EMILY DICKINSON

LETTERS AND POEMS OF A LONELY NEW ENGLAND WOMAN WHO BELIEVED IN "ART FOR TRUTH"

A recent publisher's note to the effect that the large sale of Father Tabb's poems, now in their fifth edition, was paralleled among American poets only by the demand for the posthumous volume of Emily Dickinson, recalls the work of the singular and gifted New England woman. There appears to be an interesting coincidence in this fact, in view of Father Tabb's remark, quoted by The Bookman, that "of late American poets there is none worthy to go down to posterity except Miss Dickinson." Her poems appeared several years ago, four years after their author's death. Her recently published Letters, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd, reveal in part the strange personality of the woman who for years and from her own choice never stepped outside her father's house.

Emily Dickinson was born in Amherst, Mass., in the year 1830. There seems to have been nothing exceptional about her girlhood. Her father was a prosperous man, for years treasurer of Amherst College, and at one time a member of Congress. The pictures of her home show us an attractive colonial house, spacious and dignified, surrounded by spreading elm trees. There were three children—Austin, Emily and Lavinia. Their mother was apparently a sensible and practical New England woman with little time for sentiment. Emily as a young girl appears to have had a happy life. Her education was begun at the village "academy" and "finished" by a year at Mount Holyoke. Her letters at this time are the letters of the average schoolgirl and show no trace of the epigrammatic transcendentalism which marks them later. Neither is there any trace of the shyness which became a passion in her after life. She seems to have joined in the social life of her mates and lived the normal life of the young woman of that time. Her early friend, Mrs. Ford, to whom some of her letters are addressed, prefaces their publication by a short sketch of Emily's girlhood. According to Mrs. Ford she was one of a circle of talented young girls, several of whom became famous in after years. Fanny Montague, the art critic, was one, and another was Helen Fiske, who wrote under the pen name, "H. H.," and whose death in San Francisco a few years ago was a sad loss to American letters. Emily Dickinson, strange to say, was the wit of the group and furnished the funny items for the school paper. The only hint she gave her friend of her future strange aloofness from her fellows was by asking her one day if it did not make her shiver to hear some people talk "as though they took all the clothes off their souls." Not until she is about 20 do we find symptoms of that later malady—if malady be the word for her almost fierce seclusion.

The friend who most helped to form her girlish aspirations was a teacher in the academy, a Mr. Leonard Humphrey, who was a few years older than herself. He was a graduate of Amherst and had showed unusual intellectual ability and penetration. A letter to a friend at this time briefly records his death. His name is only mentioned twice in the course of her whole correspondence and once in a letter to her literary godfather, Mr. Higginson. She says, "My dying tutor told me he would like to live till I had been a poet." This was twelve years after his death! We cannot help wondering whether this was not the key of those minor cadences to which her life was henceforth set. It seems almost a sort of sacrilege to try to pierce that reserve in which she veiled herself. There are souls as tremulous as sensitive plants. A year

"That you may not betray me it is needless, to ask, since honor is its own pawn."

We can imagine how startled and interested Mr. Higginson must have been by the receipt of such a letter. It might have been written by an Emerson or a poet of the Concord school and reminds us that the author was reared in the same mental atmosphere. Mr. Higginson's answers have, unfortunately, not been preserved. It would have been interesting to read the response he made to this singular and powerfully worded appeal for his criticism. We can surmise the gist of his answer by the second letter from Miss Dickinson. She thanks him for his kindness and for his "surgery." He had evidently pointed out that her poems were very irregular in form.

"You asked how old I was? I made no verse but one or two until this winter, sir. * * * You inquire my books. For poets I have Keats and Mr. and Mrs. Browning. For prose Mr. Ruskin, Sir Thomas Browne and the Revelations. * * *"

A small company of friends was that, but an excellent one. No wonder Ruskin was her intimate. She was a true disciple of the man who wrote:

No weight, nor mass, nor beauty of execution can outweigh one grain or fragment of thought.

Yet I do not believe that Emily Dickinson was ever consciously defiant of rules. She rather never considered them at all, and sought only to express the thought which grappled her. Sometimes this was done in strikingly homely phraseology, as in the poem:

Death is a dialogue between
The spirit and the dust.
"Dissolve," says Death, the spirit. "Sir,
I have another trust."
Death doubts it, argues from the ground
The Spirit turns away,
Just laying off, for evidence,
An overcoat of clay.

The "overcoat of clay" is stronger and comes more freshly home to the mind than any of the usual phrases, such as the body being a "garment to be laid aside," or the like, which have been said so often that we have mostly lost the feeling out of them. If Emily Dickinson had written to-day, she would have found herself in the full sweep of the art movement, which contends for originality and freshness of expression, at the sacrifice of every art form—instead of the hackneyed, which is powerless to really express.

Her letter goes on:

"I went to school, but, in your manner of the phrase, had no education. When a little girl I had a friend who taught me immortality; but venturing too near himself he never returned.

"You ask of my companions. Hills, sir, and the sundown and a dog large as myself that my father bought me. They are better than beings, because they know but do not tell, and the noise in the pool at noon excels my piano.

"I have a brother and sister. My mother does not care for thought, and father—too busy with his briefs to notice what we do. He buys me many books, but begs me not to read them, because he fears they joggle the mind. They are religious, except me, and address an eclipse every morning, whom they call their father. * * *

"I have had few pleasures so deep as your opinion, and if I tried to thank you my tears would block my tongue.

"My dying tutor told me that he would like to live till I had been a poet, but death was as much of a mob as I could master then. And when, far afterward, a sudden light on orchards or a new fashion in the wind troubled my attention I felt a palsy here, the verses just

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later in a letter to the same friend she declines a proffered invitation, saying: "I don't go from home unless emergency leads me by the hand, and then I do it obstinately and draw back if I can."

There is no hint as yet of her writing poetry. About this time her brother, Austin, left home and college to take a position in Boston. Her letters to him are delightfully clever, full of wit, with an undercurrent of sadness and loneliness, ostensibly because of his being gone. In these letters we begin to detect the beat of words, the sense of cadence which marks her poetry rather than perfect rhyme or meter. Even in homely sentences one perceives the writer to have that "ear for words" which is somewhat rarer than an ear for music. However, it need not take a verse-maker to write in that manner. This fragment from a letter to her cousin, on the death, in his first battle, of a friend's son, suggests the poet:

"Poor little widow's boy, riding to-night in the mad wind, back to the village burying-ground, where he never dreamed of sleeping. Ah, the dreamless sleep!"

Her letters to her brother detail the family and neighborhood doings, with here and there a suggestion of her growing dislike of meeting people. She mentions a great village fete on the opening of the new railroad. "They all said it was fine. I 'spose' it was. I sat in Professor Tyler's woods and saw the train move off, and then came home for fear somebody would see me or ask me how I did. Dr. Holland was here and called to see us." "Dr. Holland" was J. G. Holland, the well-known author and later the editor of the Century Magazine. A visit to the Hollands a short time after this was one of the few she ever made. Her letters to them are extremely interesting and show a constantly increasing brilliancy.

The letters to her young cousins in the beginning of the second volume show the womanly and affectionate side of her nature, that had no warp in its attitude toward those she loved.

But by far the most fascinating letters of all are those addressed to Thomas Wentworth Higginson. With her constantly increasing seclusion the necessity for some expression seemed to grow. She made no occupation of writing, but while busy with her house duties or her sewing—for she was pre-eminently a practical, capable New England woman—she would jot down the thoughts that came to her in fragments of verse, writing them often on the margin of newspapers or the backs of old envelopes. There was no system or order in her production and no thought of publication. Any sort of publicity would have been unbearable to the woman, whose shrinking from the eyes of strangers was so great that she resorted to all sorts of devices to avoid addressing her letters in her own hand. Sometimes she used newspaper labels, or if these were not to be had, one of the family performed the office for her. Her penmanship, of which a fac-simile is given, seems characteristic of her isolation, each letter standing alone. Writing for herself alone it was not to be expected that her verses should be finished in form. Indeed it is doubtful whether she understood anything of the theory or technique of poetry. But, as one of her critics said: "When a thought takes our breath away, a lesson in grammar seems an impertinence." And though her poems may be fragmentary in form, they are never so in substance. Each contains a distinct thought. As, for example, this:

Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn
Indicative that suns go down;
The notice to the startled grass
That darkness is about to pass.

After a time the desire to have some competent authority pass judgment upon her work grew so strong that it led her to do what many with a far less sensitive temperament would have shrunk from doing. She had come to have a great admiration for the work and the critical ability of Mr. Higginson, who was then connected with the Atlantic Monthly, and she wrote him the following letter, inclosing some of her poems:

"*Mr. Higginson:* Are you too deeply occupied to say if my verse is alive?

"The mind is so near itself that it cannot see distinctly, and I have none to ask.

"Should you think it breathed and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude.

"If I make the mistake, that you dared to tell me would give me sincerer honor toward you.

"I inclose my name, asking you, if you please, sir, to tell me what is true?

my attention I felt a palsy here, the verses just relieve."

If Emily Dickinson had never written any verse these letters would have stamped her a poet. Mr. Howells has said that "if nothing else had come out of our life but this strange poetry we should feel that in the work of Emily Dickinson America, or New England rather, had made a distinctive addition to the literature of the world, and could not be left out of any record of it."

In this same letter she asks Mr. Higginson if he "has time to be her friend." This was the beginning of a correspondence and of a friendship which lasted over thirty years, until the day of her death, and during all that time Mr. Higginson only saw her face twice. At first he tried to point out her imperfections of rhyme and meters, but he soon ceased, recognizing here a quality beyond all mere form. In one letter he must have told her that her vision was "beyond his knowledge," or she answers, "You say 'Beyond your knowledge.' You would not jest with me; but, preceptor, you cannot mean it?" Mr. Higginson's interest in the strange genius of his correspondent led him to visit Amherst. He has described his call upon Miss Dickinson in the pages of the Atlantic. Her shyness and aloofness were so great that he felt nearer to her in letters than in conversation. He says that for years she never passed beyond her father's garden, and there were literally years when her foot never crossed her own doorstep. In spite of this fact she is said to have been a gracious and dignified hostess on those occasions, once a year, when her father in his official capacity gave a reception to the faculty and seniors of Amherst College. Mr. Howells, however, records that later in her life she could not even once a year endure this strain, and would often sit in a back room, her face turned from her guests.

Early in life she revolted from the orthodox creed, but she was none the less dominated by her austere Puritan ideals. Strongest among these was an intense craving for sincerity, together with a loathing for cant and social hypocrisy. In her poem called "Real" she has expressed this with daring force:

I like a look of agony
Because I know it's true;
Men do not sham convulsion
Nor simulate a throe.

The eyes glaze over, and that is death—
Impossible to feign;
The beads upon the forehead,
By homely anguish strung.

Hamilton Aide reviewed her poems at length in the Nineteenth Century Magazine. He lamented their technical imperfections, saying they were too often "like pearls in packthread," but he did full justice to her power of imagination—her "gift of seeing." That is, after all, the fundamental quality of the poet. Manner is—or should be—accessory to that.

She resembles Emily Brant in work and in character more nearly than any other woman writer. It seemed fitting that Colonel Higginson should read over her grave the "Last Lines" of her sister poet. GRACE S. MUSSER.

AN UNNAMED POEM.

BY EMILY DICKINSON.

I died for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb.
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?
"For beauty," I replied.
"And I for truth, the two are one;
We brethren are," he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a night,
We talked between the rooms,
Until the moss had reached our lips,
And covered up our names.

I SHALL KNOW.

BY EMILY DICKINSON.

I shall know why, when time is over,
And I have ceased to wonder why;
Christ will explain each separate anguish,
In the fair schoolroom of the sky.

He will tell me what Peter promised,
And I, for wonder at his woe,
I shall forget the drop of anguish
That scalds me now, that scalds me now.

Miss Julia Magruder's new novel, "The Violet," will be published by Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co., in September, with illustrations by Charles Dana Gibson.

DAVID STARR JORDAN.

THE STORY OF THE INNUMERABLE COMPANY, and Other Sketches. By David Starr Jordan, president of Leland Stanford Jr University. San Francisco: The Whitaker & Ray Company, publishers; clothbound; price $1 25.

The volume before us is made up of separate sketches, nine in number, historical or allegorical, "having in some degree a bond of union in the idea of the 'higher sacrifice.'" The substance of most of the sketches has already been given in lectures by the versatile head of Stanford University. "The Story of the Innumerable Caravan" is an allegorical review of the religious creeds and beliefs of the world, in their various pilgrimages, since the birth of Christianity. The allegory is well sustained. The journey over the mountains and through the forests and across the desert of life to the distant river, the waters of which every traveler must breast alone, was made by One in early times by a way so fair that the memory of it became a part of the story of the land. He left a Chart behind for the guidance of those who should come after him, but some who tried to follow him said that the Chart was not explicit enough, and marked out every step of the way. Then discord arose, and new Charts were made, resulting in great confusion, until many despised and threw their Charts away. As time passed on the way grew brighter, and men saw that most of the difficulties and dangers of the way were those which they unwittingly had made for themselves or others. The light of wisdom shone along the way; men held the old Chart more in reverence than ever before. No longer did men say, "This path have I taken; this way must thou go."

And some one wrote upon the Chart this single rule of the forest: "Choose thou thine own best way, and help thy neighbor to find that way which for him is best." But this was erased at last; for beneath it they found the older, plainer words, which One in earlier times had written there. "Thy neighbor as thyself."

"The Story of the Passion" is a description of the famous Miracle Play as it is to-day modernized and perfected at Oberammergau. The author shows a respect akin to admiration for the simple, pious peasants in the Bavarian Alps who endeavor to faithfully and artistically represent the life and acts of Christ. The sketch contains never a word nor a suggestion which could possibly invite exception from the most ardent believer in the divinity of the holy Nazarene. The play is criticized in a broad and generous way. Mr. Jordan declares that only in the sense of historical continuity can the Passion Play at Oberammergau be characterized as a relic of medieval times; that the spirit of the age has penetrated even to that isolated valley, and that its Passion Play is as much a product of our century as the poetry of Tennyson. The machinery of superstition is done away with; harmony has taken the place of crudity, and the Christ of Oberammergau is the Christ of modern conception.

With reference to such scenes as those accompanying the crucifixion, the author observes that a treatment less reverent than is given by those peasants would make intolerable blasphemy. In his opinion the perfection of the "Passion Play" is its justification.

"It can never become a show," he concludes. "It can never be carried to other countries. It can never be given under other circumstances. So long as its players are pure in heart and humble in spirit so long can they keep their well-earned right to show to the world the tragedy of the cross."

"The California of the Padre" (an address delivered at the Teachers' Institute, Monterey, in 1893) pays a tribute to the early Spanish missionaries, whose age of glory faded away, but "left no stain in the pages of our history."

"The Conquest of Jupiter Pen" tells how, according to old chronicles, St. Bernard, through the influence of charity and truth, drove the spirits of evil from the Alps.

"The Last of the Puritans" (an address before the California State Normal School, San Jose, 1892) honors the memory of the "immortal hero, John Brown, "whose body lies moldering in the grave," but "whose soul goes marching on."

The writings of Ulrich von Hutten, a contemporary of Martin Luther in the great religious struggle of four centuries ago, receive the strongest praise. Hutten, with fiery pen, fought for freedom of the spirit. This sketch is entitled "A Knight of the Order of Poets."

A plea for "Nature Study as a Means of Moral Culture" and "The Hig
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means to an end, and that end is a good all-around life. To succeed in business and to succeed in life are two things that should be conjoined, and as modern life is very complex success is no small thing and implies no small knowledge.

"The dreamer is out of date," exclaims Mr. Judson. "Men must be thinking and doing with nervous energy. Their minds are wide awake. The pace is set by steam now and not by oxen. People are no longer provincial. The whole world belongs to everybody."

"One who would fill any considerable place in the world must understand the world is more than a fragmentary waif, and that understanding implies a wide and varied training."

The successful business man must have four prime qualifications — industry, intelligence, acuteness and reliability.

"The well-trained college man," declares the author, "knows how to work patiently and hard; how to wrestle with new questions; how to keep at a thing until he masters it, and this is the very essence of the habit of business. The higher education gives just the training in industry which a business life demands."

The essay is worthy of the consideration of parents who can afford to give their boys a higher education, and who are nevertheless undecided as to the advisability of doing so. "If a boy is of the right sort," says Mr. Judson, "he will at college form habits of methodical industry quite as well as in the factory. He will learn a larger intelligence than can be given by mere business experience. His mind will be trained to ready command of all its faculties. If, again, he is the right sort of boy he will learn a high sense of honor. Beyond all this, he will become adapted for social life in all its forms; he will be at home anywhere, and he will have his ideas so broadened and his tastes so cultivated that he will know how to make the most of life wherever he is. He will be a larger part of the community."

LITERARY NOTES.

George Kennan has written three short stories for the coming volume of St. Nicholas. One is called "How the Bad News Came to Siberia," and describes how Mr. Kennan and his comrades, while at work on the Russian Overland Telegraph, received news of the completion of the Atlantic cable. This, of course, ruined and brought to a sudden stop the enterprise in which they were engaged. Another story, called "My Narrowest Escape," is an account of an exciting adventure in Russia. The first of the stories will appear in the November St. Nicholas.

Among D. Appleton & Co.'s September publications will be, "What Is Electricity?" by Professor John Trowbridge of Harvard University, a new volume in the International Scientific Series; "Alterations in Personality," by Alfred Binet, with an introduction by Professor J. Mark Baldwin; "Fiat Money in France" (new edition), by Andrew D. White; "The Statement of Stella Maberly," by F. Anstey; "A Court Intrigue," by Basil Thompson, and "The Idol-Maker," by Adeline Sergeant.

It is proposed to erect in Paris a monument of Paul Verlaine. A bust by Niederhausen is to be placed in the Luxembourg Gardens, near the statue of Henri Murger. The money is to be raised by international subscription. Stephane Mallarme is president of the committee and the Chap Book has been appointed to receive subscriptions in America.

Mr. Hope will furnish a sequel to "The Prisoner of Zenda" after all. It will be called "The Constable of Zenda."

Every article in the October Scribner's except Barrie's serial will be by an American author, and the subjects are strongly American and of timely interest and importance, such as "The Government of Greater New York," "The Expenditure of Rich Americans," "The New York Working-girl," "The Sculpture of Olin Warner," "The American Lighthouse System," etc.

E. L. Godkin, editor of the New York Evening Post, in an article on "The Expenditure of Rich Men" in the October Scribner's, says that rich Americans, by building great houses for a display of their wealth, excite envy, hatred and malice, and he advises them to avoid this by expending it in erecting great public monuments, such as picture-galleries, museums, arches, statuary, etc., which will perpetuate their names and rid them completely of the imputation of selfishness.

AMERICAN WOMEN

GERTRUDE ATHERTON TELLS WHY THEY FASCINATE ENGLISHMEN

Gertrude Atherton in the London Daily News.

The fascination of Englishmen for American women has been much discussed of late, but the time is approaching when the possession of England by American women will prove a subject of far more vital controversy. In fact, it threatens to become one of the great international questions, for it means the reconstruction of two races. I understand that an effort is being made by the United States Government to prevent its voting citizens remaining abroad more than two years at a time, that it is seriously alarmed at the increasing thousands of Americans who are settling in Europe. The United States press has also half awakened to the fact that the defection of its women means a loss of something more than millions, although as yet its only suggestions in re self-protection have been to impose a tax on the dots of American heiresses marrying foreigners, and to create a domestic peerage.

Meanwhile, what is the reason that at the present moment American women practically own London—that they set the fashions—have, not to exaggerate, five admirers to every English woman's one, and the pick of the best men? A great many obvious reasons have been advanced. They are prettier, cleverer, more vivacious, more natural, dress better—which is to the eye what music is to the soul—have a born and acute understanding of men, less religion, above all more money.

These reasons are all good, but a little analysis will show that they do not hold water. Spanish and Austrian women are more beautiful than Americans. The French woman is equally clever and vivacious, dresses as well, and what she does not know about men is not worth recording. With the Catholic races, at least, religion is an airy convention, not calculated to make man wish that all women were pagans, and there are heiresses all over the world.

The one manifest point, therefore, upon which the American woman is sui generis is her naturalness, her habit of thinking out loud, her lack of self-consciousness, of mannerism. All English women talk as if they had studied elocution. An American voice, even when trainante, has the effect of spontaneity. And so with the manner, the habit of thought, the quick, fresh way of looking at life.

But this quality, delightful as it is, is hardly strong enough to constitute more than a passing charm, and the American woman's foothold in England is growing firm as the years go by. She has come to stay, and what is more no Englishman seems to be terrified by his brother's choice.

Under the obvious reason, or rather set of reasons, there must then be a fundamental and psychological reason. Englishmen rarely marry European women, with all their manifold charms. They make love in Paris, Vienna, Seville, Venice and Yokohama, but the foreigner they marry is the American. It must be, therefore, that they recognize in American women something that they most want—something that the women of their own country cannot give them.

Can it be that while Englishmen have gone forward, have become more alive every year, have kept pace with their century—it may almost be said that they have set the pace—the English woman has stood still? In many instances has she not degenerated? Take her literature. With some very few exceptions, no English woman to-day is writing either intellectual or wholesome fiction. Leaving the silly novelists out of the question, what does the enormous success of the neurotic, morbid and decadent effusions denote? One need hardly think twice to answer that it means a general degeneracy among English women. I hear several thousand people remarking, "These same books have had great sales in America." So they have, but because the United States is intellectually under the yoke of England, and is as yet too heterogeneous to have a mind of its own on the subject of literature. None of these books would have achieved success if written in America—in fact, they could not have been written in America. As it is, they are read out of curiosity, tossed aside and forgotten.

To return: It is inconceivable that the women who read and exist in these novels as the expression of their inner selves do not bore and disgust men. Englishmen, taking them generally, are the most wholesome, healthy-minded men in the world. They live a clean, outdoor life, love sport better than women and make history along the natural lines of evolution. In them is no taint of morbidity, and it is easy to imagine how little attraction the quality has for them in womankind.

Do the "advanced women" and their following actually believe that they can reconstruct these men—the most dominant, perfectly balanced, rapidly developing and highly developed race of men the world has ever known—along lines laid down by themselves? As well try to harness the sun. The end will be that their men will let them severely alone and marry American women. In the feminine literature of to-day and in its success is the note of decay; one can smell the mold.

It seems to me that this is the secret of the affinity between American women and English men. The vast majority of American men are composed of two elements only—money greed and sensuality. They are at the very beginnings of their own development, the most elemental race of men in all civilization to-day. American women have so far flashed past them that they stand on the plane which English women would occupy if they had kept pace with their men. They are alive to their finger tips; they have cast off the yoke of conventionality, cut-and-dried religion, and all the old forms and traditions which should be and must become obsolete as the higher civilization.

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