

ONR Papers (original letter sent by DLP 10/13/65) ^{New York Sunday} ONR-MR 10/8/93

My dear Mathilde: I have been so tired out this week with what people call festivities that it has been impossible to write to you, but now you shall have some of the gossip, and of all people in the world, I will for certain reasons begin with Charles Peirce.

This gentleman had for well known reasons been exiled from New York and located in his country home at Milford Pa., but hearing of the presence of Helmholtz in the city, started on last Monday in a train, that with thoughtful consideration to save us all ingeniously stood still the whole night in a solitary forest. Charles sat bolt upright through many weary hours, but finally arrived in a state of exhaustion. He took a dose of strychnine, and having established himself in the Windsor Hotel sent me a note. This document was to the effect that he had left his country abode for the sake of the honor of a presentation to the greatest of living scientists. He also stated two facts which were incontestably true: viz. that non-payment of debts at the Century Club prevented him from being present at the Century reception for Helmholtz, and that no one would think of sending him a card for the Columbia College reception. I took pity on him and sent a card obtained from Mr Low. The evening came and with it Charles. I went to the reception quite early to look after my assistants who were to act as ushers, and finding Helmholtz quite disengaged had a long

ONR-MR p.2 talk with him about my two last papers, that 10/8/93 happened to be on subjects of which he is the greatest living authority. He was very flattering and at once gave me all the credit which I had been secretly claiming for them myself. He said that all the photometric methods that have been in use for the last hundred and fifty years were essentially one and the same, but that my new method, depending as it did on an entirely new principle, would solve many problems that at present can not be attacked, and that the method itself would be of great interest in the theory of the action of the eye. He also asked questions as to whether I had done this or that, and seemed pleased that I had attended to all the points. The talk was quite prolonged, and to me no less satisfactory. Afterwards an immense crowd filed in and Charles with them; being engaged in introducing people to the distinguished guest I could not refuse the request of Charles, but had the curiosity to linger a moment to hear what he would say. He instantly began to tell Helmholtz that he was engaged in an investigation that was intended to prove by ordinary astronomical investigations, that space itself is spherical and that no real straight line existed, but that a straight line would be bent around by space itself and come back to its starting point &c &c. That was enough, and drawing off a little I noticed that Helmholtz made no reply, and that in a few seconds Charles was

ONR-MR p.3 swept off by a throng of new people, who we 10/8/93 will hope made remarks on other subjects. But Charles was happy: he said "Helmholtz looked interested": possibly he was wondering whether in this country we allow lunatics to run at large.

Charles being disposed of, I introduced Mayer, Dr. Drisler, Brownell, a number of ladies and some of our younger professors. In presenting one of these last I remarked that he was a "good man," for which I was afterwards sorry, as it looked like an impertinence. The next day however the "good man" called on me, evidently having been flattered. These interviews lasted from five to ten seconds only, but there were many of them. As Helmholtz evidently was getting tired, I refused to introduce more people, but had some talk with his wife who was making an effort to be pleasant to everybody. She insisted on talking German with me, though her English is generally considered better than her husband's. Of course I talked German to him. Charles got no farther chance at Helmholtz, and I would not talk to him, but devoted myself to the wives of our younger professors. After everybody had left, I sat in the great banquet hall with President and Mrs Low talking the affair over, and noticing how delighted both of them were that it had been so brilliant. Columbia is the only college, so far as I know, that gave a reception for him; Yale and Princeton did nothing and at Cambridge there were only a

ONR-MR p.4 couple of ordinary social parties. Here you 10/8/93 have the printed account, and will notice that your name appears. [Mounted clipping: see Xerox copy in Rood folder.] From 600 to 800 people were present and the supper was fine. The Century reception was to be on the following day, so on Wednesday afternoon I walked down 5th Ave to get the precise hour. On the street I encountered Charles and young Dr. Otis who is useful in paying for Charles' drinks and lending him money. Charles seized me and I was informed with much effusion that his main object in coming to town was to inform newspaper editors that Helmholtz was a very great man, a far greater man than Bismarck &c &c. After considerable effort I shook him off, and since that moment have not laid eyes on him. But do not for a moment imagine that this was the end of Charles' performances during his trip to this city; oh no! When the Century reception came off I noticed that Dr. Noyes, Prof Mayer and others acted as ushers. Among them was Van Amringe who according to his duty introduced people, and also kept an eye on things. Now Mr Van Amringe noticed that young Dr. Otis in a state of semi intoxication was hanging around Helmholtz more than was just proper, and was urging Helmholtz to dine with him on Thursday evening. Helmholtz declined but Dr. Otis would not take no for an answer, and kept repeating his invitation. Finally Van consulted with Dr. Noyes and this drunken youth was hauled off.

ONR-MR p.5 The explanation was, that Charles had got up 10/8/93 a plan of having Helmholtz all to himself on Thursday evening, and had persuaded young Otis to carry out the idea. You will farther be edified to learn that the dinner was not to be at the handsome home of Otis, for Madame Otis, who has the money, will not allow Charles to enter her house on any pretext; nor was it to be at the Century Club from which Charles is excluded: it would have to be somewhere else, Van Amringe thought, probably at the "Racket Club"! The supreme impudence of Charles in planning this descent on the lion of the day is only paralleled by the actions of Charles No 2 as set forth in the Greek story he was so anxious to read to us in Stockbridge. In this story the hero (Charles No 2) arrives a total stranger in a Turkish town, and at once sends a message to the Governor asking for his carriage for the purpose of taking a pleasant drive--and gets it. So he hoped to get Helmholtz. Then probably the idea was to publish in the newspapers an ornamented account of the meeting of these two great scientists which it was expected would greatly redound to the benefit of Mr Charles. Gibbs came on from Newport to be at the Century reception, also Willard Gibbs came from New Haven as well as Marsh, and many others. The guest at the Century Club was handled more tenderly than at the College, not so much bored by presentations, and at an early hour was conducted to the supper room and asked

ONR-MR p.6 what he wanted. He said the thing he most 10/8/93 needed was "a cup of tea." He remained with us pretty late and seemed to enjoy himself over the Rhine wine punch that succeeded the tea. On Thursday afternoon he lectured to our students amid the wildest enthusiasm, and then in company with President Low, Graham Bell the inventor of the telephone, went down town to examine the working of our "long distance telephone." [See Xerox copy for the remainder of the letter] Well, it's over now, for he sailed yesterday, and we shall see him no more--probably. This letter is so dreadfully long that I will not fatigue you by filling up the last half sheet but simply say goodbye.

Affectionately

Ogden N. Rood.

Mrs Mathilde Rood,
Stockbridge, Mass.

Mailed 10/9/93. On back of envelope:

From
Ogden N. Rood
Columbia College
New York