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# Colby Library Quarterly

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## A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED LETTER BY WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

By PERLEY M. LEIGHTON

THE COLBY LIBRARY ASSOCIATES recently purchased a copy of the first edition of Thackeray's *English Humourists* (1853)—the volume in which he printed the series of lectures he had delivered in England, Scotland, and (in the winter of 1852-1853) the United States. Now, as a gift from Miss Adelaide and Miss Caroline Wing, the Library has received a letter of Thackeray's, written in the course of the two weeks during which he was lecturing in Edinburgh. It appears to be the only extant letter written to Edinburgh acquaintances during the 1851 lecture-period. It reads as follows:\*

My dear Sir

I am going to drive with L[or]d Rutherford tomorrow after church or I should have had much pleasure in walking—and I've no day—not one upon my word—when I can accept your proposed kindness and dine with you: I should have liked that and quiet better than stalled oxen and great banquets such as I am sharing in—Not that these aren't very pleasant too as pleasant as much praise and pudding can make them—but—but a man is never contented you see.

Always sincerely yours

W M T.

I dont and *wont* thank the Scotsman but I think my friends will

\* Here printed by special permission of Mrs. Richard Fuller, Thackeray's granddaughter.

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It is safe to assume that Thackeray meant Sunday, when he wrote "tomorrow after church": i.e., that he wrote on Saturday. And since he arrived in Edinburgh on Monday night, December 8, 1851, and was back home in London by Wednesday, December 24, this letter must have been written on December 14 or 21.

There is nothing in the letter to indicate to whom it was addressed. Thackeray's diary for 1855 records that in that year he dined in Edinburgh with Alexander Russel, editor from 1849 to 1876 of the *Scotsman*, the newspaper referred to in the postscript. In another letter of 1851 Thackeray had written: "You mustn't trust the honest *Scotsman*. He's such a frantic admirer that nothing less than 1000 people [as an audience for my lectures] will content him."

The "Lord Rutherford" mentioned by Thackeray was Andrew Rutherford (1791-1854), a Scottish judge and member of Parliament, who after 1839 became Lord Advocate of Scotland, Lord of Sessions, and finally a member of Queen Victoria's Privy Council. His death in 1854 makes it certain that this letter was written in 1851, and not during Thackeray's second series of lectures in Scotland in 1855.

In Thackeray's mention of "stalled oxen" we hear an echo of *Proverbs*, XV, 17: "Better a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." But realizing that his remark might be taken as an affront to the Edinburgh banquet-givers, Thackeray hastened to deny such an implication. His reference to "great banquets" and a full engagement book shows how Edinburgh society lionized him; and although he satirized it, Thackeray dearly loved living in Vanity Fair.

