

## ENGLISH AUTOGRAPH LETTERS IN THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY.

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IT would be vain to expect that any great library's manuscript wealth should grow uniformly, when it lies in many and various fields. In such developments, fortune plays its part, whatever skill and vigilance may be shown. Only within the last dozen years has the field of this Library's autograph letters blossomed with a wealth comparable to that of other more famous fields. Letters in small and in large collections, from one pen or from many, figure repeatedly in the hand-lists<sup>1</sup> of our English manuscripts. Since 1931 some half-dozen articles<sup>2</sup> on individual groups of them have appeared in the *BULLETIN* and been reprinted, as have naturally not a few of the letters themselves. The time would seem to have come for a general survey of this correspondence. Such an attempt will, we trust, give pleasure not only to the studious reader but above all, in this commemorative volume, to him who for so many years has seen the Library's fields ripening under his care.

In modest space this attempt must admit a number of limitations. Only unprinted English letters can be discussed and quoted, and from these the quotations must be short.

<sup>1</sup> *Handlist of the Collection of English Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library*, 1928. By Moses Tyson. *Handlist of Additions . . .*, 1928-35.

<sup>2</sup> J. D. Wright, *Some Unpublished Letters to and from Dr. Johnson*, 1932. W. W. Roberts, *Charles and Fanny Burney in the Light of the New Thrale Correspondence in the J.R.L.*, 1932. M. Tyson, *A Review and other Writings of Charles Dickens*, 1934. M. Zamick, *Unpublished Letters of A. H. Hallam*, 1934. N. B. Lewis, *The Abolitionist Movement in Sheffield, 1823-33, with letters from Southey, Wordsworth . . .*, 1934. R. D. Waller, *Letters addressed to Mrs. Gaskell*, 1935. J. L. Clifford, *Further Letters of the Johnson Circle*, 1936. Also in his recent work, *Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs. Thrale)*, 1941, Mr. Clifford quotes constantly from this Library's MS. collection of her correspondence.

Collections already dealt with in the BULLETIN can only claim bare mention. Lesser names, among the correspondents, must yield to greater ones; nor does a great writer's signature give importance to any trivial note he may have written. Theologians, politicians, people eminent in many spheres, crowd the larger collections; but only when they belong to literature first and foremost can we heed them, if the article is to be an article and not a list. Our aim, in short, is literary history rather than bibliography.

Chronological order provides the framework of the survey. The Library's autograph letters in English, as the collections now stand, were virtually all written in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. The great majority lie between 1770 and 1860. Pride of place belongs to those forming part of a mass of manuscript material, acquired in 1931, which once belonged to Sir John Piozzi-Salusbury, adopted son of Dr. Johnson's friend, Mrs. Thrale, afterwards Mrs. Piozzi. In this group the letters alone exceed three thousand. Dr. Moses Tyson wrote in Volume 15 of the BULLETIN a methodical survey<sup>1</sup> of this whole collection, which includes twenty letters written to Mrs. Thrale by Johnson, published with notes by Mr. J. D. Wright.<sup>2</sup> In our space we can but pick out two groups for detailed presentment, the first being one of 110 letters<sup>3</sup> written to Johnson by Mrs. Thrale between 1771 and 1784. These belong to that mature period of his life best known to readers. Already past sixty, he has completed all but two of his important literary tasks. He is domesticated with the Thrales at Streat-ham; his hostess cheers him with her concern and her vivacity; he talks to Baretti, Crutchley and Murphy, sometimes to Reynolds, Garrick and Burke. In time the Burneys, father

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 467-488. *Unpublished Manuscripts, Papers and Letters of Dr. Johnson, Mrs. Thrale and their Friends*, 1931. In addition to those mentioned in the text, the larger groups of letters named in Dr. Tyson's survey include 154 letters from Mrs. Piozzi to the orientalist Leonard Chappelow, with 127 in reply, and of letters to Mrs. Piozzi over 100 from Dr. Arthur Collier, 151 from Mrs. Pennington (Sophia Weston), 154 from John Gillon, a West Indies merchant, 72 from Robert Gray, afterwards Bishop of Bristol, and 161 from Marianne Francis, niece of Fanny Burney.

<sup>2</sup> See note on previous page.

<sup>3</sup> J.R.L., Eng. MSS. 539-540.

and daughter, brighten the scene ; Mrs. Thrale took up Fanny on the success of *Evelina* in 1778. In the main though, as scenes will with the years, this one darkens—with Thrale's growing inertia and self-indulgence, with the family's many bereavements and with the break-up of Johnson's own health. But his two literary achievements of the period stand : that *Journey to the Western Isles* (1775) which should be read with the splendid series of letters to Mrs. Thrale from Scotland,<sup>1</sup> and the *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81), his masterwork in prose, whose proof-sheets he would sometimes hand to her at the breakfast-table.

Correspondence usually arises when Johnson is away at Bolt Court or paying summer visits in Staffordshire or Derbyshire, or when Mrs. Thrale is away at Brighton or Bath. The two friends write in styles amusingly different. Whether cheerful or gloomy, Johnson is at bottom always his sane, sententious self ; Mrs. Thrale's pen flashes over the surface of things—petulant, cajoling, witty, frivolous, all perhaps in the same letter. Sometimes we feel clearly her affection and concern for him, now and then just a lively complacency in the fact that he has grown to depend on her. "So fare well and be good, and do not quarrel with your Governess for not using the Rod enough"—this remark, from letter 30, which may be a reply to Johnson's singular letter in French<sup>2</sup> with its implications of restraint and of hypochondria, strikes after all quite an exceptional note. The attraction of this batch of Mrs. Thrale's letters resides mainly in their witty social portraiture, their pert glances at public events, and their eager allusions to Johnson himself, his friends and his doings.

The degree granted him at Oxford in April, 1775, evokes the following remark (Letter 39) : "I rejoyce in your being made Doctor in due form, and next to praising you myself I love to hear others praise you." In August, 1777, he made one of his customary summer tours. She writes (Letter 66) : "Perhaps the bad state of our affairs abroad lowers your Spirits, but go to Dr. Taylor [in Ashbourne] and he'll tell you 'tis all a Trick

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, nos. 320-339.

<sup>2</sup> For the text of this letter, and comments, see J. D. Wright, *Some Unpublished Letters to and from Dr. Johnson*, 1932.

and that we let the Americans torment us on purpose. . . . I don't value Mrs. Aston of Stowe Hill." Jealousy of Johnson's old Staffordshire friends peeps out here and elsewhere from these epistles. A remark from another (72) of September in the same year shows Mrs. Thrale to be well acquainted with Boswell's great purpose: "I am glad Mr. Boswell is with you—nothing that you say for this Week at least will be lost to Posterity." From Brighton, where she went later in the year, comes one of her most happily conceived epistles, from which we quote at greater length, to show to what droll purpose her pen sometimes flashes along (Letter 76): "It is a long way from Ashbourne to Brighton, yet you will travel it I think, for as Seward says a Man must be somewhere, and the Sea roars away so finely that the King shall say 'let him roar again, let him roar again' . . . Dr. Taylor's Cows & Bulls make a figure even in the Newspapers we read here. Dr. Delap<sup>1</sup> asks us every day where you are—he is never a whit nearer knowing when one has done. How very odd it is that that Man should play well at Whist. I can sit and wonder at it." Delap, it seems, is at work on one of his unfortunate dramas. (Letter 77:) "He takes it to the Bathing Machines and reads it to the roaring of the Sea, 'tis all about Hercules I hear & Dejanira." In the same letter short shrift is given to a famous personage of the time, to John Wilkes, whom their party encountered at Brighton: "I like him not, he professed himself a Lyar and an Infidel . . . such sort of Gabble from an old & decrepit Wretch . . . gave me nothing but offence so we parted." Then comes one of several amusing assurances in these letters that her husband is looking over her shoulder as she writes: "Why, says he [Thrale], these are the persons we are all running after.—Ay, quoth I, & old Satan is the Person that even they are running after, so you see clearly what good humour I am in."

With Thrale's apoplectic stroke in June, 1779, the clouds gather. His wife's bitterness comes out in a sentence from Letter 93, written from Bath: "Here's not an Apothecary's Prentice in this Town, but what can see that he's knockt down like a Cock at Shrove Tide, & all by overfeeding." Johnson's

<sup>1</sup> John Delap, D.D. (1725-1812), poet and dramatist.

health, too, declines ; with Letter 86 she sends a peremptory request : " Here's Dr. Burney come & says you are very ill. . . . For Goodness sake do as Dr. Lawrence would have you & pray don't be bleeding yourself & doing yourself harm." Resilient though she remains under the blows of fortune, we can well believe a passing confession in May, 1780 (Letter 96) : " I am very low-spirited for all I flash away so." In April next year Thrale is dead ; after struggle with herself and estrangement from her daughters Mrs. Thrale marries the Italian singer Piozzi ; Johnson, old and ailing, has lost his happiest refuge. On all this there is no need to dwell. Some sentences may nevertheless be given from the important last letter (no. 110) in this group, even though it was quoted by Dr. Tyson in this BULLETIN<sup>1</sup> in 1931. It is an answer to the letter<sup>2</sup> in which Johnson made as kind amends as he could for the former too well-known epistle voicing his first feelings of shock and anger at Mrs. Thrale's re-marriage. " Your last Letter is sweetly kind ", writes Mrs. Piozzi on 15th July, 1784, " . . . Have no Fears for me, no real Fears. . . . He is a religious Man, a sober Man, and a thinking Man. . . . Accept his Esteem, my dear Sir, do. . . . I hope your Health is mending." She scored out its signature later ; but surely she wrote in earnest this plea for understanding, with its final note of concern for the well-being of her old friend, who five months later was at rest in the Abbey.

Two letters may now form a kind of appendix to this first group before we pass to the second. One,<sup>3</sup> written by James Boswell to Henry Thrale, is missing from C. B. Tinker's collection. It is dated Edinburgh, 29th July, 1773, just before the tour of Johnson and Boswell in Scotland ; we give its salient part : " It is a most fortunate circumstance that Mr. Chambers comes north just now, as that will I hope insure me our friend Mr. Johnson. But I must once more apply to you & Mrs. Thrale to *launch* him from London, as I called it. He will return to you with a cargo of at least some *curious* things, if not

<sup>1</sup> Vol. 15, pp. 467-488. See note on p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, no. 972.

<sup>3</sup> Eng. MS. 542.

with *valuable* ones. You can scarcely imagine how great joy I feel in the prospect of his coming. . . ." The other letter,<sup>1</sup> and but a part of that, is all we can find room for here of the fifty and more this Library possesses of Arthur Murphy, that witty and temperamental Irish playwright. He had, it appears, written to Henry Thrale, whose wife had replied for him; the occasion is of no importance. Murphy now writes from Lincoln's Inn, on 20th January, 1768: ". . . I am glad Mr. Thrale has so Elegant a Clerk, as it gives me an opportunity of addressing myself to Mrs. Thrale. Voiture ought to be now at my Elbow to tell me what to say next. But I look round and Lord Coke stares me in the Face. Surely I am Excusable if so situated I am unable to turn one graceful Period and find myself reduced to the Necessity of saying in a Plain John-trot stile, that I am much flattered by your politeness. . . ." The culture of these words is as easy as their blarney; more than that, we have a particular reason for remembering Murphy, one of Johnson's closest friends. Mrs. Thrale reminds Johnson, in an early letter of our main group, that Murphy "first brought us acquainted".

The second group was written to Mrs. Thrale by Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, "queen of the Blues". To us she is less of a literary than a social figure—a wealthy hostess, a valiant champion of the cultural status of women rather than of Shakespeare against Voltaire. Her famous essay, however, counted in its day; her letters might count for more than they do were there fewer of them. The present unprinted batch of thirty-five<sup>2</sup> lies between 1780 and 1786; she is now past sixty, a widow, but still high in repute. There sounds through them the note of a friendship free with graceful compliment, recognizing at times a common bond in literature, but of a friendship also a little wary, a little prone to raillery. Mrs. Thrale, literary hostess though she might be, was after all not in the true circle of bluestockings; what troubled their leader was that such a literary lion as Johnson lay in Mrs. Thrale's keeping. He and Mrs. Montagu had been on excellent terms until he criticised Lord Lyttleton in his *Lives of the Poets*.

<sup>1</sup> Eng. MS. 891.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 551.

After that, the bloom was gone from their acquaintance. Of this group of letters, the third contains Mrs. Montagu's fullest expression of her desire to win him over to her social dominion; it is undated, but was probably written before their quarrel: "Dr. Johnson looks well, is in good spirits, delights one by his conversation, but he is very coy, & very cruel, and I am always courting him & always get a denial. I cannot but say he is very polite, but I want him to be tender." A complaint in the next letter would seem to be directed towards him: "It is provoking to see how those who write for posterity despise the admiration of their co-temporaries." This feeling must have filled the breast of many a literary host and hostess. Mrs. Montagu ends several of these letters with a request that Mrs. Thrale will transmit her formal compliments to the great man; to one of them she adds the sprightly postscript: "I dare not trust a Rival with what I w<sup>d</sup> say to Dr. Johnson." Can a wicked note of gladness just be heard through the figured compliment of Letter 25? Johnson is away: "What Serpent has tempted Dr. Johnson to wander from your Paradise? not that cunning one who offered the Fruits of the Tree of Knowledge, because it grows in your Garden at Streatham. . . ." But however these ladies may strive with each other for the favours of greatness, one man—they agree when greatness is dead—has been unworthy of them. In Letter 2, dated March, 1786, Mrs. Montagu writes of "the very moderate degree of credit I give to all Mr. Boswell has ascribed to or repeated of Dr. Johnson".

For the rest, this budget, though entertaining and often witty, can only receive summary treatment. Several allusions are made to the slow process of removal from the house in Hill Street, where Mrs. Montagu first won fame as a hostess, to the statelier mansion in Portman Square, with the "feather room" in it of which Cowper wrote. "*Farewell the tranquil mind*", she exclaims in Letter 23, some six months before the house-warming of Easter, 1782: "the bustle of removal will be unpleasant to me, who had rather be in a hurricane or an earthquake than a fuss". But just as cultured hospitality is a bluestocking's duty, to be pursued in spite of physical and mental strain, so, in their degree, are attendance at the theatre

or at a royal Drawing-room (Letter 21): “. . . We will decline a very agreeable invitation to meet Mrs. Garrick & Miss More at dinner & will attend you [at the theatre to see a tragedy by Delap]. The weather is very cold, & a modern tragedy is generally very cold, but the pleasure of the conversation between the acts will pay one for the hazard of getting cold.” (Letter 4:) “. . . We will drink their Majesties’ healths out of respect to their Virtues. . . . Keep yourself from colds & fatigue till Monday. That day we must encounter dangers, but glorious danger has its charms for noble spirits.” Only in Letter 16 is a literary judgment of any length to be found. Here Mrs. Montagu condemns a certain “picturesque tragedy” which Mrs. Thrale has lent her; its failings would seem to lie at the opposite extreme from those of Delap’s play just mentioned. In spite of “a certain spirit of poetry in it”, the author, she thinks, would do better as a painter of stage scenery than as a maker of dialogue. “However our modern tragedies abound with purple suns & scarlet moons when the State is distempered. . . . I sh<sup>d</sup> have wept for the parting of Titus & Berenice tho’ they had never taken a morning or evening walk together.” No “pathetic fallacy” for Mrs. Montagu, no salutation of the faint dawns of Romance. Just common sense, with a modest share of the sensibility of an age that wept over *Clarissa*. We close her budget, and this Library’s Thrale correspondence, with a feeling of respect.

Henry Chorley and A. G. L’Estrange, who between them gathered much of the correspondence of Mary Russell Mitford, missed a bundle of 117 letters,<sup>1</sup> now in the Library. Written between 1821 and 1842, all from her famous cottage at Three Mile Cross, near Reading, they are addressed to Thomas Noon Talfourd, 63 of whose letters<sup>2</sup> in reply we also have. These come either from the Temple or from other places where legal business called him, between 1821 and 1831. A conscientious lawyer, Talfourd is best remembered as the biographer of Lamb and as the friend of many in Lamb’s circle—not often, in these days, as the author of *Ion* and other tragedies in verse. And few readers think of Miss Mitford apart from *Our Village*,

<sup>1</sup> Eng. MSS. 665-666.

<sup>2</sup> Eng. MS. 667.



those sketches whose colours remain bright after a century and more. Yet here are 180 letters in which the implied object of the main literary labours of both writers is poetic tragedy.

At the very time when her best-known work was appearing successfully in serial form, Miss Mitford clearly had strange ideas as to where her true talent lay. We read in the earliest of these letters (21st March, 1821): "What you say of *Our Village* is exceedingly encouraging & comfortable. I had looked on prose composition as a thing not difficult merely but impossible." Talfourd was at this time active in theatrical criticism; he long remained for Miss Mitford the good genius who would open the doors of dramatic fame for her; he sent her much detailed and rather pompous advice. Even in 1825, with *Our Village* an undoubted triumph, she declared (Letter 20): "I am sure that after four or five years passed in dramatic composition I could write a good Tragedy—but that will not happen—I shall be driven to spinning out wretched trash of novels." Her plays *Julian* and *Foscari* won a modest success. She hoped much from Talfourd's interest with Macready, who nevertheless in 1825 refused *Rienzi*, her best play. Her reproaches to him, copied and sent to Talfourd in Letter 22, prepare us to find little good said of Macready during the rest of this correspondence. The hour of Miss Mitford's short-lived triumph as a dramatist struck in October, 1828, when *Rienzi* appeared with Charles Mayne Young in its leading part. Talfourd's letters from London picture this success in detail; Drury Lane saw thirty four performances, some of them "to a very full and very elegant house"; he refers to the production as "your victory", and he makes sure that she gathers from Price, the manager, its due financial fruits. But though we read much of her later plays and of their writing, the main impression we receive is one of increasing labour. For *Otto*, in particular, Drury Lane had to wait an unconscionable time. Even when revising *Rienzi* Miss Mitford could say (Letter 29): "Though you talk of my facility I am really the slowest . . . writer in the world. . . . What looks like ease in my style is labour"—a confession which applies surely to her dramatic verse rather than to her prose.

These letters are a storehouse of facts and opinions about the theatrical world of London—and in a minor degree that of Reading—between 1820 and 1840. Yet the actor of whom we hear most is not Kean or Charles Kemble, but Cathcart, who has not found his way into the *Dictionary of National Biography*. He played much in Reading and made no sort of hit in the metropolis, yet Miss Mitford thought highly of his talents and for long hoped and schemed for his advancement. While saying and doing what he could for him, Talfourd clearly did not share her enthusiasm. He gives in Letter 27 an interesting impression of Harriet<sup>1</sup> Smithson, the Irish actress who in 1832 captured Paris with her playing of Juliet and Ophelia and Jane Shore, and who became the wife of Hector Berlioz. Talfourd is duly severe on her way of speaking, with “its abominable compound of Irish & French accents”. “On the other hand”, he continues, “there is a feminine delicacy in her demeanour which would absolutely charm if her voice did not break the spell, and a startling energy and rapidity of action in particular passages which dazzled & puzzled me.” Of Young in a bad hour he puts down the scornful criticism (Letter 14): “He merely walks about in an imposing dress, stands in the right place and speaks some few of the author’s words”. He can also say, in Letter 42, of Kean rousing himself from his decline to appear in December, 1829, at Drury Lane: “Kean has broken out again twenty thousand strong. . . . He is the greatest miracle of the age.”

Apart from theatrical matters, Talfourd’s epistles tell us a good deal of his growing preoccupation with his legal work, and something of his unsuccessful attempt, in 1830, to be elected Recorder of his native Reading. From Miss Mitford we naturally learn something of that selfish spendthrift her father. She is here, as elsewhere, the perfectly dutiful child; scarcely do we find a word against the man who, poor through his own recklessness, lived for many years on his daughter’s literary earnings. The severest thing she brings herself to say of him is this (Letter 37): “As far as general assertion goes, I never believe him on a point where his wishes are much interested”. It is fair, also, to state that several times these

<sup>1</sup> Or Henrietta.

letters reveal Dr. Mitford as helping his daughter in her wearisome theatrical negotiations. Her own ardour and courage we constantly feel, except as the dark days of her father's decline and her own come nearer, and the strain of writing for a living goes on. These words, from Letter 75, were written shortly before a pension brought her some slight respite in 1837: "No woman's constitution can stand the labour & anxiety . . . of a life of literature. It killed Mrs. Hemans & will if this relief be not obtained kill me—and then what would become of my dear father?" The buoyant Mary Mitford of *Our Village*, recognisable in the earliest of these letters, fades from them as they progress. Before they end we feel pity for the strain and the overclouding of a rare spirit that seemed born for happiness.

Two groups of miscellaneous letters, the Raffles collection<sup>1</sup> and the Gaskell collection, now claim our notice. The former, much the larger, amassed by that eminent Congregational divine and acquirer of autographs Thomas Raffles of Liverpool, cannot be adequately surveyed in small space. Covering the first sixty years or so of the nineteenth century and containing autograph letters from many prominent Englishmen and Englishwomen of those times, it is a vast quarry for students of biography, church history, theology and politics, no less than for the student of literature. The Gaskell collection, a gift from the executors of Miss M. E. Gaskell, daughter of the writer of *Cranford*, covers much the same stretch of years. Out of these two repositories and a third<sup>2</sup> we can only select for summary treatment a few letters, yet unprinted, from the chief literary pens of the time.

One fairly long letter<sup>3</sup> of Wordsworth, not gathered in De Selincourt's great collection, was written from Rydal Mount on 16th April, 1828, to Barron Field, that interesting wanderer, to whom Lamb's essay, *Distant Correspondents*, is addressed. Field was staying at the time in Liverpool. The poet used to consult him freely on possible improvements in his work; one

<sup>1</sup> This collection, a considerable part of that formed by Dr. Raffles, was purchased by Mrs. Rylands in 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Eng. MSS. 340-341.

<sup>3</sup> Eng. MS. 355.

instance of this is found in the longer letter of 24th October in the same year (No. 829 in De Selincourt). In a recital of comings and goings and prospective visits the present letter imbeds a number of suggested alterations in certain poems. The first stanza of *Beggars* is given in this form :

She had a tall man's height or more,  
 No bonnet screen'd her from the heat,  
 A long drab-coloured cloke she wore,  
 A mantle reaching to her feet,  
 Luxuriant curls half veil'd her ample brow  
 Shed from beneath a cap white as the new fall'n snow.

The definitive edition alters this considerably. A version of the fourth stanza of *Simon Lee* once stood as the second ; in fixing the present order Wordsworth writes : " This position would let the reader hear of Simon in his livelier days first, which I cannot but think is better. . . ." Definitive form is also given to the third and fifth stanzas of the poem *To the Lady Fleming, on seeing the foundation preparing for the erection of Rydal Chapel, Westmoreland*.

Southey, in a letter<sup>1</sup> dated 14th June, 1817, greets a friend who is probably Landor. He is abroad, he tells him, " to try what change of scene & new images of external nature might do for me " ; he " arrived at Milan this morning ". He was still seeking comfort and distraction after the loss of his son Herbert in the previous year. A later epistle<sup>2</sup> from Keswick, dated 30th April, 1837, and addressed to William Shepherd of Gateacre, near Liverpool, is more resigned in tone and an excellent example of his prose style. " Time has dealt gently with me ", he muses, " and Providence most kindly." Not only has Peel increased his pension, thus setting him above the fear of want, but " Longman has persuaded me to bring out a collective edition<sup>3</sup> of my poems, in monthly volumes. . . . There is a good deal to collect from miscellaneous publications and something to add. By setting this part of my house in order, I shall save my representatives some trouble & have an opportunity

<sup>1</sup> Eng. MS. 341.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 384.

<sup>3</sup> This appeared, 1837-38, in 10 vols. 8vo.

of saying for myself what they could not say for me." Events made their own sad ironical comment on all this. He was soon incapable of further work, his mind broken by the prodigious toil of his literary career. Of letters by his friend Landor two may be mentioned, both short and both undated. One,<sup>1</sup> to an unknown recipient, describes Landor's mother's estate, Ipsley Court in Warwickshire; another<sup>2</sup> makes a minute correction in his idyl, *The Prayer of the Bees for Alciphron*, which was first published in *Hood's Magazine* for April, 1845.

One interesting letter of Thomas Campbell<sup>3</sup> found a place, ruthlessly abbreviated, in William Beattie's *Life and Letters* of that poet, issued in 1850. Dated 22nd April, 1820, it is addressed from Sydenham to a Mrs. Fletcher, a literary hostess and advocate's wife in Edinburgh. After harping disconsolately on his bad health and his anxiety for his family, Campbell passes on to his project of a visit to Germany. "I have been attending to the language", he writes, with his own contemptuousness, "in long hours when I had strength for nothing better." The chief attraction for him would seem to be A. W. von Schlegel, then at Bonn: "he is a delightfully original being for all his cloud-capt metaphysics." Alas! later epistles of the poet's from Germany record that Schlegel's charm palled rather soon, the trouble being not so much the metaphysics in themselves as that professor's habit of delivering lectures outside as well as inside the classroom. Of a greater compatriot of Campbell this Library possesses a few letters yet unprinted—none, unfortunately, of any immense importance. Even Grierson omitted by design from Scott's correspondence certain items, of no literary interest, bearing on his own and his publishers' financial troubles. The Library has two such letters,<sup>4</sup> also a short note,<sup>5</sup> undated, from Scott to his mother in George Street, Edinburgh. He tells her of a "small reinforcement of medicines" which is to reach her and hopes she will find it "agreeable to her constitution".

The ageing Francis Jeffrey sends an attractive and confiding epistle<sup>6</sup> from Berwick to Campbell's correspondent,

<sup>1</sup> Eng. MS. 379.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 341.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 351.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 340 and 734.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 734.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 379.

Mrs. Fletcher of Edinburgh. Its occasion is merely an apology ; he and his wife cannot visit her in Kendal, her abode at the time ; they are on their way to London in a snowstorm which he makes us feel : " Our breath froze hard on the inside glasses of the carriage." A lament for an old colleague on the *Edinburgh Review* pins down this undated letter to 1845 : " Alas for poor Sydney <sup>1</sup>—and poor Bobus <sup>2</sup> gone swiftly after him ! What havoc Death has been making among the Seniors since last Xmas ! " Jeffrey also alludes modestly to those Thursday and Friday evenings at his house which were notable literary reunions of the 'forties in Edinburgh : " My friends have been very kind to me in coming to my simple hap-hazard little assemblies." One would not guess from this amiable letter that Jeffrey's pen had ever been feared ; the letter of an older journalist leaves room for no such misapprehension in his case. William Cobbett writes from Ross-on-Wye to Thomas Smith, a Liverpool bookseller who made himself useful to the fierce old publicist by transmitting parcels for him to America. The fourth of June, 1830, saw the birth of this epistle.<sup>3</sup> As its lines roll on we picture Cobbett's enemies going down like so many ninepins. Burdett, for example, is vanquished in the first short paragraph ; then we read : " You will find the next *Register* <sup>4</sup> a *stinger* ; and the next after . . . one of the most interesting that I ever wrote." In this number, apparently, Huskisson is laid low. " I want this paper to be re-published, as quickly as possible, at New York ; in a pamphlet, mind. How can we insure this ? . . . It is the *finest blow* that the Borough-villains have got for years. . . ." We see him rubbing his hands with glee as he bursts out, before his " yours faithfully," into the final cry : " What sport I have with these fools and rogues ! "

Sport of a less violent but light-hearted kind is to be found in a letter <sup>5</sup> written on 24th May, 1849, from the Albany,

<sup>1</sup> Sydney Smith, 1771-1845.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Percy Smith, 1770-1845, his brother, nicknamed " Bobus ".

<sup>3</sup> Eng. MS. 375.

<sup>4</sup> *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, written mainly by Cobbett himself, lasted from 1802 to 1835.

<sup>5</sup> Eng. MS. 380.

London, by Macaulay to his niece Margaret. "I am glad", he says, "to hear that, what with the hawthorns in the hedges and what with the trinkets in the bazaars, you are leading a pleasant life. . . . Eddis has all but finished my portrait. Mamma thinks it very like. I hope it is like: for I appear as a very meek, gentle, smiling person. My other effigies by no means do justice to my moral qualities. In Richmond's drawing I look extremely sensual, in Parke's bust extremely impudent, and, in Maschetti's medallion, which I gave you, extremely sulky. . . . Eddis has seized the truly seraphic expression of my countenance. . . ." For art-criticism of a different sort we may turn to a brief undated note<sup>1</sup> sent by Ruskin to someone who has asked him to pronounce on a problematic Turner. "I do not think it is a Turner", he replies; but he refuses to commit himself hastily, and makes a confession: "I never yet—as far as I know—declared a drawing to be Turner's which was not; but I have twice declared drawings not to be Turner's which *were*. I want to get another opinion about it. . . ." Another letter<sup>2</sup> of Ruskin, sent to F. O. Ward, and belonging to the early 'forties since it refers to *Modern Painters* as anonymous, voices well the conservative strain in the future apostle of social reform: "He [the author] has an infinite horror of novelties *as such*, and though perhaps admitting that certain mushrooms may be innocent if well selected, thinks the *species* generally poisonous."

Closing at last these miscellaneous collections, we take up as a final sheaf the Library's English MS. 336, which contains twenty-three letters of Ruskin's master Thomas Carlyle. As wholes the great majority of them remain unprinted.<sup>3</sup> They fall into three groups. The first one of four letters is written in 1820 from Mainhill, his father's farm in Annandale, to Matthew Allen, an asylum doctor in York. The young Carlyle in these days does tutoring and writes in the *Edinburgh Encyclopædia*. He had expressed himself scornfully about Dr. Allen three years before, after hearing in Kirkcaldy certain phrenological

<sup>1</sup> Eng. MS. 383.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 341.

<sup>3</sup> No. 8 is printed by R. H. Shepherd in *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of T. Carlyle*, 1881, vol. 2, pp. 96-97. Of the four letters written in 1820 a few sentences are quoted by D. A. Wilson in *Carlyle till Marriage*, 1923.

lectures delivered by that disciple of Gall and Spurzheim.<sup>1</sup> "Spurzheim has demonstrated nothing", he wrote, the Carlylean thump of the fist already audible, "*si populus vult decipi decipiatur*". But time has brought a change; Allen is now a friend who may improve his prospects for him. "Come and visit me", writes Allen; but Carlyle has "no money to spend on travelling". In September of this year the asylum physician offers him the tutorship of a young man advised to travel "on account of bodily and mental weakness". Anxiously Carlyle enquires: "What kind of weakness? If it were of a kind needing constant attendance and sympathy . . . no money would be enough." Nevertheless, in October he pays his first visit to England, to York; but declines the tutorship on closer acquaintance with the young man. These four letters, rather wordy and self-engrossed, and full of a natural anxiety about his career, form an interesting addition to those already printed from the pen of a Carlyle as yet young and unknown.

The other letters belong mainly to the 'forties, the longest one in the second group being written from Chelsea, on 3rd November, 1848, to William Maccall, a Unitarian minister whom both Carlyle and J. S. Mill befriended. It refers to Maccall's translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus*. Of the translation Carlyle mostly approves, but he thinks the appended preface "too angry, emphatic, controversial". The last group is a pleasant sheaf of eight letters to Charles Henry Cooper,<sup>2</sup> author of *Annals of Cambridge*, a scholar who helped him not a little in the quarrying of facts for his *Cromwell*. We feel in these epistles the urgency of the work demanded by the book's second edition. Carlyle thanks Cooper for "your valuable Parcel of Books", "your lucid copies & comments"; he is constantly thankful and usually "in great haste" as they settle point after point. [16th January, 1846:] Will Cooper help him to distinguish between a Sir John and a Sir Roger Burgoyne? His "miserable little Baronetage" is no good. [22nd January:]

<sup>1</sup> See his letter of 31st March, 1817, to R. Mitchell in *Early Letters of T. Carlyle*, ed. C. E. Norton, 1886.

<sup>2</sup> The whole collection of Carlyle's letters in Eng. MS. 336 belonged formerly to Cooper.



“ Your reference to Wood concerning Downhall’s death is correct to the letter. . . . We have now completely managed Downhall.” [20th March :] “ I have received your Ely papers, still in time. . . . A business of endless trouble : but you will find the Book a little improved, and not fail here and there to see traces of your own labour in it.” [21st June :] “ I yesterday marked for you at the Bookseller’s a Copy of the Second Edition of *Cromwell*, which I have now at last happily got off my hands.” These letters show us a reasonable Carlyle, glad in his work ; they also give us examples of his easy, everyday prose, too intent on its task to bother with Immensities and Eternities.

We are at the end of these ingatherings from the Library’s store of English letters. The survey has been necessarily condensed, possibly arbitrary as well, from the constant need of deciding what to take and what to leave. Many writers—some great, the least of them notable—have been heard in brief snatches of epistolary converse with their fellows. Many a fact, many an opinion, in such a mass of correspondence may fall into its right place in some scholar’s structure of research—literary, historical, biographical or whatever else it may be. As his mind glances back over these letter-writers, a librarian may well feel possessed by that mood which Southey has voiced in *The Scholar* :

My days among the dead are passed.

But the mood need have nothing of the sepulchral in it. To the poet, and he was a scholar too, all these dead are alive :

My never failing friends are they,  
With whom I converse day by day.

Some of them hail from the time of stamps and envelopes, of “ yours faithfully ” and the like ; some from days of seals and franks, when a correspondent had the honour to be your humble and obedient servant. Some puzzle the eye with scrawl such as Wordsworth or Scott wrote in their hastier moments, others refresh it with a neat meticulous script like Southey’s, or the firm, clear penwork of Mrs. Thrale. There, anyway, in our collection, all their words lie ; ready for any awakening, like

that of the bones in Ezekiel, to which the student can conjure them. Or let Carlyle, so recently in our thoughts, pronounce on them his blessing :

“ The true Past departs not, nothing that was worthy in the Past departs ; no Truth or Goodness realised by man ever dies, or can die ; but is all still here, and, recognised or not, lives and works through endless changes.”