

# Colby



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## More Letters from Sarah Orne Jewett

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possessed an elemental dignity in their proportions. It was quite natural for her to describe the Bowden family reunion in its procession across the field to the picnic grove as though it were "a company of ancient Greeks going . . . to worship the god of harvests. . . . We were no more a New England family celebrating its own existence and simple progress; we carried the tokens and inheritance of all such households from which this had descended, and were only the latest of our line."



### MORE LETTERS FROM SARAH ORNE JEWETT

TWO years ago the Colby College Press published a little volume of *Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett Now in the Colby College Library*—a book so attractively gotten up by The Anthoensen Press that it was chosen by the American Institute of Graphic Arts as one of the Fifty Books of the Year. It is perhaps due to the advertising that this selection gave the book that it is already out of print.

The Colby Library has now come into possession of some additional letters from Miss Jewett, and in order to make them available, in this the centennial year of her birth, to her admirers elsewhere, we here transcribe the text of the letters and append brief annotations.

The numbers here assigned to the letters follow those in the volume referred to above.

#### *Letter No. 34*

South Berwick, Maine.

21 December [1891]

My dear friend<sup>1</sup>

I thank you over and over again for the great pleasure I have had in your lovely book of poems,<sup>2</sup> and I thank you most for your kind remembrance. I cannot tell you with what feeling I read again the

<sup>1</sup> Robert U. Johnson, at this time associate editor of *The Century Magazine*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Winter Hour, and Other Poems*. New York, Century Co., 1892.

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pages that I knew last spring in Venice, and some of the lines of *The Winter Hour* belong to my life as much as to yours. I shall be always reading between those dear lines and remembering days that we both remember.

I did not need them to recall our friendship; but I put your white flower of a book into the safest place. I know how dear *The Winter Hour* must be to your wife—it made it doubly beautiful to me because I know something of your life together. God bless you both, dear friends! I send you my best Christmas wish and I wish for myself that I may be so fortunate as to see you sometimes in the New Year.

I saw Mrs. Fields<sup>3</sup> a day or two ago and found her pretty well. We talked of you then—we are pretty sure to think of you when we think of the spring and summer in Italy and France.

I envy you the pleasure that your white book will give to every one, and so bring back to you.

Pray believe me always

Your sincere and affectionate friend

SARAH O. JEWETT

### *Letter No. 35*

148 Charles Street [Boston]

21 Dec'r 1894

Dear Mr. Johnson<sup>1</sup>

I thank you so much for your note and I should have answered it at once, but I have been ill with a very bad attack of bronchitis which keeps me in bed yet. I send the cheque for Mr. Newman's picture—oddly enough I found your note about it a fortnight ago just as I left home, speaking of the price &c. and said to myself that Mr. Newman must have forgotten it. I shall be very glad if you will send it *here*.

I am sorry about the "Sad Captains."<sup>2</sup> I shall be so glad if they do get

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<sup>3</sup> Mrs. James T. Fields, with whom Miss Jewett had travelled to Europe in 1891.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Underwood Johnson (1853-1937), who joined the staff of *The Century Magazine* in 1873. It was he who induced General Grant to write his memoirs, and who later (1920-1921) became United States ambassador to Italy. At the time when Miss Jewett wrote him this letter he was associate editor of the *Century*, in which two of her sketches had been published (in 1890 and 1893). He had apparently accepted her story "All My Sad Captains" but had reported that there would have to be a delay of some months before it could be published.

<sup>2</sup> "All My Sad Captains" was published in *The Century Magazine* for September, 1895, and collected in *The Life of Nancy* later in that same year.

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printed and done with at last! I was just in the middle of a fine spin of work when I was taken so ill, but I shall have to put by everything now for a while.

Mrs. Fields<sup>3</sup> is very well and sends her best regards with mine and kindest Christmas wishes to you and Mistress Kate.

Ever your sincere and affectionate friend

SARAH O. JEWETT

*Letter No. 36*

148 Charles Street

Boston 19 December [1897]

Dear Mr. Johnson

I am very late in sending you my best thanks for your new book of poems,<sup>1</sup> but just as I came up to Town and found it, Mrs. Fields fell ill, and I have put by almost all my letters, and turned to reading aloud to a poor dear person who was commanded by her doctor to listen and not to talk. And you know very well how fast the winter days can fly when one is living a good deal in an invalid room. I am glad to say that Mrs. Fields is much better—I do not know whether she had written you her thanks for the *Songs of Liberty*, but I shall say again how affectionately she really did thank you!

I find that "The Wistful Days" is my favorite; I care very much about it, and just as it spoke to me at first, so, as I think about all the poems, it shines brightest to me now. I cannot exactly say why I care more for it than for any poem I ever read of yours, but the fact remains that I do, and so I will not stop to hunt for reasons.

I hope that you and Mistress Katharine are beginning the winter well—the last I really heard about you was in France. My last letters from Madame Blanc<sup>2</sup> have been very cheerful.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. James T. Fields, from whose Boston home Miss Jewett was writing. "Mistress Kate" is Mrs. Katharine Johnson.

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of Liberty and Other Poems*, New York, The Century Co., 1897.

<sup>2</sup> Madame Therèse Blanc-Bentzon was a French writer who had translated a number of Miss Jewett's sketches into French and had introduced her to a French audience through the pages of the *Revue des deux Mondes*. In 1893 Madame Blanc visited America. After her return to Paris, Miss Jewett was instrumental in placing some of her articles in American periodicals, among them the *Century* of which Robert U. Johnson was then associate editor. He became editor-in-chief in 1909.

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Goodbye, with kindest wishes for a happy Christmas from your sincere friend

SARAH O. JEWETT

[P.S.] Mrs. Fields's book about Mrs. Stowe<sup>3</sup> is having really a great success and brings her much pleasure, especially just now. I am sure that you will care about it.

### Letter No. 37

34 Beacon Street [Boston].  
Thursday morning.<sup>1</sup>

Dearest Katharine<sup>2</sup>

I thank you so much for such a dear and satisfying letter! You don't know what a real help it gives a fellow! I have my ups and downs about the story, but I do think that it gathers as it goes on. The key of it is so different, and the pace of it so much slower, being a longer expedition, that I can see the wide difference there is between it and the *Pointed Firs*,<sup>3</sup> for instance. One can't get the same immediate hold.

It is certainly a dangerous thing to try to write something entirely different after one has been for years and years making stories as short and round as possible, but I have long had a dream of doing this, as you know, and I suppose I had to do it. It is so hard to get an honest word like yours—some people like to be kind! and other people are really indifferent! and neither praise nor blame counts unless the right person speaks, and says both halves of his thought.<sup>4</sup>

I am at last here for my twice-delayed winter visit. I wish you could let me see you. I can if you are coming into town with a spare hour.

With my love to you and little sister  
Your grateful and affectionate  
S. O. J.

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<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* was published in 1897.

<sup>1</sup> Presumably in the late winter of 1900-1901, perhaps in February or March, 1901. *The Tory Lover* was at this time appearing in *The Atlantic Monthly*. It began in November, 1900, and ran, in ten installments, through August, 1901.

<sup>2</sup> Presumably Katharine McMahon (Mrs. Robert U.) Johnson (1876-1924), who had written while *The Tory Lover* was enjoying its *Atlantic* run. After the novel had appeared in book form, a copy "in good Tory red" [see next letter] was sent to the Johnsons. The original of this letter to "Dearest Katharine" is now pasted into that copy of the novel.

<sup>3</sup> S. O. J.'s masterpiece, published in 1896.

<sup>4</sup> Henry James was among those who wrote to S. O. J. about *The Tory Lover* and "blamed" her for writing outside the bounds of her own rare abilities.

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Letter No. 38

December 5th [1901]

South Berwick, Maine.

Dear Mr. Johnson

I am afraid that I cannot write about Madame Blanc!<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Fields does such things better than I ever could, should you care to ask her, and I would lend a hand if my hand were needed. I do not forget that I am to send you a sketch by and by—the best that the winter crop has to offer, but I have been so idle of late that no green shoots are yet appearing through the snow.

I hope that you received a *Tory Lover* in good Tory red or Patriot blue—one was to be sent to you.<sup>2</sup> He is doing very well indeed, I am glad to say. Some persons say that he should have been a second *Country of the Pointed Firs*, but how could the willingest of old story writers make two books just alike?(!)

Please give my best messages to Mistress Katharine.

Yours always most truly

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

Letter No. 39

148 Charles Street [Boston]

Feb'y 17th 1908

Dear Mr. Johnson

Mrs. Fields gives me your letter: the date of Madame Blanc's death was February 5th 1907. We have been thinking of her very often in these last days, especially as we happened to have a friend staying with us who was also her friend and had seen her much within a year or two of her death.

Yesterday I happened to come upon this biography-in-brief, and I put it into my envelope, as you may like to make sure of some other points, though it is not exactly infallible! I should like to have it back again.

I miss dear Madame Blanc's constant letters; it was delightful to know about France or Paris through her, and in every way I miss her more and more. I hear once in a while from her good nephew Comte Louis de Solens and last year I used to get letters from Miss King, but I have never seen her and of course our only reason for writing was not to last always. I believe that she is still in France.

Mrs. Fields sends all her affectionate messages with mine to you

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<sup>1</sup> Five years before this, *The Century Magazine* had published an article by Therèse Blanc-Bentzon. In 1897 she had again visited America and stayed for some time in Miss Jewett's home in South Berwick, Maine.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 2 to the preceding letter.

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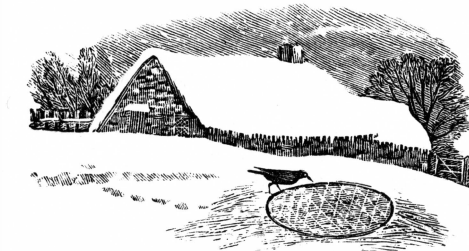
and to Mrs. Johnson. We are going on in usual winter ways—that is, winter ways of these late years! We are so much interested about your son's play.<sup>1</sup> I had heard already about *The Comet* and I wish it and its author all good fortune.

Yours most sincerely  
S. O. JEWETT<sup>2</sup>



### ANOTHER BEWICK WOODCUT

EARLIER issues of this quarterly have announced T. Raymond Pierce's gift of a number of original wood blocks cut by the famous Thomas Bewick (pronounced *Bieu-ick!*), and in our pages there have appeared prints of several of these blocks. We here present another.



This view of Bewick's snow-drifted house and the hungry bird recalls a passage in Sarah Orne Jewett's first book—in fact, if he had not lived a century too soon, Thomas Bewick might well have found pleasure in illustrating some of Miss Jewett's books. Here is the passage in *Deephaven* (originally a sketch called "In Shadow" when it was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in September, 1876), which almost seems written as a description of Bewick's snowbound abode:

<sup>1</sup> The son was Owen McMahan Johnson.

<sup>2</sup> This is among the last letters written by Miss Jewett. She died on June 24, 1909.