

Colby



Colby Quarterly

Volume 3
Issue 13 *February*

Article 4

February 1954

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Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, series 3, no.13, February 1954, p.211-215

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A LETTER FROM MRS. HUMPHRY WARD
TO VERNON LEE

By HILDA M. FIFE

University of Maine

MRS. HUMPHRY WARD (1851-1920) knew everybody of any importance; and everybody, of importance or otherwise, knew Mrs. Humphry Ward. Granddaughter of Dr. Arnold of Rugby; niece of Matthew Arnold; wife of Thomas Humphry Ward, Fellow and Tutor of Brasenose College at Oxford, journalist on the *Times*, and lecturer; and aunt of Aldous and Julian Huxley—Mary Augusta Arnold Ward was in a position to meet most of the outstanding Victorians and their twentieth-century descendants. Her intellect, her personality, and her concern for others drew people of all kinds to her. Portraits and photographs show her as a lovely girl and a beautiful woman. Associated intellectually and socially with the academic and religious leaders at Oxford, she participated in discussions and in literary arguments which led eventually to the writing of the religious novels for which she is best known. Yet she never neglected her career as Mr. Ward's wife and the mother of three children. Furthermore, she found time and energy to devote to social service, and was responsible for the establishment of a settlement house, of playgrounds, and of special schools for crippled children in the city of London. And during World War I, when she was approaching sixty, at the suggestion of Theodore Roosevelt and with the cooperation of the British government, she visited war plants, naval vessels, and even the battlefields to collect material for three books that would show Americans, in particular, how all England was working to win the war. A remarkable woman, Mrs. Humphry Ward—rather too brilliant and sure of herself to appeal to some, but certainly deserving of respect and admiration for her varied accomplishments.

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A list of the famous people Mrs. Ward knew would be long, ranging through royalty, clergy of many faiths, writers, publishers, artists, and statesmen, and limited in no way by nationality or geography. Among the Americans, for example, were Henry James (an especially congenial friend), Sarah Orne Jewett and Mrs. Annie Fields, Edith Wharton, and Theodore Roosevelt. It is not surprising to find that Mrs. Ward and Violet Paget knew each other, for they had various characteristics and interests in common: brilliance of intellect, beauty of person, devotion to both scholarly and imaginative writing, love of Italy, acquaintance with many of the authors of their time. There is only one letter from Mrs. Ward to Miss Paget in the Colby collection, but the informal tone of it suggests an acquaintanceship of some duration. Unfortunately, neither Mrs. Ward in her autobiography, *A Writer's Recollections* (1918), nor Mrs. Trevelyan in her biography of her mother, *The Life of Mrs. Humphry Ward* (1923), mentions Vernon Lee. Mrs. Trevelyan refers to a journal kept by Miss Gertrude Ward, but this seems not to be available to the public in either written or MS. form; it would perhaps reveal more details of the relationship between the two correspondents.

The letter shows Mrs. Ward as possessed of human weaknesses like the rest of us. A definite reason for writing—to introduce Miss Wakefield—has spurred her to pen a long overdue answer to a letter from Miss Paget; she has, of course, a good reason for being so remiss in her correspondence. She starts a paragraph about Miss Paget's book, but in the second sentence slips to the subject of Mrs. Ward again, where she stays until she politely brings Miss Paget back into the paragraph in the last sentence.

61, RUSSELL SQUARE [London].

17 February 1884.

Dear Miss Paget,

I have been a long time answering your letter, but I

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know you will allow my disabled arm¹ to be an excuse. It is so difficult to get through one's work and correspondence when everything has to be done by dictation. I was the more anxious to write to you soon because a friend of mine, Miss Wakefield, has gone to Florence and was anxious to see you. I promised her I would write to you, and I only hope this letter may find you as soon as she does. You may have heard of her as a most charming amateur singer; she is a connexion of mine and we are very old friends. I am sure you will like her: she is a most vigorous, energetic and delightful creature.

I was much interested in what you told me of Anna Meyer; it is indeed a sad story, and I find it often very hard to realize when I look back upon what she was as a school-girl.

I am looking forward to your book; I hear that the essays it contains are most interesting and—if I may say so—show an advance on your previous work.² I am inclined to envy you your powers sometimes, for with weak eyes and two disabled arms it is almost impossible to do any satisfactory work. Have you seen Amiel's "Journal Intime"?³

¹ "Early in 1883 she began to suffer from a violent form of writer's cramp, which made her right arm almost useless at times, and recurred at intervals all through her life, so that writing was usually a far more arduous and painful process to her than it is to most of us. Through the years 1883 and 1884 she was frequently reduced to writing with her left hand, but she also dictated much to her young sister-in-law, Gertrude Ward, who came to live with us at this time, and became for the next eight years the prop and support of our household." Janet Penrose Trevelyan, *The Life of Mrs. Humphry Ward*, p. 43.

² *Euphorion: Studies of the Antique and the Mediaeval in the Renaissance*, which was published in London in 1884, or *Belcaro: Essays on Sundry Aesthetic Questions*, published in London in 1881. If it is the latter, "your previous work" would be *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, published in London in 1880.

³ *Journal Intime*, edited by Edmund Scherer, French critic and friend of Amiel (1821-1881), appeared in 1882. It was a careful and loving selection from thousands of pages of a journal kept for thirty years by the Swiss philosopher and mystic—a record of "his various occupations, and the incidents of each day . . . his psychological observations . . . the impressions produced on him by books," and the "confidant of his most private and intimate thoughts," as Mrs. Ward tells us in her introduction. Amiel wrote in his native French, which was, however, strongly marked by his years of study and thinking in German; in fact, one critic accused him of attempting "to write German in French." The translation of such a work was no easy task. Mrs. Ward's version, prefaced by an

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He is one of the small class of Introspectives which has a great attraction for me. I am very busy with a translation of his book just now and an introduction; and I am also reading a good deal of Modern Spanish literature, on which I hope to have an article in the Quarterly for April.⁴ But dictating is as yet a great burden. Have you ever tried it?

Mary Robinson⁵ seems better but not yet strong. I suppose she never really is. Mrs. Robinson talks of her taking cold easily and being soon overtired. She spent a night with us not long ago, after having been to see Miss Anderson, the new London "rage," at the Lyceum.⁶

Believe me

Very sincerely yours

MARY A. WARD.

This letter is like Mrs. Ward's *Recollections*, which is more

introduction of thirty-odd pages, became the standard English edition of the work, the one used by Matthew Arnold in his essay on Amiel that did much to stimulate interest in the philosopher.

⁴ A forty-page article reviewing seven works of Spanish literature and criticism, ranging from 1852 to 1883, appears in the July, 1884, issue of *The Quarterly Review*.

⁵ In the early 1880's when Violet Paget was visiting England (she lived with her family in Florence, Italy), she stayed at the home of Mary Robinson, a young woman of her own age and of similar tastes. In 1881 Miss Paget dedicated *Belcaro* "To A. Mary F. Robinson." Miss Robinson had already published a book of verse, *A Handful of Honeysuckle* (1878), and was at work upon a novel, *Arden* (1883). During a period of fifty years she wrote poetry, fiction, and biography in both English and French. She is represented in *The Library of Congress Catalogue of Printed Cards* (1943) by over twenty titles. Among these is *An Italian Garden: A Book of Songs*, an edition of which, limited to 925 copies, was published by Thomas B. Mosher in Portland, Maine. Her last two books, *A Portrait of Pascal* and *The Life of Racine*, were published in America by Harpers in 1926. She was married twice, each time to a man outstanding in his own field: James Darmesteter, an Oriental scholar, and Pierre Émile Duclaux, director of Pasteur Institute in Paris. Search to date has revealed no information as to her death or her present whereabouts.

⁶ Mary Antoinette Anderson (1859-1940) was a beautiful and popular American actress who was noted especially for her Shakespearean rôles. In 1883 she opened at the Lyceum in London in *Ingomar, the Barbarian*, by Maria Lovell, having chosen to play Parthenia in that play (rather than Juliet) as "the simplest character in my *répertoire*, and one in which I could not challenge comparison with any English favorites." Mary Anderson, *A Few Memories*, pp. 135-136. Her success was immediate, and she played this and other rôles to overflowing houses for nearly eight months. She went on tour through the provinces and Ireland, and then had a second season in London, during which she played Juliet a hundred nights. W. S. Gilbert wrote *Comedy and Tragedy* especially for

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about herself than about her famous friends—to the annoyance and distress of several of the reviewers of the book. But one is not justified in carping at such self-interest; in what better place can an author write about herself than in personal letters or in an autobiography?



HARDY'S LETTERS

Reviewed by DAVID PATTERSON

In a recent book on Shelley, the author remarks: "Our deepest crimes . . . and our best actions . . . are not as a rule the things we record in letters. . . . Hardly anyone quite fails to lie in some degree in every letter that he writes. Letters are fascinating and indispensable tools for scholars, but they are not *all* of scholarship. For one man with the genius for self-revelation of Van Gogh, we have a thousand with the talent for self-concealment that literary men in general possess" (Ivan Roe, *Shelley*, London, 1953, page 11).

No reader of this book of Hardy's letters* will fail to recognize that, while he quite obviously had no "genius for self-revelation," he was singularly free from the "self-concealment that literary men in general possess." He was no actor. Hardy was honest and sincere; he said what he really believed, and his letters contain none of the "small talk," the flippant jests, the straining after rhetorical effect, and none of the petty gossip, the political dia-

her. In 1889 she retired from the stage, married Antonio F. de Navarro, whom she had long known, and settled in England.

Mrs. Humphry Ward's first novel, *Miss Bretherton* (1885) "was suggested to me by the brilliant success in 1883 of Mary Anderson, and by the controversy with regard to her acting—as distinct from her delightful beauty and her attractive personality—which arose between the fastidious few and the enchanted many." Mrs. Humphry Ward, *A Writer's Recollections*, Vol. II, p. 15.

* *The Letters of Thomas Hardy* transcribed from the original autographs in the Colby College Library and edited with an introduction and notes by Carl J. Weber; illustrated. Waterville: Colby College Press, 1954; \$5.