reproduce below only the primary text. A further challenge is deciphering Wharton's sometimes very casual marking

style and deciding precisely where her pencil marks begin and end. As much as possible, I attempt to re-create her emphases accurately.

Taken as a whole, Wharton's annotations in her Bible illuminate theological issues of interest to her, namely, one in particular: the contemplation of wisdom. The majority of her markings fall into two sections of the Old Testament: the wisdom literature, particularly Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and three of the books of prophecy, Isaiah, Joel, and Micah. Traditionally, the books of Job, Psalms, the Song of Solomon (the Song of Songs), Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are known as the "Books of Wisdom," or, alternatively, the "Books of Poetry." While Proverbs offers commentary and guidance on practical living, Ecclesiastes and Job examine philosophical questions prompted by the difficulties of life experience. It is not surprising that such issues intrigued a novelist like Edith Wharton. All the marked passages in the New Testament continue with the recurrent theme of wisdom, strongly suggesting that not only did the "music" (*A Backward Glance* 70) and the "majestic phraseology" (*A Backward Glance* 40) of the Bible engage her, but so too did its insights into the perplexities of life.

The Old Testament

*The Book of Job*⁷

The first handwritten marks to appear in Wharton's Bible occur in the Book of Job. In her recollections of "A Little Girl's New York," Wharton attributes her discovery of the "organ-roll of Isaiah [and] Job" to Reverend Washburn's reading from scripture (284). It is not surprising that the little girl who so loved "making up" would have been drawn to the superb storytelling of Job, which confronts the age-old dilemma of bad things happening to good people. In the opening chapters of the Book of Job, he is introduced as an upright man with a large family and many herds of livestock. God has blessed Job, but Satan argues that Job loves the gifts of God rather than the Giver and will surely curse God once he is tested. God agrees to let Satan test Job, and Satan brings about the sudden death of Job's children, the loss of his animals, then diseases that torture Job with physical pain. At this point, Wharton's markings begin in the third chapter, under the column heading "*Job's complaint of life*."⁸ This chapter contains Job's first speech, expressing the depths of his sorrow; he laments the day he was born. Wharton marks an X beside the first verse—"After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day"—and verse 3: "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and

the night *in which* it was said, There is a man child conceived.” One can imagine Ethan Frome echoing these dark thoughts. Then Wharton’s long vertical line continues, marking an entire passage from the middle of verse 3 through verse 10, the continuation of Job cursing his day of birth: “Because it shut not up the doors of my *mother’s* womb, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes” (v. 10).

Then Wharton’s line stops, leaving verse 11 unmarked—“Why died I not from the womb? *why* did I *not* give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?”—before proceeding again with a long line beside verses 12–15:

¹² Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck?

¹³ For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest,

¹⁴ With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves;

¹⁵ Or with princes that had gold, or filled their houses with silver[.]

This section continues with Job expressing longing for the grave, imagining it as a place of peace and rest from his suffering. Then Wharton’s line resumes beside verses 21 and 22. Verse 21 begins, “Which long for death, but it *cometh* not,” and she underlines “and dig for it more than for hid treasures”; while verse 22 continues, “Which rejoice exceedingly, *and* are glad when they can find the grave?”

In her selections from Job, Wharton seems intrigued by this most anguished kind of human suffering; Job’s existence, once rewarded by God, has become an unbearable struggle for him. A number of interesting questions arise from Wharton’s focus on Job’s terrible state of mind and the failure of all human wisdom, offered through his three friends, to help him make sense of it. One of the most compelling questions concerns when she marked these passages. As Meredith Goldsmith points out in her study of the marginalia in Wharton’s books of Whitman, “the lesson of the archives is that we’ll never really know,” but here and elsewhere, these marked biblical passages may seem more like the choices of a woman who has known suffering rather than those of a young, albeit precocious girl.

In chapter 4, the reply of one of Job’s friends, Eliphaz, Wharton marks part of verse 18 and all of verses 19 and 20, which remark on the fragility and brevity of human existence: “¹⁸ Behold, [God] put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: ¹⁹ How much less *in* them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation *is* in the dust, *which* are crushed before the moth? ²⁰ They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever, without any regarding *it*.”

The next marking appears in chapter 7, under the heading, "*He reproveth his friends.*" She makes a double vertical line beside only verse 6, where Job laments, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope." Her marking extends a bit beside the first half of verse 7, though possibly unintentionally. It reads, "O remember that my life *is* wind."

Wharton marks an X at the beginning of chapter 9, when Job answers another friend, Bildad the Shuhite, who has argued that God cannot be unjust, so Job's suffering must be a result of sin. In a section describing God's greatness, including His creation of the constellations, Wharton also marks both sides of verse 9 with vertical lines—"Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south"—and an outer longer line suggests her interest in the surrounding verses as well, especially verse 10: "Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number."

Later in the same chapter, Wharton marks verse 28, where Job admits, "I am afraid of all my sorrows, I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent." With another line, she continues marking verses 29–31: "²⁹ *If I be wicked, why then labour I in vain?* ³⁰ *If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean;* ³¹ *Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch,*" and her line may extend to include the end of verse 31, "and mine own clothes shall abhor me."

Wharton marks another X beside the heading "Chapter X." In this chapter, Job imagines God is angry with him but begs to know the nature of the charges against him. Wharton specifically marks this plea in verse 2: "I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." She also doubly marks the last verse of the chapter, verse 22, with a line beside it and a small X at its end, in which Job echoes the longing for the grave of chapter 3: "A land of darkness, as darkness *itself*; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and *where* the light *is* as darkness."

In chapter 11, Zophar asks Job in verse 7, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Wharton marks verse 8 where he continues, "*It is* as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" When Job answers in chapter 12, Wharton marks verse 2 with her two parallel vertical lines: "No doubt but ye *are* the people, and wisdom shall die with you." Job is evidently frustrated with the futility of his friends' wisdom. Wharton makes a third vertical line which marks verse 2 again, then extends it to include verse 3: "But I have understanding as well as you; I *am* not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these?" Finally, at the end of a passage that acknowledges how wisdom and power

belong to God, Wharton marks verse 16, “With him *is* strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver *are* his.”

In chapter 14, under the column heading “*Of man’s frailty and mortality*,” Wharton marks the beginning of verse 20, “Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance,” which ends with “and sendest him away.” Job is exhausted and discouraged at this point because God will not relieve his suffering. Wharton’s final marking in the Book of Job is a strong vertical line beside Job 17:14: “I have said to corruption, Thou *art* my father: to the worm, *Thou art* my mother, and my sister.” It is notable that Wharton does not mark any of the final chapters of the Book of Job, in which he is vindicated and eventually restored, as though her interest primarily lies in Job’s suffering and his search for wisdom as he questions God.

The Proverbs

A focus on wisdom also appears in Wharton’s markings in the Proverbs, a collection of three thousand sayings generally accredited to King Solomon and his compilers. In the opening passages of Proverbs, wisdom and folly are represented as women, both trying to entice followers. The second, third, and fourth chapters describe the rewards of a life spent seeking wisdom. Wharton’s markings begin in the third chapter, under the column heading “*Benefits conferred by Wisdom*.” Her penciled line begins to the right of verse 33: “The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.” She underlines the beginning of verse 34, “Surely he scorneth the scorners.” In chapter 4, Wharton marks verse 18 with her emphatic double vertical lines: “But the path of the just *is* as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” Further on, she uses a left bracket to mark verse 23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life.” She underlines “the issues of life” with a line that then extends to form a loose right bracket of the whole verse.

In chapter 5, which serves as a warning against adultery, verse 6 begins, “Lest thou shouldest,” and Wharton underlines what follows: “ponder the path of life,” then the verse ends, “her ways are moveable, *that* thou canst not know them.” Continuing in this theme, much of chapter 7, the enticement of the Woman Folly,⁹ who lures a man into adultery, is marked with one long vertical line to the left of verses 9–21. It is interesting to note that the woman is not portrayed as a prostitute but as a wealthy woman who expects her “goodman” or husband home at an appointed time. As a counterpoint to Folly, the call of

Wisdom personified begins at chapter 8, where Wharton marks a very large X extending from the heading “Chapter VIII” to the first five verses:

¹ Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?

² She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths.

³ She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors.

⁴ Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice *is* to the sons of man.

⁵ O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.

Later in chapter 8, verses 22–31 describe Wisdom’s role in creation, as an attribute of God before “ever the earth was” (v. 23). With a vertical line beside it, Wharton marks verse 28: “When he established the clouds above; when he strengthened the fountains of the deep.”

Similarly, there is a large X to the right of “Chapter IX” and the first verse: “Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars.” Later, Wharton draws attention to verse 13 with an X: “A foolish woman *is* clamorous; *she is* simple, and knoweth nothing.” The chapter goes on to describe how this foolish woman entices those who lack judgment to indulge in illicit pleasures, marked with a faint line: “Stolen waters are sweet, and bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant” (v. 17). Wharton uses double marks beside the response to this temptation: “But he knoweth not that the dead *are* there; *and that* her guests *are* in the depths of hell” (v. 18).¹⁰

The subsequent chapters highlight various suggestions for a life of wisdom. In chapter 17, Wharton uses double lines to mark the side of verse 22, “A merry heart doeth good *like* a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.”¹¹ Given her penchant for social critique, it is not surprising that Wharton marks various warnings against human failings. Gossip is condemned in Proverbs 18:8, which she marks with a firm line: “The words of a talebearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.” She also highlights a caution against lying, placing a dark pencil line beside “Bread of deceit *is* sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel” (Proverbs 20:17). Sloth and greed receive similar treatment, with a mark at verse 25 and possibly 26a of chapter 21: “²⁵ The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. ²⁶ He coveteth greedily all the day long.” In keeping with her own lifelong work ethic, Wharton also marks Proverbs 22:29 with emphasis, using

her double vertical lines beside “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean *men*.” In chapter 23, she distinctly marks verses 10 and 11 with a firm vertical line: “¹⁰ Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: ¹¹ For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.” Also, her double vertical lines appear beside Proverbs 25:14: “Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain.” Under the column heading “*The reward of prudence*,” Wharton marks Proverbs 27:20: “Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.” With a double vertical line, she marks with emphasis verse 22: “Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.”

In chapter 30, an appendix containing the sayings of Agur, Wharton makes a single vertical line next to the end of verse 14 and the beginning of verse 15, then adds a horizontal line, forming a cross, or rotated X. Before her mark, verse 14 begins, “*There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the*” and her mark begins beside “earth, and the needy from *among men*.” Her mark seems to emphasize verse 15, “The horseleach hath two daughters, *crying*, Give, give. There are three *things that* are never satisfied, *yea*, four *things* say not, *It is enough*.” The alternative translation provided for “It” in this verse is “wealth.” Although Wharton does not mark verse 16, it lists the four things of verse 15 that do not say “it is enough”: “The grave; and the barren womb; the earth *that* is not filled with water; and the fire *that* saith not, *It is enough*.” Wharton uses her typical vertical line for verse 17: “The eye *that* mocketh at *his* father, and despiseth to obey *his* mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.”

Finally, Wharton makes a leaning X, or slightly tilted cross, midway through verse 31 and partway into verse 32. Verse 29 had mentioned “three *things* which go well, *yea*, four are comely in going.” Wharton may have wished to indicate the last “thing” in that list in verse 31, “a king, against whom *there is* no rising up.” Her mark likely includes the first part of verse 32, “If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, *lay* thine hand upon thy mouth.”

Ecclesiastes; or the Preacher

Like Job, the author of Ecclesiastes seeks to understand the meaning of existence and offers the wisdom he has gleaned through his long experience of life. Wharton’s marks begin in the second chapter, where Wharton uses three firm

vertical lines to mark the second half of verse 10. It begins, "And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy," and she triply emphasizes the continuation, "for my heart rejoiced in all my labour; and this was my portion of all my labour." She resumes marking in verse 12, which begins, "And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly," echoing the themes she marks in Proverbs. Her double vertical lines highlight the second half of verse 12, "for what *can* the man *do* that cometh after the king? *even* that which hath been already done."

The entire seventh chapter is a meditation on wisdom, and in it there is an uncharacteristic marking that looks like a partial star, in faint blue ink. It may have been made at a different time, or even by someone else. It marks verse 4, from which the epigraph of *The House of Mirth* is drawn: "The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth." Later in chapter 7, her characteristic double vertical lines mark verses 21 and 22: "21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: 22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others."

She marks an X beside the heading "Chapter IX," as is consistent with her focus on wisdom. The chapter begins, "For all this I considered in my heart, even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works *are* in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred *by* all *that is* before them" (9:1). Later, the author of Ecclesiastes points out that wisdom is better than folly (vv. 13–18), and Wharton marks verse 17: "The words of wise *men are* heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools."

In chapter 10, Wharton uses double vertical lines to mark verse 7: "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth." Her lines do extend, perhaps unintentionally, beside the beginning of verse 8, "He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it," a statement that ends with "and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him." Her final marking in Ecclesiastes, a set of double vertical lines, appears beside "He that observeth the wind, shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds, shall not reap" (11:4). This chapter in general seems to emphasize not waiting too long, either to get to work or to remember God.

In addition to her evident interest in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, Edith Wharton's annotations also show a careful reading in the books of prophecy, which are the final seventeen books of the Old Testament, also called the Prophets. This portion of the Bible comprises prophecy concerning the expected Messiah, as well as ramifications for the people of Israel

around the time of their captivity in Babylon. Wharton's marginalia appears most often in the prophetic Book of Isaiah, as well as sparingly in the books of Joel and Micah.

The Book of the Prophet Isaiah

In Isaiah, Wharton places a large X at the beginning of chapter 13, either indicating an emphasis on the entire chapter, or the first two verses, which fall within the length of her X: "THE burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see. ² Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles." Near the bottom of the same column, her line begins beside the latter part of verse 18, "their eye shall not spare children" and extends beyond the end of verse 19 to the bottom of the page. On the following page, she uses a long line to mark the rest of verse 19 and verses 20–22 to the end of the chapter. A second vertical line outside of her first long line adds emphasis to the middle of the passage, mostly verse 21: "But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there: and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures: and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there."¹²

Even though this prophecy is a bleak message for Israel, the following chapter promises God will have compassion on His people, and Wharton marks another cross (or tilted X) at the opening verse of chapter 14: "For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob." Later in the same chapter, she makes multiple marks (see fig. 2) on Isaiah's song against the king of Babylon, marking verses 5 through 16 with another long vertical line; within this outer line, she adds emphasis with two more short parallel lines beside the first part of verse 9: "Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet *thee* at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, *even* all the chief ones of the earth." She adds another single vertical line beside verses 11 and 12: "¹¹ Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, *and* the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. ¹² How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!" Later in the second part of Isaiah, which offers comfort instead of judgment against Israel, Edith Wharton uses her double vertical lines to mark verse 15 of chapter 45: "Verily, thou *art* a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

The green ribbon bookmark of the Bible lies between two pages of Isaiah, both bearing her marks, and while we do not know if she placed it there or if a

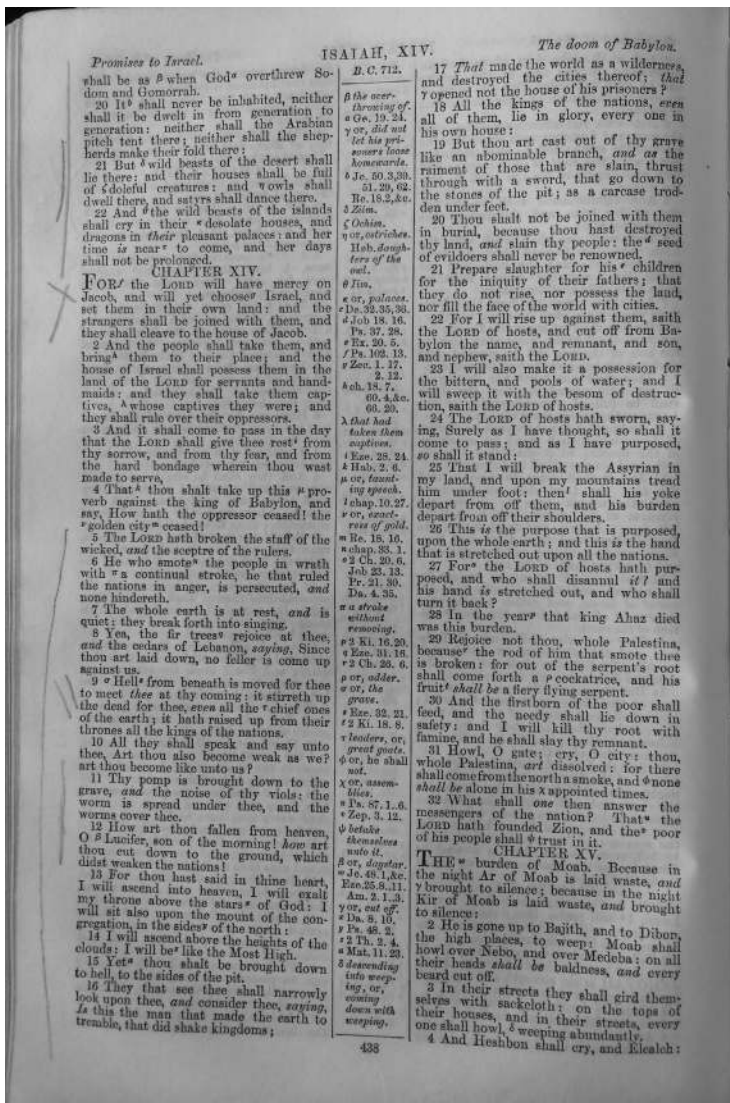


FIG. 2 Wharton's markings in the book of Isaiah.
Photo by Sally Jones, courtesy of The Mount, Lenox, MA.

later reader moved it, it may well be where she left it. On the left bookmarked page, she underlines "the cup of trembling" in the verse, "Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of his fury; thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out" (Isaiah 51:17). On the opposite page, she draws a V or arrow to mark the second

verse of chapter 53, which describes the Lord's righteous servant: "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him."

Wharton uses a large horizontal V to point to the beginning of chapter 54, a description of the future glory of Zion, which begins, "Sing, O barren, thou *that* didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou *that* didst not travail with child: for more *are* the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD." This chapter continues with verses that use the personification of a forsaken and barren wife; the two verses leading up to her next marking give context to her emphasis: "6 For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. 7 For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." With a vertical line, she marks the next verse, "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer" (v. 8). Further down, she marks verse 11 with another vertical line, "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, *and* not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires."

In chapter 58, under the column heading "*Sanctification of the Sabbath*," Wharton uses her characteristic vertical line to mark the beginning of verse 12, but adds slash marks at the beginning and end of the first phrase to clearly demarcate the words "And *they that shall be* of thee shall build the old waste places." Her final markings in Isaiah appear in chapter 63, where she uses a large X to mark the chapter heading, and a vertical line to mark the first three verses, which use the figure of a winepress to describe the coming judgement of God.

Joel

The prophet Joel delivers both a warning of coming judgment for evil and a promise of blessing for those who are faithful. Edith Wharton's only marking in Joel correlates to her first full-length novel, *The Valley of Decision*: "14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD *is* near in the valley of decision. 15 The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining." This passage, marked with a brief vertical line, is part of a proclamation to the nations to prepare for a final battle prior to the final coming and judgment of the Lord.

Micah

It seems fitting that Wharton's final marking in the Old Testament highlights the theme of social justice. Like the other prophets, Micah's message is both negative and positive in that it condemns idolatry and empty religious ritual, yet offers the promise of hope for God's faithful. Wharton marks the eighth verse of chapter 6, where Israel is reminded of the importance of doing good: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

The New Testament

Carol Singley has pointed out that "Wharton possessed an Old rather than a New Testament sensibility" (104), as we have seen in the concentration of marginalia so far. While there are relatively few marked passages in the New Testament, each of them continues to reveal Wharton's interest in wisdom.

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans

In this letter to the people in Rome, just above where Edith Wharton's first mark occurs, the subject of wisdom appears again: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (11:33). In keeping with her lifelong commitment to "finding out," Wharton highlights Paul's advice for striving toward transformation through "renewing" of the mind. With a long vertical line, Wharton marks "¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (12:1–2).

The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians

This letter written to the church at Corinth opens with an attempt to settle quarrels among the congregation. In the latter half of chapter 1, Paul discusses where true wisdom lies (in God alone), and Wharton draws a line beside verse 22: "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." Further

down, she marks verse 27: “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” In chapter 2, this discussion of wisdom provides context for Wharton’s final mark:

- ⁴ And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:
- ⁵ That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.
- ⁶ Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:
- ⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:
- ⁸ Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
- ⁹ But, as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

And it is here that Wharton makes her last mark in her Bible, at the tenth verse: “But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” Indeed, this verse seems a fitting tribute to Wharton’s own indefatigable search into all things, even the deep things of God. For all the many enigmas it presents, and future threads to follow, Edith Wharton’s Bible is an intriguing artifact of her concentrated interrogation into the mystery of divine and human wisdom.

SALLY A.R. JONES teaches courses in American and Canadian literature, British modernism, and detective fiction at Grande Prairie Regional College, in Alberta, Canada. Her research interests include women’s writing, Canadian pioneer texts, detective fiction, and theology. Sally is a graduate of Trinity Western University (B.A.) and Middle Tennessee State University (M.A.) Her master’s thesis traces G. K. Chesterton’s influence in detective fiction, particularly his creation of the priest detective who applies compassion to the solution of crimes. At the University of Aberdeen Sally is currently completing her Ph.D. dissertation focused on the precarious position of single women throughout Edith Wharton’s work.

Notes

1. The Latin Vulgate of the Roman Catholic Church, titled *Biblia Sacra: Vulgatae Editionis*, 3 vols. (Ratisbona [Regensburg]: Nationale Verlagsanstalt, 1899).

2. Both are the Americanized version of the traditional Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, ratified by the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, October 16, 1790.

3. In a section asking about Holy Communion, there is a faint mark beside "Question: What is the inward part, or thing signified?" This passage continues with "Answer: The Body and Blood of Christ, which are spiritually taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper."

4. *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments: Translated out of the Original Tongues; and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised, by His Majesty's Special Command* (London: printed by G. E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode, 1859). This version is commonly known as the King James Bible.

5. *The English Version of the Polyglot Bible, Containing Old and New Testaments: With a Copious and Original Selection of References to Parallel and Illustrative Passages* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons). In 1816, Samuel Bagster produced *The English Version of the Polyglot Bible*, based on the King James Version of the Bible but containing a multitude of parallel references. Edith Wharton's Bible seems to be a later edition, though it is not dated, as it resembles an 1849 printing. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Samuel Bagster the Elder (1771–1851), "The production of English bibles was a monopoly in the United Kingdom, confined in England to the king's printer and the two great universities, in Scotland to Sir D. H. Blair and John Bruce, and in Ireland to Mr. Grierson. It had been decided, however, that the patent did not apply to bibles printed with notes," which allowed Bagster to produce his inexpensive edition, more accessible than the rare and expensive polyglot Bibles of that time. Bagster's Bible appeared "(with a preface by T. Chevalier), in foolscap octavo size, containing a selection of over 60,000 parallel references, mainly selected and all verified by himself. The book was extremely successful. Every detail in its production was superintended by the publisher, who introduced a new style of binding in the best Turkey morocco, with flexible tight backs, the sheets being sewed with thin thread or silk. He also used prepared sealskins, which, with their 'pin-head grain,' were much admired." "Bagster, Samuel (1772–1851)," in *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 2, ed. Leslie Stephen (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885).

6. See Carol Singley, *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995).

7. These section headings reproduce the titles as they appear in Wharton's Bible. Wharton's edition, however, presents titles in all capital letters.

8. The column headings reproduce the titles as they appear in Wharton's Bible.

9. See Carol Singley's discussion of *The Reef*, which engages the female images of Wisdom and Folly in the Bible (*Matters* 145).

10. Wharton's double marking extends past the *heading* and the first verse of chapter 10, but it may be inadvertent. If she meant to include it, it is an extension of her interest in wisdom: "The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother."

11. Again, because her marking is informal and not always deliberately precise, the longer outside line could be interpreted to include the last line of verse 21 and the whole of verse 23. Verse 21 reads, "He that begetteth a fool *doeth it* to his sorrow; and the father of a

fool hath no joy." Verse 23 adds, "A wicked *man* taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment."

12. The punctuation in this passage diverges from that of the standard King James Version.

Works Cited

English Version of the Polyglot Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments: With a Copious and Original Selection of References to Parallel and Illustrative Passages. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, n.d.

Goldsmith, Meredith. "What Did She Really Mean by That?" *The Mount: Edith Wharton's Home*. 14 Nov. 2014. <https://www.edithwharton.org/uncategorized/really-mean/>.

Lee, Hermione. *Edith Wharton*. London: Vintage, 2008.

Ramsden, George. *Edith Wharton's Library: A Catalogue*. Settrington: Stone Trough Books, 1999.

Singley, Carol. *Edith Wharton: Matters of Mind and Spirit*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

Wharton, Edith. *A Backward Glance*. 1933. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

———. "Life and I." *Novellas and Other Writings*. Ed. Cynthia Griffin Wolff. New York: Library of America, 1990. 1069–96.

———. "A Little Girl's New York." *The Uncollected Critical Writings*. Ed. Frederick Wegener. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996. 274–88.