

EARLY LETTERS OF EMERSON.

BEFORE me lie four letters. They are clear as print, but brown and brittle with many reverent unfoldings. They were written sixty years ago, by a youth who had just been graduated from Harvard College, and they betray something of that loneliness and dreariness which follows shortly upon chipping the shell of a new phase of existence. The youth addresses, in a sort of playful envy, a classmate who has gone directly from the studies of Harvard to the studies of Andover. The first letter bears the date of the writer's death, April 27th; but the year is 1822. It is written in Boston.

MY DEAR LORD W * * * : A tall cousin of mine (Mr. Shepard) hath informed me that you have lately descended upon them at Andover to learn their good ways—from the miserable school of heterodoxy at Cambridge. Now I determined forthwith to write to my right scholarly classmate, for several distinct reasons:—to congratulate you upon your singular exemption from the general misery of your compeers, who have rushed into the tutor's desks of every Minerva's temple in the country; then to claim the honour of corresponding with one scholar in the land,—and to enjoin it upon you, as a primal duty, to write a letter from your seat of science, to a desponding school-master. I am delighted to hear there is such a profound studying of German and Hebrew, Parkhurst and Jahn, and such other names as the memory aches to think of, on foot at Andover. Meantime Unitarianism will not hide her honours; as many hard names are taken, and as much theological mischief is planned at Cambridge as at Andover. By the time this generation gets upon the stage, if the controversy will not have ceased, it will run such a tide that we shall hardly be able to speak to one another, and there will be a Guelph and Ghibeline quarrel, which cannot tell where the differences lie. * * * I have a high respect for Professor Stuart, but have never seen him. I want you to write me a description of his mind, body, and outward estate. The good people abroad, who are Calvinists up to the chin, do not treat him well. He watches upon their outposts, and receives all the weapons of the enemy, and those within the pale, his brethren of Connecticut, accuse him of apostasy. They should know, that the oppo-

site party humbly judge that if they lose him they lose all, and that any party can boast few such redeeming Palladiums.

What are you studying beside Bibles? Do you let suns and moons, eclipses and comets pass without calculation or account? Is there not time for trigonometry, no, not for a logarithm? Or, if all these are forgotten, I hope you have not sacrificed Johnson and Burke, Shakspeare and Scott altogether. Books are not so numerous at Andover, but that you will want the Cambridge library, which, by the way, grows rich rapidly, and bids fair to load its shelves to the breaking point, under the care of such an eloquent beggar as Professor Cogswell. He has already won away to the library most of the splendid European books in Boston, and obliged Mr. Thorndike to cover the Ebeling library, which he presented. But whatever may be your pursuits, your designs, or your advantages, this is to remind you that I expect a very literary letter which may unfold them all to my admiration. You can form no conception how much one grovelling in the city needs the excitement and impulse of literary example. The sight of broad, vellum-bound quartos, the very mention of Greek and German names, the glimpse of a dusty, tugging scholar will wake you up to emulation for a month.

You will excuse the liberty I have taken, in addressing myself to you unasked, to solicit a correspondence, but I am weary of myself * * * I suppose you may know opportunities to send to Frye, if not, pray drop a letter into the Post Office, the first time you pass by it, to

Your friend and classmate,
R. WALDO EMERSON.

In this pleasant, little, limpid, sometimes plaintive, ripple of phrases,—occasionally sophomoric, one sees no sign of the magnificent swell, the

“Full-fed river, winding slow,”

of his later speech. In the course of his next letter, he speaks with eager, boyish enthusiasm of a charming new writer, a novelist, Walter Scott. He was preëmpting a new field in literature at that time, for before it, fond as one might be of vivid pictures of social life, one could find few novels tolerable to a sound head and a clean heart. And yet the

austere, *tyiste* life of ancient New England created a great craving for some sort of stimulant. Happy they who found it in thought, instead of wine!

BOSTON, July 27, 1822.

MY DEAR SIR: I am glad to hear I have a letter from you, which, with true collegiate negligence, my brother has kept carefully for me at Cambridge this fortnight. Of course, I cannot answer it, nor can I tell whether, in the delicate eye of the law, I can yet be construed into a debtor in correspondence; but as a tall cousin aforesaid is again on the wing to academic bowers, I am quite willing to advance the payment of a letter upon the security of my brother's word.—I have this moment finished the first volume of "Fortunes of Nigel," which I fear is excluded from your reading catalogue, because it is so unfortunate as to bear the name of a *novel*. But if masterly, unrivalled genius add any weight to the invitation for a scholar to step out of his Greek and Hebrew circle of sad enchantments, that he may pluck such flowers of taste and fancy as never bloomed before, to deck his strength withal,—why then he may read Scott, and particularly the latter novels.

In this book there is nothing akin to any novels of another man. There is no unskilful crowding of incident,—indeed there is very little incident at all; the interest is maintained by the very elevated and animating and yet perfectly natural tone of the conversation which is kept up. The youngest observer of human society recognizes circumstances corresponding entirely with the records of his own mind; and in all the strangeness and remoteness of the scenes and persons, I have twenty times borne witness to the sagacity of observations which I had many times felt to be true without ever having expressed them. Our sternest scholars must admire the genius of this unrivalled seer whose fruitful invention already surpasses the "One Thousand and One Tales" of Arabian Entertainment. Next to Shakspeare, he will stand highest with posterity, and there is but one consideration that should lead me to give unhesitating preference to the dramatist, and that is, the circumstance named in some review or other, that Shakspeare stands alone in this: that all his characters, each being perfect and original, are utterly distinct from one another: that when he had exhausted art upon Hamlet, upon Othello, upon Jaques, that character is thrown off at once and hinted at in no other play whatever.* But in Scott, we commonly complain

* Falstaff is continued professedly under the same name. The *Fools* are necessarily the same.

of a new representation of the same persons; and in Byron we always complain. Perhaps it is wasting your time to trouble you with my lucubrations about novels and poetical idolatry. But at the moment, I have it more at heart than aught else; and if, when you read this, you be stooping to some musty folio which suffered under the types a century ago, you will oblige me by transferring your solemn thoughts thereupon to paper for me; yea, if it be a *dictionary*, if it be anything earthly but mathematics.

I doubt not you deplored the loss which Cambridge and the community sustained in the death of the Professor [Frisbie]. And I need not tell you how much you lost in being absent from the Eulogy, which equalled Mr. Norton's other productions. It is a happy lot, "*laudari a laudato viro*," and never probably was praise more sincere or true. If the eulogy had defects, we did not find them out, and the critics, with you or elsewhere, must wait till it comes from the press,—and then remember that it was written in *two days* by a man who submits his writings always to Horace's rule of 'nine years.' It will cost the corporation no little trouble to find a successor to the vacant chair, for boast as we will of our literary society, there is nobody here with a claim to the place. Is there any man in your schools of prophets competent to the office?

The North Am. Review, which came out yesterday, is a very fine number. The article on Mirabeau is the best, but I do not know its author. The long piece in it on ancient and modern poetry by one of your scholars, Marsh, I have not yet read, but have been told it was very good. Cushing reviewed Webster; and Everett, "Bracebridge Hall." In American books we feel quite proud of "Europe" (Alex. Everett's), "The Spy," and "N. England Tale." Add to this, Mr. Tudor's new work, "Life of James Otis," not yet published, but of which much is expected from the known talents of the author. Self-complacent America will lift her head yet higher in the pride of literature, when she sees the English press anxiously claiming "Europe" as the work of some Englishman. But I may as well stop from telling old news.

Have you any very bright stars which shall be lighted in your church? Your classes are so large as certainly to contain one or two magnates. But I have been disappointed in general, when I have heard young candidates preach at Park street. Why? Are there faults in the instruction? or shall I venture the wicked question whether it is impossible for minds of a certain order to submit to certain systems? But milord frowns

—and with reason— “And finds *within*, denial of the tale.”

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R. WALDO EMERSON.

It seems hardly right to let all the world in to observe the mind of Emerson in this confidential morning undress, as it were. But Charlotte Brontë says: “The real refinement of a nature appears most genuinely in the disclosures made *en dishabille*.” How generous and impersonal are all the comments of this young student! How purely mental the objects of his interest and enthusiasm! “It is a happy lot *laudari a laudato viro*,” says the wistful, shy youth. Who ever lived to taste this “happy lot” more deeply? Emerson, when thirty years old, made a reverent pilgrimage to Carlyle. The cynical oracle used afterward to speak of the young American as dawning upon him like an angel—a supernal vision. Here in Washington Charles Sumner, America’s bravest and most ideal statesman, died after living to see “ideas that got mobbed out of lecture-rooms come back to sit throned in the Capitol.” It is remembered that as the strong heart was panting out its last beats in agony, some one named Emerson. The dulling ear caught the sound, the paling lips murmured: “Tell him I love him; tell him I revere him!”

The next letter opens with a yearning curiosity toward a star destined to rule greatly in his life—Plato.

BOSTON, 21 November, 1822.

I have had it in contemplation for some time to try my pen in French and send you a Gallic epistle; but I am so indolent this evening that I must write Kings’ English. My first question regards Plato. For the love of Athens, I pray you tell me what golden thoughts you have culled from the oracle of so many centuries? Have you found the source of heresies and the models of all bad creeds? And chiefly have you found that “*etherial imagination*,” which all books ascribe to Plato, and which of all his excellencies I am the least willing to take upon trust. I confide in your scholarly character, that you spurn translations and read the Greek. From my very limited knowledge of the philosopher, I should judge that, of all the ancients, he is most a citizen of the world, that is, soared above his time and judged of men and things *then*, as a speculative man does to-day. One difficulty always meets me there, to wit, how to distinguish Socrates from his disciple. When a man writes a biography of Socrates, he ransacks Plato as if he were another Boswell. But when Plato is the hero of the tale,

poor Socrates becomes a theoretic personage, yea, the mere mouth of his disciple. Now these contradictions it is incumbent upon your learning to reconcile, and I shall expect your solution with impatience. If Plato be the thing I have imagined him to be, namely, a philosophy not too profound for easy comprehension, mixed and softened with a proportion of imagination and poetry—enough to adapt it to an idle eye and a vacant hour—why, in that case nothing but his Greek should appall me. By and by the gods may grant your aspiring correspondent some few more nerves of perseverance, and a few more mercurial drops of activity. Some winter day shall perhaps cool down the superfluous heats of imagination, and leave room for sterner elements to grow, if such there be. And perhaps, my lord, some summer day shall thaw down the frosty coat, which, men complain, conceals your faculties and buries the “light” of the world in an icy napkin. You will excuse my wicked pen, who, I find, is not to be trusted with ink.

Does Blackstone still march along side of Rosenmüller? I had rather hear from you the fruits of your studies than your complaints of the parties, which, I suppose, is a necessary consequence of living in a theological school.

I have hardly traveled far enough in Demosthenes to boast of much acquaintance with the best eloquence of the world. I promise myself great satisfaction hereafter in repaying tit for tat, and transmitting a sheet worthy of the Scoliaist on the orator, to return your strictures upon Plato. So much castle building for our sublime correspondence. I have read one very useful book of late, which you will like, I know, Stewart’s Second Dissertation. It saves you a world of reading by laying open the history of moral and intellectual philosophy since the Revival of Letters, exposing the rise and fall of successive theories, and the amount of each man’s addition to the common stock. It is a beautiful and instructive abridgement of the thousand volumes of Locke, Leibnitz, Voltaire, Bayle, Kant, and the rest,—by a man “amply qualified for the task.” The next books in order upon my table are Hume and Gibbon’s Miscellanies. I shall be on the high road to ruin shortly with such companions, but I cannot help admiring the genius and novelty of the one, and the greatness and profound learning of the other, maugre the scepticism and abominable sneers of both. If you read Hume, you have to *think*; and Gibbon wakes you up from slumber, to wish yourself a scholar, and resolve to be one. And with regard to the danger, if you have not yet grounded yourself in your faith, still our New

England education sets all our prejudices in arms against them, and we are not likely to be buffeted. Therefore I think them both very good books to read. Gibbon values himself upon knowing thoroughly whatever he touches, and this, it seems to me, is the prime virtue of an historian.

When time shall suffer me to go to the schools and open the Divinity folios, I hope to come into your neighborhood. But am not sure with regard to the propriety of one who thinks himself an Unitarian—asking the bounty of Andover. I believe that although laws and charters may favour my coming, the *spirit* of the same would not; nor would it be construed as strict honour and good faith, to come and steal from their armoury, the weapons which I intended to wield, certainly not *for*, and perhaps against them. Besides, I apprehend, the spirit of the community being somewhat against heresy, that I should hardly be favourably eyed by my fellow-students. You would oblige me much by solving my doubts on this topic.

I have almost filled my page and think it high time to dismiss this scrawl from

Your friend and classmate,

R. WALDO EMERSON.

This letter shows the development of that bee-like quality of his mind, that ever more and more distilled the honey only, from all books and all persons and all events. One had to be careful, indeed, how one over-filled one's third page, when envelopes were unvented: the letters must be neatly folded and infolded, and sealed; the address written upon the blank fourth page.

The fourth letter contains the sole allusions of the four, to anything feminine.

BOSTON, Jan. 29, 1823.

If I am not mistaken, I am your debtor on the epistolary account, and intend to pay you in current money, though I cannot in your own Roman coin [referring to a preceding Latin letter]. I dislike cordially an exact correspondence which makes it binding on the conscience of the receiver of a letter, to write his answer by the next post. I rather choose to claim the liberty of writing when I am in the humour, and in what dialect of the nations I will. If to write twice without waiting for an answer, please my despotic whims, I shall write twice; or if I should let my pen rot a whole year unwet, I should feel no qualms. Claiming so large a charter for myself, I must needs allow the same to those who honour me with their epistles, and if my lord would not always wait for my tardy letter, but would sometimes vouchsafe

a gratuitous sheet, I should be exceedingly grateful. Thus much for preamble. You will find the "N. A. Review" impregnated from title-page to Finis with Everett's spirit. I never saw one so exclusively his own. I am sorry I do not yet know the different authors, to give you the list, but presume he must have written at least half the book. Von Haunier's "Constantinople" and Humboldt's travels I know to be his. The tragedy piece is probably his brother's. Beyond the new book I can have little to say. For what can be expected from an unlucky apprentice at the trade of Dionysius, who writes to a dweller amid folios, libraries, and professors? You hold in your hand the keys of all the Past, whilst I can only deal out the crumbs of to-day's gossip. I covet your lofty contemplations, your "*ruinas ecclesie*" and plans, no doubt, for adamantine foundations of a new temple. I hope persecution does not, indeed, light his fires in your college halls, but lying Rumour has a hard story to tell about the brotherly love of your professors. If there be iniquity, heaven keep the hands of the *Rabbi* clean from its pollution.

I have heard it stated that the case is deemed of extensive interest, because upon its result hangs the question whether a man can be dismissed from an elective office upon such a charge as incompetency, when such incompetency existed at the time of his election. If you decide it the wrong way, many a poor professor must take up his bed and walk. Besides, the same decision would affect the church, and a frivolous charge of incompetency would oust half the clergy of the land. Our Andover college of Cardinals, who look after the Ecclesiastical State, must beware of giving facilities to the divorce of Pastor and Church any more than of Husband and Wife; because an evil closely analogous would speedily accrue to the community, since it would destroy that mutual obligation to keep the peace with each other which the Necessity of their union imposes. Moreover, a decision of the consistory against the professor would infringe somewhat upon the old rule, that, as it takes two to make, so it takes two to break a bargain.

How do the studies of your class and closet flourish? The only objection that I can think of, at this moment, to your mode of study is, that you all live double; at Cambridge a graduate can get a room alone. This, no doubt, appears an indifferent matter to yourself, with most abstracted and silent habits; but to a butterfly personage like myself, who cannot help thinking upon the thousand things which flit about me, entire solitude is an immense advantage. I put on faith in the

maxim, "magna civitas, magna solitudo; I should substitute *multitudo*." A man in a million, or in ten, or in two, is but a common, equal man; whereas a man, alone, is a very important person; is in his thoughts, lord of the past, and hope of the future; commands the spirits of earth, air and heaven with a calm majesty exclusively known to solitude. There is an unlucky consciousness of which I can never divest myself that there is a breathing being in the room, and this cramps the pen that it cannot scamper freely over my page, or carries away mine eye from the lines of my book, and I feel very strongly persuaded that the success wherewith I study Divinity depends essentially upon this circumstance.

Do the Naiads who protect my mineral spring in your woods, resign their charge to Jack Frost? I presume you hardly frequent their rustic temple at this season. If when you revisit the woods, you should, perchance, descry the sylvan spirit peeping over her urn, you must present my poetical devotions to the red water lady, and promise my re-

turn to the same. I have just seen my tall cousin from your halls who promises to take my letter. He carries likewise a new "Christian Disciple." I know two or three of the authors. After this number, it passes into other hands. Please to read the first article and I will tell you who the writer is. I learn that Dr. Bigelow reviews Nuttall in the *N. A. Review*, and Mr. Hale (Editor of the *D. Advertiser*) reviewed Morse's *Geography*. I am in haste and cannot wait to finish my page.

Respectfully your friend and classmate,
R. WALDO EMERSON.

He to whom these letters address their frank admiration, and their shy appeal for sympathy, lived most of his life in the obscurity of country parsonages. April 27, 1882, sixty years from the day the first letter was written, he who called himself "a desponding school-master," "weary of myself," lay dying—his pillow watched and wept and blest by reverent thousands.

Mary S. Withington.

WASHINGTON ON THE EVE OF THE WAR.

DURING the summer and autumn of 1860, I was in Washington, supervising the preparation of maps of the reconnaissances which had been made by the Scientific Commission under my orders during the years 1857-58-59; and at the same time preparing my report on the operations of the Commission. It was my desire to preface the report by a history of all previous surveys and explorations of the western coast of North America. I had access to the large and valuable library of the late General Peter Force, probably the most complete collection of rare works on American history that then existed. General Force was a sergeant of volunteers for the defense of the capital at the time of its invasion by the British in 1813. He had been from that time forward attached to the militia organization of the District of Columbia, and had passed through every grade from sergeant to major-general, thus arriving at the highest grade known in the corps in which he had been enrolled fifty years before. He showed me a copy of a bill which the Secretary of War had prepared, abolishing all existing laws regarding the District of Columbia militia and volunteers and providing for a new organization. He said that the bill would no doubt pass the two

houses of Congress, and that meantime all the old organizations had been abandoned excepting a few companies, and these were awaiting the advantages of the new law to reorganize on the new basis. He then requested me to aid him in organizing his new division. I willingly consented, and began to study the matter with reference to the distribution of the volunteer organizations between the two divisions, the arrangement of the rolls of the militiamen, etc. The country at this time (Dec. 1860) was in a curious and alarming condition: one State (South Carolina) had already passed an ordinance of secession from the Union and other States were preparing to follow her lead.

The only regular troops near the capital of the country were three hundred or four hundred marines at the marine barracks, and perhaps a hundred enlisted men of ordnance at the Washington arsenal. The old militia system had been abandoned (without being legally abolished), and Congress had passed no law establishing a new one. The only armed volunteer organizations in the District of Columbia were: One company of riflemen at Georgetown (the Potomac Light Infantry), one company of riflemen in Washington (the National Rifles), a skeleton battalion of in-