

THE DIAL.

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THE YOUTH OF THE POET AND THE PAINTER.

[Continued from p. 174 of last Number.]

LETTER X.

EDWARD ASHFORD TO JAMES HOPE.

Lovedale.

I HAVE been reading Wordsworth with some attention, on these cold evenings, in my chimney corner, having no better book. I cannot understand how he engaged so large a share of praise, or how he can be set among illustrious poets. Yet the age places him among the first. I suspect, he and Southey owe part of their renown to the quantity of verse they have written. These heavy volumes, bearing such immense freights of decent poetry, deter their readers from insisting on finding pure gold, and the few really good lines, scattered in many places, gleam like jewels, and illumine the rest with deceptive light.

Did not Wordsworth make a radical mistake to write verses on a plan? I have no conception of any thing which has a right to be called poetry, unless it come living out of the poet's nature, like the stream gushing from the rock, free and clear. It demands life from the depths of character, and must be written necessarily.

I have tried many people, in the hope of finding among them some one with whom I can fully sympathize. I have the part of the hermit left to play, and begin seriously to think I will attempt it. I do sympathize with you, but it is as men feel for each other, rather in pursuit than sentiment. I wish some woman to come, such as I picture in my dreams. I feel I was born for intimate sympathy, yet find little except with trees and fields. I peep into the

windows of the cottages, where families sit around bright wood-fires, all bound together by a circle of firelight, so that no frosts can form in the centre of their being, but I cannot enter, — for how bare are the walls, and how square the rooms! I crave the hearth on these chill evenings, but my roof must be open to the sky, and the keen rays of the stars shine for my candle. I can feel soft arms willing to clasp me; the steel fetters of strength do not glitter round their wrists; I must have something more than affection.

It is tiresome to wander in society, knock at every door, gain admittance, and find the old arrangement of settees, coal-grates, centre-tables, and Turkish carpets. O for a lofty hall, with the sun shining crimson and purple through its dome, while on the walls hang pictures, and statues stand in the niches, with some music from a lute sounding, and no need of artificial warmth, but the sun always! I would have the windows unglazed, and let the winds rush through on dizzy storms, and rain and snow enter as they please, and the stars glow dazzling. I have found decency everywhere, and what they call a respectable appearance, without a spark of wildfire.

You seem better than the rest, but as one of my own sex, I cannot come to you, as I would to the other, — you are only half the sphere, as well as I. I am fortunate to foresee my path among these sands of time. I now feel desolate like the bird who has neither mate nor nest, and am wild and proud, as if I would not resign myself to solitude without war. Yet this day of tempest will pass, and I shall walk calm and resigned, and build myself a hut, if I have nothing in it, except a broken branch of some last year's tree. There, if I secure quiet, with some smiling fields from the window, I can whistle as if content.

I delight to catch glimpses of sunlight in others' fortunes, and it makes me smile to see others glad. These bending, cheerful natures, which sing as gaily as the little birds on the bough after a shower, in the bright, golden sunshine, come and alight on the bare walls of my existence, and the rays of their light blue plumage are reflected for a second in the surface of my solitary lake, whose grey waves melt on some side into the azure radiance. Yet these passing gleams of brightness fade soon, and seem to leave a darker tint behind, as after the autumn sunsets, charged as they

are with splendid gorgeousness, the woods scowl in hard outlines; I don't know that I am better for these; I only see what these soft, sunny characters enjoy.

I met a little child, who roved among the ferns, moving her large wild eyes, dark as the raven's plumage, yet bright in their depths, gracefully from tree to rock; a silent motionless mirth, and a smile about her small, crimson mouth, though I never heard her laugh. I saw her passing before me, like a sunbeam with its shadow, and one day she came to my skiff, and we sailed far up the river. I love children, yet they never satisfy me, for I must have some toil, and some defeat, to cling to, yet this child seems more than any being I have met. She is not affectionate, yet remains to my memory, a gipsy figure, moving among the woods, and I have been pleased to find these solitary places haunted by a creature so genial. Childhood is a painting set in health and artlessness, and a time cut out of existence, that we can parallel with nothing beside, for we cannot bring it back, and see it afar, as we do heaven. It is like a bower, or a desert, made of the greenest trees, and planted inside with flowers, while about its leafy walls, are rude cliffs not even moss-covered, bare sands where no blade of grass grows, and heat that mocks life; in the midst a clear spring of delicious water rises, where swim gold and silver fish, and the light from them tints the air to the door of the delightful place; the sound of the fountain dances gaily, and sends a gush of music into the flowery roof. No wonder the old people talk so much about the time when they were young. This little child brought me a bunch of ferns, and hung them over the kitchen fire, and sat herself down in the corner, gazing with her large, dark, motionless eyes. I did not speak, and when the firelight played with its changing red over her low forehead and brown cheeks, I seemed to have some creature out of the world of gipsies. She was sent away somewhere the next day, and I shall not see her again, but then one meets such children often. If they came once, and then would stay a day, I believe they would form such sunny memories, we should have gold beams for our recollections.

E. A.

LETTER XI.

EDWARD ASHFORD TO JAMES HOPE.

MY DEAR HOPE,

Lovedale.

I send some of my journal, as I promised. I know you will procure little from it, yet it will furnish some picture of the life I lead. It is not a record of what I do, but what I feel.

How cold came the wind from the misty sea, with its sad, grey clouds, yet I love thee, Autumn. Even if thy looks are sorrowful, a joy dwells within thy grief. I feel that nature has her sorrows, and I am not alone in mine, even if my Autumn continues through the year. My spring is forming in the depths of my chill heart; the flowers, if concealed, are sown, and one sunny day will warm them into life. I long for that, — to throw myself into the sunniest joy a human soul ever knew. I sat in the pine woods, upon the red carpet of spires, dropping and accumulating for a century (and above waved the century-old trees), while the ravens sailed over, mingling hoarse cries with the gentle whispers of the forest, as the painful sounds of life flow among the sweet songs of heaven. Night dwells in these evergreen bowers, while the ocean's music murmurs and carries me to the pebbly beaches of the blue floor of the moving sea. I remember the waves, as the memories of a better world stand with folded arms, in the sunny bowers of childhood. I should love to build my cottage in the pine woods, yet it would be too solitary.

I am reflected from the forms of nature, yet their graceful aspects do not adorn my figure, and I see myself as I am, a poor wanderer, seeking shelter in the tempest of the world from the winds and cold rains. I blame myself, and not the world, for the jarring image. I have come to myself late. Perhaps if I had been shaped, when a little child, by the beautiful thoughts of the poet, and baptized in the sea of lovely forms, I should never have entered this sandy desert, whose end flies as I advance, and whose entrance I find equally inaccessible. Yet I cannot deplore

my history more than my companions, for they are all unsatisfied as I am. No one of them is perfect; they have some flaw, some speck, and their great endeavor is to hide this from themselves. I differ in exposing mine; I am desirous to see my solitude in its true proportion, to know how much I can trust others, and how far depend on myself. If my efforts fail, when I seek to express my life, let me at least have the satisfaction of knowing the origin of my ill success; give me light, even if it be a torch, to brighten my errors. I would try every thing, — every art, every man; no failure can prevent a new trial, though I have taken the wrong so many times that I can hardly tread the right, during these ill-fashioned days of time. Let me be great enough to stand resigned till death's golden key opens the gate of the next eternity.

THE BIRD'S SONG.

I heard the song of a forest bird,
Sweet was the note in my grateful ear,
It came like the tone of a friendly word,
It was finished, and gentle, and clear,
Yet the singer I saw not, though near.

I hear the bird's song wherever I go,
For it echoes my inward desire,
But the minstrel I deem does not venture below
The far clouds, — his world is a higher,
His altar is lit by a purer fire.

Sing on thou sweet anthem, — to me,
Though viewless, thou seemest a tone,
That one day shall come in full melody,
And the singer be near, and my own,
Even if now I wander alone.

I grow more attached to this beautiful place each day. It is fitted for a home to some wanderer like me, and though I feel I must, before many days, set my sails to the wind and dash through the green billows, far from the sheltered coves, I shall remember these green spots, which should make the earth a heaven. Sweet river, fair groves, and peaceful fields, receive thanks from a spirit folded for a few flying moments, in your tender arms; receive the

assurance, that if it were mine, I should delight to celebrate your gifts in fitter strains. How impoverished I feel, when I return to the house, after one of my long walks, with the beauty yet standing in my eyes, because I can give none of it away, and know that presently it will fade even from my consciousness.

I am a wanderer from a distant land,
There the clouds glow in crimson, and the flames
Of a perpetual summer fill the air.
Noon never falls into dull twilight: trees
Swell in their ruby foliage, and no hand
Cold and regardless plucks the endless bloom.
Shadows fall deep red, and yellow, softening mists
Robe the white temple's pillars with rich gold.
No tears are shed among those sunny years,
For the high day walks garlanded with love.

LETTER XII.

RICHARD ASHFORD TO EDWARD ASHFORD.

MY DEAR NED,

I wrote some days since an unfortunate letter, I suppose, under a severe twinge of rheumatism, as I learn you put an interdict upon correspondence between us. What if an interdict will not go far enough to cover the whole ground, for in the first place, you must interdict me from writing; then the postmaster-general from sending my letters after they are written, and then, further, your own heart, which I know is as soft as lamb's wool, from opening and reading them, after they are written, sent, and have reached you. An old head like mine, through whose hair the storms have blown in three circumnavigations of the globe, can afford to have a few of these inland gales winter in its locks; and yet, Ned, why you severely interdict me from sending an occasional epistle, I cannot understand. This, however, shall be the final blast of your uncle's trumpet, and would it might prove a Jericho horn, and batter down the grey walls of morbidness, which yesterday and tomorrow have built round your existence. Finally, I have

worked upon your mother's reason, and she has agreed with herself and Heaven, to leave you in unending stillness, by which I mean, she has constituted me, with your consent, trustee of your pecuniary finances, unless you prefer taking them into your hands.

In the mean time I transmit an account of your property, so far as I have obtained it, by several drillings, musters, and overhauls of the lawyer, and Mr. Penny, who has long been captain of your mother's purse. In the first place, I find ten shares in the Rotten Twine Company, originally valued at one hundred dollars per share, purchased by Mr. Penny for seventy dollars per share, worth, as I see by the Doughnut Chronicle (which serves me for blotting paper), fifty dollars per share. My notion is, that, as the Rotten Twine Company has broke three times, it will break again; so, with your leave, and without Mr. Penny's, I shall sell the ten shares. Next, a farm in Middlebury, originally bought for fifteen hundred dollars by skilful Mr. Penny, at your mother's request, they both considering the earth solid and good to buy. I have made inquiries into its present price, and find it will sell for near one thousand dollars, and have had an offer by a neighbor, who sees the wood waving from his window, and the red grass and mullens in the fields, and who, as he needs firewood and sheep pasture, like many another country booby, thinks he will lay out his savings, now in the bank, earning him his six per cent., upon land, which every year will run him more than six per cent. in debt. Then, twenty shares in the Heydiddle Railroad, which will yield, the directors say, in ten years, after all expenses paid, including their own, newspaper puffs, directorial dinners, cow-killing and cart-breaking, eight per cent. yearly interest. Ned, the Heydiddle Railroad affords amusement for these directors, with its sherry wine, roast-beef, and turkey dinners, but what could have led Mr. Penny to pay two thousand dollars and get so little for his pains, neither of us can see, unless it was, because Mr. Penny was a director. With your consent, I shall sell the Heydiddle Railroad, with the Rope and Twine Company. The next investment of Mr. Penny is three thousand dollars in Eastern lands, and I have pumped much mud and bilgewater, to say nothing of good, clean drinking water, out of Mr. Penny and the lawyer, but I can say, that neither of these speculators will make a chart of the land, or give me any

point to steer by. I shall, with your permission, enter into correspondence with all persons in Maine, and find where these lands lie, what they are worth, and who will buy them, and proceed to sell them for cash. Mr. Penny's next purchase was three shares in the Solar Microscope Exhibition, which cost one hundred dollars per share, and is now offered for five dollars; this has yearly produced two visits to the Ashford family, under the escort of Mr. Penny, who had each time to exhibit his certificate of stock, and his own right to enter, which he held under a greasy ticket signifying that he was an original life-subscriber. I advise you, with Mr. Penny's consent, to hold fast to these shares, for you may, one day, like to see eels in vinegar yourself. You have a share in the Sticker library, worth originally two hundred dollars, and have the right of taking out three books once a month, by paying six per cent. yearly on the cost of your share, and a farther trifle of three dollars, which goes straight into the bowels of poor Peter the librarian. As you never took out books, nor went to the library, and as your mother subscribes to Mrs. Rundle's Circulating Library, whose whole volumes you might purchase with your one share in the Sticker, and further, as the Sticker share would not bring fifty dollars, perhaps it would be well to transfer it to Mrs. Rundle, and enable her to let the waste water of the Sticker marsh into her own basin.

There are in the Doughnut Bank two thousand dollars belonging to you, which will yield six per cent., like a good cow that gives a certain quality and quantity of milk. My notion is, that we sell all and sundry your other stocks and investments, and lump them in this Bank; if you only make six per cent. a year, you will never lose ten. The directors I have watched the last three years with open eyes, and conclude they are crusty, miserly fellows, who love money too well to part with one farthing, and consider whatever is in the Bank theirs, so far as it enables them to make their six per cent. You may expect six hundred dollars, clear, a year, if you will put your money in this Bank, which I expect will support you, or keep your head above water, which is considered necessary now-a-days. I live on two hundred a year, and have for the last ten years, so, with me living on a small means is no experiment. I purchase my clothes on the same day with some other boarder at my house, and

find, after four seasons, he has renewed his eight times, while mine are yet wearing as well as ever. Thus, I never spend any money for clothes now, because mine are all bought; I consider I have purchased the articles I require in this line. In winter I spend every day but Sunday out of my room; in this way I save all my fuel, except a seventh part, and this I borrow. I sit from nine in the morning till one, at which time I dine, by the bar-room fire, and read the paper, and talk with the landlord. In the afternoon, I have a round of ten stores I visit, spend part of an hour in each, and wile away my evenings in the parlor; so I spend nothing for lights. I board on an original plan, as I consider it. Thus, I do not agree to eat any one meal at any one particular place, and by not stipulating, am always prepared to accept every invitation. If none of my acquaintance remember me, at the hour for meals, I purchase one cent's worth of crackers, and dine off that, or drink tea, or take breakfast off of it. Wines, beers, or druggist's small waters, I never purchase, as my stomach turns sour on every such introduction of drink. I resolve never to expend more than six cents, any one day, for food. You may ask where my money goes, to which I reply, that nominally I live on two hundred dollars a year, but actually on one hundred dollars. I expend something on books, music, and tobacco, three departments I value beyond clothes, food, and physic. But then, my tobacco only costs me three dollars a year, and as I buy cigars by the bushel, and pipe-tobacco by the barrel, I get as much as I want for a series of years for a five dollar bill. I pay no poll-tax, no minister's-tax, no school-tax, and no fiddler's-tax, because I migrate from Doughnut to Pultenham, according to the visits of the tax-gatherer, and am thus a citizen of no place, and belong generally.

Your uncle, DICK.

LETTER XIII.

MATHEWS GRAY TO JAMES HOPE.

Eaton.

I have thought more of your letter respecting Edward, and not only that, but have had an interview with Mrs.

Ashford. She found I was interested in her son, who, of course, is the interesting subject which she has for conversation. I think I have enlightened her in the premises, and I trust our melancholy poet will be left to the enjoyment of his reflections undisturbed. She was with difficulty persuaded, that a young man, left to his own inclinations, could become anything but an idler, and a spendthrift in addition. It was inconceivable to her, that any young man could have the least pretence to sally into a new country, out of the formal path which his ancestors followed five hundred years, and was for bringing him at once to the city, and placing him in a counting-room. I told her, her son would never put himself in such a situation, however much she desired it, and when she became satisfied of this, she abandoned the idea. Mrs. Ashford is not a miserly woman, but has that unaccountable folly of many generous people, and thinks that all money not spent according to custom is thrown away. The fact of Edward's pecuniary independence made little impression on her, and any disposal of his means, unless devoted to some formal business in a city, she considered a misfortune.

You express some fear, that Edward, instead of being a poet, will be a dreamer, and after he has written some musical verses, enter manhood, to become an elegant, literary man, or a prosaic rhymist. It is true, he has one great disadvantage to contend with, he has not the grand teacher, — poverty. His means are sufficient, and his days will not be spent in toil to conquer enough from the world to feed his body with on the morrow. I do not regret this, I have long wished to see a poet nursed by nature, not obliged to struggle with indigence, and whose only cares and toils should be a sacrifice to the muse. His present melancholy has in it the elements of salvation. This struggle between sorrow and a desire to be cheerful, this question which must be asked every day, whether his faith is not strong enough to find in life sovereign bliss, — this mining into the depths of existence to grasp the glittering charm which lies hidden under the cold granite of his present fortune, will stand him instead of poverty, contest with men, cultivation, and experience. A great sorrow shows the deepest vein of life, and no man has been a dreamer, who has wrestled bravely in youth with a giant

despair. If Edward sat weakly down, as he would if this sorrow had any sentimentalism, and yielded his career to the hand of chance, nerveless, bashful, and envious, we might resign him to the poor lead of every trifling circumstance; but when you mark what vigorous faith lurks under every expression of sadness, how healthy his life is when it breaks the chains of his prison-house, and finds a vent in song, you must conclude that he is fighting the great battle of knowledge against ignorance, which every man, who has proved any thing, has first been obliged to conquer in. His contest will be more than the experience of a thousand worldly people. It is an unfortunate mistake, which I think your constitution leads you into, with many of your temperament, to suppose our best and most useful experiences flow from the external. Let us first know ourselves, which result can come only from contest with inward difficulties, and never from what we catch from the passing shades which hover around, and whose exteriors we see, and then no man can be concealed, because our destiny is one and the same. Let us omit this struggle, — let us go into life, or into nature, and be acted upon from without, and though the beginning may be fair, the ending will be disappointment. For my part, I rejoice at Edward's present situation, and hope he will be left to himself, in nature, there to battle with the fiend of ignorance. Were he not so delicately constituted, had he the power of warding off circumstances, was it not necessary for him to surrender himself to many more impressions than the mass of men, I should not insist so positively upon his placing himself among the woods and fields. Thus finely formed, when every discordant tone jars on the chords of his most delicate heart, I am glad nature surrounds him, and when I further consider that he is a poet, both by this education and an evident predilection from his earliest years, I rejoice yet more. We need some poets truly bred in nature, who have gone out, not to look at trees and sunsets, and put them into their note-books, but drawn by an inevitable necessity, to unburden their hearts, and confess their imperfections, before the stern beauty of the perfect. Our poetry is too full of conventional existence, and we neglect verses often if newly written, as if there could be nothing true in them, because the expression of nature is

not caught, while the note of social life sounds continually. I am out of patience with the tameness of late poetry; it is a feeble imitation of what in its time was good, and suited the age, and I feel that we demand an actual feeling of nature, which poets have lost. Our social life does not admit us into the sanctuary of human nature, but tosses us some chips, some crumbs of feeling or thought, as if the strong, healthy, abundant nature of man had dwindled into a pretty scholar, apt at feeding the birds from the window, while his tasks of courage were forgotten.

It is a good part in Edward's history, that he has courage to make disappointments, — to sing his song to the end, though assured his verses will prove unsatisfactory. Those poets who have halted, and could not say at the end of life, as Michael did, "*anchora imparo*," to use an old illustration, never went into the depths of the art, never used their powers except as amateurs. I am glad you tell me, Edward cannot be satisfied with any poem he makes, for I am convinced, with his constitution, he will never tire, until he makes verse which shall be much to him, and yet that he will never cease to write. I think it will be long before he finds his true position, and till then he cannot estimate the place of any other person. How it is I cannot say, but there is, in people of his description, a power of misrepresenting the exact capacities of those by whom they are surrounded. It looks impossible for them to address themselves friendlily to those with whom they sympathize imperfectly, and they demand from all, character and entertainment, which only a very few can ever yield.

Truly yours,

M. G.
