"Will You Marry Me?"

Some First-hand Accounts of Marriage Proposals, 1400-1900

Edited by Ernest Davis

The Gentleman Next Door Declares his Passion for Mrs. Nickleby
"Phiz" (Hablot K. Browne), 1839.

For my dear brother Joey

My teacher and guide in all matters historical

Note: The original subtitle of this collection was "Some First-hand Accounts of Marriage Proposals, 1600-1900i".

Also by Ernest Davis on the subject of marriage proposals:

"How does a 19th century heroine accept a proposal of marriage?" May 2015.

"Proposals of Marriage in the Hebrew Bible" February 2019.

"Proposals of Marriage in the Plays of Shakespeare" June 2019.

" 'Naming the Day' in English Literature" May 2022.

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Preface

We all know what marriage proposal are like in novels, on stage, in the movies, on TV. But if, like me, you have wondered how people in the past actually went about proposing — here is a collection of thirty-six proposals/declarations of love/accounts of betrothals between 1477 and 1883. Thirty are proposals made by a man to a woman; two are proposals made by a woman (Queen Victoria, Maria Porter) to a man; in one (Bettina Brentano and Achim von Arnim) we don't know and either way is equally plausible; two (Grace Sharington to Anthony Mildmay and Margary Brews to John Paston III) were arranged by the families; and one (Bessie Farfel to Abraham Cohen) was arranged by a marriage broker. Thirty-four are recounted in the words of one or both of the participants; one was recounted by an eyewitness; one is an account in the autobiography of one of their children. Twenty-four of these resulted in marriage. Nine were declined. Two were accepted but the marriage never took place. One was a declaration of love by a man who was already engaged to someone else.

There is no reason whatever to think that the proposals here were representative or typical of their time and place. For one thing, all but five of these couples includes at least one author, more often than not a famous author. I did not follow any system in collecting these or carry out any difficult research; these were just the first that I ran across.[1] The most that can be said about them is that they were *possible* for the participants; though in the cases of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Maria Porter, clearly at the limits of what was possible.

Fifteen of the proposals here are from memoirs or autobiographies of the woman involved, written years later. Two are from a diary of the woman, written the same day or a week later. Sixteen are combinations of journal entries and letters. One is from an autobiography of one of the couple's children. One is from a memoir of childhood by a younger sister of the woman. One is my summary drawn from a biography of the woman. The result is that the different sections of this collection vary widely in style and length. Ralph Waldo Emerson's proposal to Lydia Jackson is a three-paragraph letter; she clearly responded by letter, but if that letter survives, I could not find it. The account by Fanny Mendelssohn Bartholdy is two paragraphs in a diary with no details as to what her suitor said or what she answered. Morris Raphaël Cohen's account of his parents' betrothal is one paragraph, though I have also included part of his account of their earlier life. The account by Mary Somerville is three sentences long, and the suitor is not even named, but the story is too good to omit. By contrast, Thomas Barlow's unsuccessful proposal to Frances Burney goes on and on over nine pages here, involving three letters and two very long journal entries; and the saga of the courtship of Lady Mary and Edward Wortley Montagu

[1] Furthermore, in the middle of compiling this, I was interrupted by the disruption of the coronavirus pandemic, which closed the physical library; for two years, I was limited to materials I could find online.

goes on for seventeen pages here. Luckily, these are among the most entertaining and interesting.

I have put the examples in backward chronological order. For the twenty-first century readers, in the later examples, the language, attitudes, and behaviors are, on the whole, comparatively natural; as one goes back in time, everything becomes less familiar. For the most part, I have kept the spelling and punctuation of the edition where I got my information (in the cases of Mary Rich and Grace Sharington, those are certainly those of the modern editor rather than original.) However, I did add paragraph breaks in the 17th-century examples and in one of Jane Porter's letters, which, in the original, are uninterrupted walls of text; and I modernized the spelling in the 1477 letters of Margery Brews and John Paston III, since the fifteenth century spelling is really rather burdensome for the modern reader.

At the front of each of the examples I have added a short biographical note, with some description of the position of the participants (so far as it is known) at the time of the proposal; except Queen Victoria and Albert, where this is unnecessary. (In the case of Lady Montagu, this note is itself three pages long; however, this is an unusually complicated situation.) I have also occasionally added some explanatory material elsewhere in the accounts. All this editorial material is in small font. The images are all in the public domain, except possibly the photo of Shanklin and Harlan. Except for the photographs of the Cohens, the pictures of people are all from the corresponding Wikipedia article.

One somewhat striking point: As one might expect[2] from pre-twentieth century marriages, many of the women involved were, by current standards, very young at the time of their marriage. Laura Ingalls, Annie Wood, Bessie Farfel, Anna Snitkina, Malvina Shanklin, Lucy Webb, Julia Foote, Queen Victoria, Elizabeth Villa-Real, Lucy Parke, Mary Rich, Lucy Apsley, and Grace Sharington were all between 15 and 20. But there are as many exceptions: Marianne Schnitger was 23, six years younger than Max Weber. Lady Mary Pierrepont was 23, eleven years younger than Wortley Montagu. Fanny Mendelssohn was almost 24, eleven years younger than Hensel. Mary Fairfax was 24 at the time of her first marriage, in her late twenties when she received the proposal included here; at the time of her second marriage she was 31 and her husband was 40. Maria Porter was 25 when she proposed to Frederick Cowell, then 19. Bettina Brentano was 25 and Achim Antrim was 30 when they married. Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya was about 27 on entering into her common-law marriage, three years younger than Jaclard. Jane Porter was 29 when she received her two proposals (I don't know the ages of her suitors.) Margaret Montgomerie was about 30, two years older than Boswell, when she married. Lydia Jackson was almost 33, a year older than Emerson. Anne Murray was 34, 12 years younger than

[2]However, this expectation itself is to some extent based on a myth. Apparently, through most of history, the average age of marriage in England was about twenty-five for women.
https://www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk/blog/2024/07/11/what-age-did-people-marry/

Halkett. Charlotte Brontë was 38, three years older than Nicholls. Elizabeth Barrett was 40, six years older than Browning. Frances Burney was 41, four years younger than d'Arblay. (Incidentally, Barrett and Burney each had a child after they were married.) Margaret Brews' age is not known.

It is quite striking that the very substantial majority of the words in this collection — somewhere between 80% and 90% — were written by women. I feel certain that this reflects reality — that is, it is indeed the case that, in these societies at these times, women did indeed write more than men about their personal romances — but I will not venture to try to explain that or connect it to other aspects of those societies.

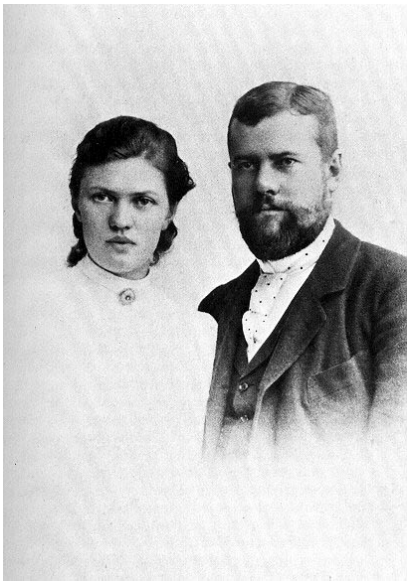
Another point: In the nineteenth-century proposals, money is never mentioned, though marriages are sometimes postponed until the couple is financially secure. (Malvina Shanklin points this out explicitly of her own case, but seems to be saying that in 1915, when she was writing, that would be unusual.) In the eighteenth- and seventeenth-century proposals, except for Apsley/Hutchinson, it was always discussed, often at length; with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, quite dramatically so.

I am extremely grateful to Nicholas Denyer, for pointing out the entry in Queen Victoria's journal; to Laura Stokes, for providing the text and translation of the passage from Fanny Mendelsson's diary and information about the courtship; to Devoney Looser, for helpful information about the Porter sisters' letters; and to Rebecca Chung, for pointing out to me the remarkable courtship of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and for helpful discussions.

Finally: One of the advantages of publishing a book on the Web is that one can always change and extend it. So if you know of any other really interesting proposals from the nineteenth century, or moderately interesting proposals from the eighteenth century, or any proposals at all from the seventeenth century or earlier — that is, first-hand accounts of real marriage proposals — please do email me and let me know. My email address is davise@cs.nyu.edu.

Ernest Davis
August 2020;
updated intermittently through November 2025.

Marianne Schnitger (1870-1954) and Max Weber (1864-1920). Married 1893.



Marianne and Max Weber, 1894

Maximilian Weber was a seminal figure in sociology. Marianne Schnitger Weber was also a sociologist, and a feminist activist. Marianne was Max's first cousin once removed; his father's father was her mother's father's father. At the time of their courtship and marriage, Max was on the faculty of the Royal Friedrich Wilhelm University of Berlin.

The texts below are taken from Marianne's 1926 biography of her husband, Max Weber: A Biography*, trans. Harry Zohn. In the biography, Marianne refers to herself in the third person.*

The charm of the Baumgarten home[3] was further enhanced by two fine daughters. When Weber came to Strasbourg, the older one, eighteen-year- old Emmy, had blossomed into a girl of great loveliness. She was remarkably dainty and delicate, intelligent and lively, a young madonna with a crown of blonde tresses above her narrow, oval face. Her soul and her heart were entirely in the Fallenstein manner: absolutely pure and self-denying, profound and unselfish. But she had also inherited the nervous problems of her mother and grandmother, and at an early age exhaustion and melancholia began to overshadow her youth.

[3]Weber was close to his aunt (his mother's sister) and uncle, Ida and Hermann Baumgarten and often visited their house during his student days and afterward.

The young one-year soldier was profoundly touched by her loveliness, charm, and animation, and he confided in her in a tender, brotherly friendship. Without suspecting it, she was one of his guardian angels in those days. Military exercises took him back to Strasbourg on several occasions–first in the spring of 1885, then in 1887. In the meantime he cultivated his relationship with the Baumgarten house by corresponding with Hermann and Ida. In 1886 he began exchanging letters with Emmy as well, and when the young people met again during the second officers' exercises, a restrained affection sprang up between them. Weber was now twenty-three years old and had just become a Referendar [junior barrister]; for the first time Eros had touched him deeply.

Ida's motherly heart sensed what was going on with conflicting emotions. She loved this unusual nephew like a son, as did her husband, but she feared the disaster of a love match between such close relatives. ... And so, to forestall danger, Ida sent Emmy to Waldkirch to stay with her brother Otto for a while. But Weber followed her there, and the young people spent a few days of sweet closeness in the poetry of spring. They felt that they were in love with each other, but no word was spoken, and they remained at a chaste distance. Only at parting did a warm stream of tears moisten the young man's eyes for an instant.

* * *

[A year later, Emmy gave up hope of marrying Max.]

Not only his empathy with his mother's spiritual life but the fate of his girl friend as well gave Weber a deeper understanding of the special problems of a woman's life, a life in which service to others does not produce objective achievements, but is constantly obliterated by the passage of time. During those years the depression and physical exhaustion from which his girl friend suffered more frequently and more acutely oppressed him too. She suffered all the more from the limitations imposed upon her by illness because, like Helene and Ida, she was naturally inclined to serve and help others.

Just a year after the beautiful spring they had spent together, she decided to give up the man she secretly loved. She could not even be sure that he still loved her. His letters, which were intimate in a brotherly way, did not give her an unequivocal answer. But even if he did, she came to doubt more and more whether she would get well and be a worthy life's companion to him. Under no condition would she tie him down or give him any indication that she was waiting for him. She was out of his sight, and for years the two young people made no attempt to see each other again. Their exchange of letters became less frequent, and the image of the girl friend faded. But Weber did not break away from her inwardly. After all, there still was hope that one day she would reemerge in good health and, with her old charm, give him

a radiant smile. He left everything in abeyance. Because the nature of such illnesses was then little known, he secretly had the guilty feeling that his own indecisiveness was the cause, that she was withering away because of unrequited love. And with every year he became more convinced that if he could not cure the girl and make her happy, he had no right to full human happiness either. There also gradually developed a mysterious feeling, from his innermost being, that it was not given to him to make a woman happy.

* * *

[Marianne Schnitger's mother died when she was two or three, and her father had severe psychological problems; eventually he and two of his brothers were institutionalized. Marianne was brought up by her grandmother and aunt in poverty and hardship in their house in Lemgo, a small town in central Germany. When she was 16, her father, Karl Weber, sent her to finishing school. She graduated when she was 19.]

Marianne studied eagerly and learned a great deal; she developed intellectual appetite and ambition, heard and saw genuine works of art, and compared herself with others. When she left Hannover at the age of almost nineteen, she had become a cultured person with exacting standards in every respect and was alienated ftom the limited conditions of a provincial city. She no longer belonged in that framework; when her grandmother died, no one wanted to keep her in that town, for there was nothing to satisfy her lust for life. Her former schoolmates were already struggling with the barrenness of an unfulfilled youth, slowly wasting away with unsatisfied longing for fulfillment in marriage, something achieved by only a few in that small-town society. For the young men went away, often for good, or else they returned with a wife. ...

Now Marianne was homeless. ... [Her mother] Anna's younger sister Alwine, a kindly, serious woman with many children, whose husband had become a partner in the family business, lovingly took Marianne in, In this very harmonious family circle she was supposed to prepare herself for the future tasks of being a housewife and mother by helping around the house. It seemed to be high time for this. She was sure to find a suitable husband some day, even though in the country the prospects were not ex- actly favorable for a girl with her high intellectual standards. But Marianne's disposition was not typical, and she inwardly rebelled against the traditional fate of girls. The small domestic duties in a household that did not really need her help seemed unimportant to her. She had no capacity for this kind of work, and to help by serving others was an effort for her.

The smooth but uneventful flow of rural life in which the men devote themselves to their businesses and the women to the home and the children offered nothing to her

aspiring intellect and passion for life. There was nothing to develop her own strength, and she felt that her life was condemned to stand still. The days did not stream by, they crept by. She was almost sick with boredom and was profoundly unhappy, but felt guilty about it. The family sensed her alienation with mounting discomfort and would have liked to help, but did not know how. Unfortunately the girl did not at all conform to the hallowed ideal of femininity that the men believed in, an ideal that had shaped all the women of this group, and evidently her stay at the institute, with its highly organized work and all its stimulation, had also spoiled her for country living!

What now? A career? Surely that was not necessary. A profession for a woman made sense only if she was poor and had to forgo all prospects of marriage. Karl Weber's granddaughter need not and must not earn any money; what would people think? Marianne was at her wit's end. ...

When Marianne was twenty-one, the Charlottenburg family took pity on her and invited her to spend a few weeks with them during the winter. Now she could get her fill of the intellectual atmosphere of their house and the cultural treasures of the big city. The quick rhythm of Berlin life surged through her veins; *this at last was living*! She could hardly take everything in. The assessor, Max, took her to her first ball and benevolently uncled [*beonkelt*] her. For the first time she met a group of lively young men. Of them all, her three grown cousins seemed to her to be the most impressive and the most distinguished. The two younger cousins were extremely handsome, but the assessor was not. He did not attach any importance to his appearance. He was corpulent, his pear-shaped head bore fencing scars, and his hair was cut short. His delicately curved lips were in strange contrast to his large, unshapely nose, and his dark eyes were often hidden by his overlapping eyebrows.

No, this colossus was neither handsome nor youthful, but in his every gesture he was powerful and manly, and despite his massiveness he had a subtle grace of movement. What elasticity in his stride, what expressiveness in his hands! Now and then his eyes would show flashes of kindness, anger, or mischief, and occasionally his peculiar aloofness gave way to liberating humor, sympathetic understanding, and chivalrous kindness.

...

When after an interval of a year and a half Marianne saw the assessor again, she immediately knew how she felt, and she also knew that she would be able to stay near him only if no one suspected that she was in love. She also heard about the delicate, lovely Emmy, her mysterious illness, and her closeness to [*Max's mother*] Helene. The rest she surmised. The secret did not bother her at all; for the time being, all she wanted was to be near the man she loved. In the fall of 1892 Weber traveled south for the first reunion in five years with his girl friend, who had found a second home in a beautiful sanatorium. She could increasingly bring her illness under control and was

now able to help other patients. When he told Marianne about this, she felt that he had visited Emmy in order to find out how they felt about each other — and that he was finished with the past. She could not help but ask herself why this had happened at that particular time. Now her feelings were be- ginning to assume a clearer outline and she began to hope for fulfillment.

But the road there went along an abyss. A friend of Max, whom Helene was mothering, courted Marianne. The girl was too dazed to be aware of this; she noticed only that her cousin was changing and withdrawing into his shell again. Helene ardently wanted her young friend and Marianne to marry, a union in which she saw great happiness for both. And her "eyes were holden" [Luke 24:16], all the more so because she was still hoping for a marriage between Max and Emmy. After all, Max had visited Emmy, and this had been followed by the news that the girl was slowly getting well. Marianne was given away without being asked. Hopeless confusion ensued. Helene felt responsible to her young friend, and her guilty feelings toward him brought her to the point of a nervous breakdown. The situation demanded renunication all around, which seemed to be the only dignified and bearable thing to do. Weber wrote a letter to Marianne which like no other document illuminates the fate of his youth and his nature in those years.

> Read this letter, Marianne, when you are calm and composed, for I have things to tell you that you may not be prepared to hear. You believe — I think — that we are through with each other and that I shall banish you to the still, cool harbor of resignation in which I myself have lain at anchor for years. But that is not so.
>
> First this: If we understand each other at all, I need not tell you that I shall never dare to offer a girl my hand like a free gift. Only if I myself am under the divine compulsion of complete, unconditional devotion do I have a right to demand and accept it for myself. I am telling you this so that you will not misunderstand what follows. And now listen.
>
> As you yourself realize, I have known you for only a very short time, for you have been a mystery to me in many respects which I now understand. But you do not know me, you cannot possibly know me. You do not see how I try, with difficulty and varying success, to tame the elemental passions with which nature has endowed me. But ask my mother; I know well that her love for me — which forces me to silence, because I cannot repay it — is rooted in the fact that morally I used to be her problem child. For years the idea that the rich heart of a girl could come close to my sober nature never occurred to me. This is why I was blind and certain of my opinion even in your case.
>
> When I watched my friend's affection for you grow and thought I saw signs of your returning it, I was not able to understand why more than once an

obscure oppressive feeling–something like sadness–came over me when I looked at you and thought that I would have to see you go through life at his or another man's side. I took it for the selfish feeling of someone who has given up at the sight of another person's happiness, and I suppressed that feeling. But it was something else. You know what it was. The word must not pass my lips, for I have a double debt to pay to the past and do not know whether I am able to do so. You know about both, but I have to speak about this nevertheless.

First, the events of the last difficult days. Both of us, although the guilt is mine alone, have impaired my friend's happiness, and more severely than you are able to fathom now. His pure figure stands be- tween us. He knows what I am writing you now, and he is manly and rational. But I do not know if and when the time will come when he could look into your eyes without embarrassment or a feeling of resigna- tion, and with lively sympathy, if you stood before him as the wife of another man. For as long as this is not so, I could never build my own life's happiness on his resignation, for a shadow from the past would fall over the feelings that I would be able to offer to the wife at my side. But I must speak of even more difficult matters.

From my mother you know that six years ago I came close to what I now regard as the pure heart of a girl who resembles you in some re- spects and is dissimilar in others. But you do not know the full weight of the responsibility that I assumed when I was still half a boy in my relationship with girls. I did not recognize it myself until late, and it is a lifetime responsibility. She knew better than I what my situation was; I did not realize this until later. For a long time I was not sure whether we were through with each other. In order to know it for certain I went to Stuttgart last fall. I saw her, the appearance and voice of old, and it was as if some invisible hand were extinguishing her image deep in my heart, for the figure that approached me was different from the one that had lived in me, as though it were from another world. Why that was so I do not know. We parted — so I thought — for life.

Then, at Christmastime, I heard that the doctors were not able to find the cause of her continuing illness and had come to the conclusion that she was *still* secretly in love. So I am searching my heart in vain for a definitive answer to this question: Is it possible that when I thought I was helping her overcome her feeling for me (provided it existed), I was actually arousing hopes in her? Now comes the news that she is beginning to get well, and believes that she is, and I am doubly oppressed by the uncertainty as to whether it is hope or renunciation that is strengthening her nerves. Whatever the reason, I could not accept cool renunciation or resignation from her either. I cannot be dead for her if I am to live for

another, and that is why I must look into her eyes and see whether her heart beats sympathetically when I receive from another girl the happiness that she would have given me if prejudices, my outward hopelessness in my tedious period as a *Referendar*, and also my weakness had not intervened. But when will that day come? I do not know.

And now I ask you: have you inwardly renounced me in recent days? Or resolved to do so? Or are you doing it now! If not, then it will be too late, we shall then be bound to each other, and I shall be hard toward you and not spare you. I say to you: I shall take the course that I must and which you now know. And you will take it with me. Where it will lead, how far it is, whether it will lead us together on this earth, I do not know. And even though I now know how great and strong you are, you proud girl, you may still succumb, for if you go with me, you will not only bear your burden but mine as well, and you are not used to taking such paths. Therefore, test both of us.

But I believe I know how you will decide. The tidal wave of passion runs high, and it is dark around us — come with me, my high-minded comrade, out of the quiet harbor of resignation, out onto the high seas, where men grow in the struggle of souls and the transitory is sloughed off. But bear in mind: in the head and heart of the mariner there must be clarity when all is surging underneath him. We must not tolerate any fanciful surrender to unclear and mystical moods in our souls. For when feeling rises high, you must control it to be able to steer yourself with sobriety.

If you will go with me, then do not answer me. In that case I shall quietly press your hand when I see you again and not cast down my eyes before you, something that you should not do either.

Farewell; life is coming down hard on you, you misunderstood child. This is all I shall say to you now: I thank you for the wealth you have brought into my life, and my thoughts are with you. And now once more: Come with me, I know that you will come.

When Marianne read this letter, she was profoundly shaken by a sense of the ineffable and eternal. She asked nothing further. From then on her life was to be a thanksgiving for the gift of this hour. But oh, how hard it was to wait when the ecstasy had subsided, for now renunciation had been transformed into hope. ... A few months after the event — the time seemed long — Max and Marianne were permitted to become engaged.

* * *

In early autumn a great family wedding took place at Oerlinghausen. Wina [Alwine], the loving and graceful mistress of a flourishing clan with whom the bride

had spent her tortured girlhood, was delighted to be able to open her beautiful country estate to so many important guests. Since her engagement the local family had been very pleased with Marianne. Helene and her family were dearly loved there, and the Privatdozent [adjunct lecturer] was already admired as the distinguished man with a "future." Who would have thought that this peculiar girl would draw such a lot in life?

Laura Ingalls and Almanzo Wilder

Laura Ingalls (1867-1957) and Almanzo Wilder (1857-1949) married 1885.

Laura Ingalls Wilder and Almanzo Wilder, c. 1885

Laura Ingalls Wilder was the author of a series of eight children's books *Little House in the Big Woods* through *These Happy Golden Years*, describing her own childhood in a pioneer family in the American West, and her husband's childhood on a farm in upstate New York.

In 1883, the Ingalls family was living in De Smet, North Dakota, where her father had gotten a homestead. Laura was sixteen, finishing her schooling, and preparing for her own certification as a school teacher. Almanzo Wilder had moved to the area in 1879. Wilder's courtship of Laura is described in the two last books of the series, *The Long Winter,* and *These Happy Golden Years.* They were married on August 25, 1885.

It is a curious thought that, though Laura Ingalls was, at the time of her engagement, one of the poorest in material terms of all the people in this collection, she is now, for twenty-first century Americans, nearly the best known, second only to Queen Victoria.

From Laura Ingalls Wilder, *These Happy Golden Years*:

Again silence came and was unbroken while Barnum on his own accord turned north toward the house. Then Laura said, "I've sung for you, now I'll give you a penny for your thoughts."

"I was wondering . . ." Almanzo paused. Then he picked up Laura's hand that shone white in the starlight, and his sun-browned hand closed gently over it. He had never done that before. "Your hand is so small," he said. Another pause. Then quickly, "I was wondering if you would like an engagement ring"

"That would depend on who offered it to me," Laura told him.

"If I should?" Almanzo asked.

"Then it would depend on the ring," Laura answered, and drew her hand away.

It was later than usual when Almanzo came next Sunday.

"Sorry to be so late," he said, when Laura was seated in the buggy and they were driving away.

"We can take a shorter drive," Laura answered.

"But we want to go to Lake Henry. This is about our last chance for wild grapes, now they are frosted," Almanzo told her.

It was a sunny afternoon, warm for the time of year. On either side of the narrow road between the twin lakes, ripened wild grapes were hanging from their vines in the trees. Almanzo drove slowly, and, reaching from the buggy, he and Laura picked the clusters of grapes. They ate of their tangy sweetness as they watched the water rippling in the sunshine and watched the waves lapping on the shore.

As they drove home, the sun went down in a flaming western sky. Twilight settled over the prairie and the evening wind blew softly through the buggy.

Then driving with one hand, with the other Almanzo lifted Laura's, and she felt something cool slip over her first finger while he reminded her, "You said it would depend on the ring. How do you like this one?"

Laura held her hand up to the first light of the new moon. The gold of the ring and its faint over set shone in the faint moon radiance. Three small stones set in the golden oval glimmered.

"The set is a garnet, with a pearl on each side," Almanzo told her.

"It is a beautiful ring," Laura said. "I think . . . I would like to have it."

"Then leave it on. It is yours, and next summer I will build a little house in the grove on the tree claim. It will have to be a little house. Do you mind?"

"I have always lived in little houses. I like them," Laura answered.

They had almost reached home. Lamplight shone from its windows, and Pa was playing the fiddle. Laura knew the song, it was one that he often sang to Ma. His voice rose with its music and he sang,

A beautiful castle I've built for thee
In dreamland far away,
And there, gentle darling, come dwell with me
Where love alone has sway.
Oh sweet will be our blisses,
Oh rare will be our blisses!
We'll tell our time by the lovers' chime
That strikes the hour with kisses.

Barnum was quiet while Laura and Almanzo stood beside the buggy when Pa's song was finished. Then Laura held up her face in the faint moonlight. "You may kiss me good night," she said, and after their first kiss, she went into the house, while Almanzo drove away.

Pa laid down his fiddle when Laura came in. He looked at her hand where the ring sparkled in the lamplight.

"I see it is settled," he said. "Almanzo was talking to me yesterday, and I guess it is all right."

"If only you are sure, Laura" Ma said gently. "Sometimes I think it is the horses you care for, more than their master."

"I couldn't have one without the other," Laura said shakily.

Then Ma smiled at her, Pa cleared his throat gruffly, and Laura knew they both understood what she was too shy to say.

Annie Wood (1847-1933) and Frank Besant (1840-1917), married 1867, legally separated 1873

Annie Wood Besant

The story of the engagement and marriage of Annie Wood and Frank Besant resembles that of Dorothea Brooke and Mr. Casaubon in *Middlemarch,* but has a much more satisfying ending. Dorothea had to be rescued from her horrible marriage by the well-timed death of her husband, and ended up living a life in which "her full nature ... spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth . . . liv[ing] faithfully a hidden life, and rest[ing] in an unvisited tomb." Annie Besant, by contrast, after six years of unsuccessful marriage, got a legal separation from her husband and embarked on a single life, described below, which was quite successful, extraordinary, and extremely visible.[4]

When Annie Wood met Frank Besant, in Easter 1866, she was nineteen, well educated, rather poor, and intensely religious (Protestant).[5] Her father died when she was five and she was extremely close to her mother. Frank Besant had graduated Cambridge and had been ordained a priest. He had no living at the time and was working as a schoolmaster.

[4]The Besants' separation occurred a year after the publication of *Middlemarch.* However the novel is set forty years earlier, and, in fairness to Dorothea, it seems safe to say that it would have been difficult or impossible for her, in 1832, to embark on a career at all comparable to the one that Annie Besant pursued after 1873.

[5]She was educated during her teens, and effectively adopted, by Ellen Marryat, a wealthy sister of the novelist Captain Marryat, apparently for free, because Miss Marryat took a liking to her when they met. Miss Marryat's education included a trip to Europe. Her father left no money when he died, so her mother ran a boarding house to support the family.

Their courtship is described in the passage below. They had two children, but the marriage was difficult, partly because of incompatability of character, but primarily because Annie lost her faith. She started to write to make money. In 1873 the two were legally separated. I have not made any attempt to find out what happened to Frank afterward.

Annie soon became deeply engaged in a variety of progressive causes: atheism, socialism, freedom of expression, feminism, birth control and home rule for Ireland and India. She gave public lectures and wrote and published articles and books. In 1877 she and her colleague were arrested and tried for publishing a book advocating birth control; they were found guilty but the verdict was overturned on a technicality. She was a member of the Fabian Society from 1885 to 1890. In 1888 she got elected to the London School Board, one of the very few governmental offices then open to women. She involved herself in a docker's strike. She worked with Irish Home Rule activists.

In 1889 she converted to Theosophy and soon became one of the leader of the movement. (Her Wikipedia biography is, perhaps unfairly, categorized under "Theosophy".) She also became involved in Freemasonry.

She moved to India and became very active in the Indian Home Rule movement. She joined the Indian National Congress. In 1916 she and a colleague launched the All India Home Rule League. In June 1917 the British government arrested her for her political activities. In September 1917 she was released, welcomed by crowds all over India. She became President of the Indian National Congress for a year. Gandhi and Nehru spoke in praise of her activities. She died in 1933.

From *Annie Besant: An Autobiography.*

My grandfather's house was near at hand, in Albert Square, and a favorite aunt and myself devoted ourselves a good deal to this little church, as enthusiastic girls and women will. At Easter we decorated it with spring flowers, with dewy princesses and fragrant violets, and with the yellow bells of the wild daffodil, to the huge delight of the poor who crowded in, and of the little London children who had, many of them, never seen a flower. Here I met the Rev. Frank Besant, a young Cambridge man, who had just taken orders, and was serving the little mission church as deacon; strange that at the same time I should meet the man I was to marry, and the doubts which were to break the marriage tie.

Besant goes on to describe how, as a devotional exercise for Holy Week, she assembled a table (which she reproduces in full in her autobiography) of the accounts of the Passion of Christ in the four Gospels, and was shocked to discover that there were significant discrepancies between them. The discovery very seriously disturbed her, and it took a major mental effort on her part to, temporarily, recover her previous faith in the inerrancy of Scripture.

It can then be imagined with what a stab of pain this first doubt struck me, and with what haste I smothered it up, buried it, and smoothed the turf over its grave. *But it had been there,* and it left its mark.

The last year of my girlish freedom was drawing to its close; how shall I hope to make commonsense readers understand how I became betrothed maiden ere yet nineteen, girl-wife when twenty years had struck. Looking back over twenty-five years, I feel a profound pity for the girl standing at that critical point of live, so utterly, hopelessly ignorant of all that marriage meant, so filled with impossible dreams, so unfitted for the *rôle* of wife. As I have said, my day-dreams held little place for love partly from the absence of love novels from my reading, partly from the mystic fancies that twined themselves round the figure of the Christ. Catholic books of devotion — English or Roman, it matters not, for to a large extent they are translations of the same hymns and prayers — are exceedingly glowing in their language, and the dawning feelings of womanhood unconsciously lend to them a passionate fervour. I longed to spend my time in worshipping Jesus, and was, as far as my inner life was concerned, absorbed in that passionate love of "the Saviour" which, among emotional Catholics, really is the human passion of love transferred to an ideal — for women to Jesus, for men to the Virgin Mary. In order to show that I am not here exaggerating, I subjoin a few of the prayers in which I found daily delight, and I do this in order to show how an emotional girl may be attracted by these so-called devotional exercises:

"O crucified love, raise in me fresh ardours of love and consolation, that it may henceforth be the greatest torment I can endure ever to offend Thee; that it may be my greatest delight to please Thee."

. . .

All girls have in them the germ of passion, and the line of its development depends on the character brought into the world, and the surrounding influences of education. I had but two ideals in my childhood and youth, round whom twined these budding tendrils of passion; they were my mother and the Christ. I know that this may seem strange, but I am trying to state things as they were in this life-story, and not give mere conventionalisms, and so it was. I had men friends, but no lovers — at least, to my knowledge, for I have since heard that my mother received two or three offers of marriage for me but declined them on account of my youth and my childishness — friends with whom I liked to talk, because they knew more than I did; but they had no place in my day-dreams. These were more and more filled with the one Ideal Man, and my hopes turned towards the life of the Sister of Mercy, who ever worships the Christ, and devotes her life to the service of His poor. I knew my dear mother would set herself against this idea, but it nestled warm at my heart, for ever that idea of escaping from the humdrum of ordinary life by some complete sacrifice lured me onwards with its overmastering fascination.

Now one unlucky result of this view of religion is the idealisation of the clergyman,

the special messenger and chosen servant of the Lord. Far more lofty than any title bestowed by earthly monarch is that patent of nobility straight from the hand of the "King of kings" that seems to give to the mortal something of the authority of the immortal ... Viewed in this way, the position of the priest's wife seems second only to that of the nun, and has, therefore a wonderful attractiveness ...

That summer of 1866 saw me engaged to the young clergyman I had met at the mission church in the spring, our knowledge of each other being an almost negligible quantity. We were thrown together for a week, the only two young ones in a small party of holiday makers, and in our walks, rides, and drives we were naturally companions; an hour or two before he left he asked me to marry him, taking my consent for granted as I had allowed him full companionship — a perfectly fair assumption with girls accustomed to look on all men as possible husbands, but wholly mistaken as regarded myself, whose thought were in quite other directions. Startled, and my sensitive pride touched by what seemed to my strict views an assumption that I had been flirting, I hesitated, did not follow my first impulse of refusal, but took refuge in silence; my suitor had to catch his train, and bound me over to silence till he could himself speak to my mother, urging authoritatively that it would be dishonorable of me to break his confidence, and left me — the most upset and distressed little person on the Sussex coast. The fortnight that followed was the first unhappy one of my life, for I had a secret from my mother, a secret which I passionately longed to tell her, but dared not speak at the risk of doing a dishonorable thing. On meeting my suitor on our return to town I positively refused to keep silence any longer, and then out of sheer weakness and fear of inflicting pain I drifted into an engagement with a man I did not pretend to love. "Drifted" is the right word, for two or three months passed, on the ground that I was so much of a child, before my mother would consent to a definite engagement; my dislike of the thought of marriage faded before the idea of becoming the wife of a priest, working ever in the Church and among the poor. I had no outlet for my growing desire for usefulness in my happy and peaceful home-life where all religious enthusiasm was regarded as unbalanced and unbecoming; all that was deepest and truest in my nature chafed against my easy, useless days, longed for work, yearned to devote itself, as I had read women saints had done, to the service of the Church and of the poor, to the battling against sin and misery — what empty names sin and misery then were to me! "You will have more opportunities for doing good as a clergyman's wife than as anything else," was one of the pleas urged on my reluctance.

In the autumn I was definitely betrothed, and I married fourteen months later. Once, in the interval, I tried to break the engagement, but on my broaching the subject to my mother, all her pride rose up in revolt. Would I, her daughter, break my word, would I dishonour myself by jilting a man I had pledged myself to marry? She could be stern where honour was involved, that sweet mother of mine, and I yielded to her wish as I had been ever wont to do, for a look or a word from her had ever been my law, save where religion was concerned. So I married in the winter of

1867 with no more idea of the marriage relation than if I had been four years old instead of twenty.

Bessie Farfel (1848-1936) and Abraham Cohen (1847-1934). Married 1867.

Bessie Farfel Cohen and Abraham Cohen were the parents of the philosopher Morris Raphaël Cohen (1880-1947). This account of their early years and their betrothal below is taken from his autobiography, *A Dreamer's Journey.*

My father was born in the town of Kletsk in the government of Minsk in White Russia. . . . It seems that in those rare intervals of life when he could find work my paternal grandfather was a tailor. But most of the time he read the Psalms. . . .

My father's education along pious Orthodox lines could not have been a prolonged one, for very early in his teens he became a tutor to the children of Jewish farmers. This opportunity he probably owed not only to what scholarship he possessed but perhaps even more to his great abilities as a general handy man about the farm. Throughout his life there were few mechanical tasks which he hesitated to undertake or which he failed to carry through skillfully

My mother was born in 1848 in Neshwies, a town near Kletzk in present-day Belorussia. Her father . . . was a tailor.

. . .

My mother remembered the hard times when food was only occasionally seen in the house — such food consisting almost entirely of stale bread discarded or sold for next to nothing by certain warehouses. . . .

She was undersized but that did not prevent her from being overworked. She had an elder brother, my uncle Elias, who as a boy and the heir apparent, was regarded

to the best of everything, while she had to help her mother with household work and the care of the four other boys who came in subsequent years. At the age of eleven she was hired out as a field worker pikcing potatoes and carrying heavy sacks of them. Even so, her first employer had some quarrel with my grandfather and refused to pay her. Despite her stunted growth annd overwork she had a great deal of spirit and a beautiful face framed in flaming red hair and illumined by penetrating eyes whose lustre eighty-eight years of life could not quench.

As a cavalry regiment was stationed near my grandfather's house, he was afraid that some officer or soldier would seduce his daughter, and he sometimes spoke as if he intended to cripple her to prevent such a calamity. Believing implicitly in every word of the Bible, he was thoroughly convinced that he who spares the rod spoils the child; one day he beat my mother so that out of sheer humiliation she ran out to the pond and jumped in to drown herself. Some monks rescued him and forced my grandfather to promise that he would never beat her again.

Though that promise was kept, my mother's lot was not a happy one. She became an expert seamstress, but her earnings went to her father. Occasionally she did get a kopeck to buy something to eat with her bread. This she saved in order to pay a woman to teach her how to write. Though my grandfather, who had some scholarly pretensions, could read, he had never learned to write. Reading prayers and sacred books was for men a religious virtue, but writing was a luxury — especially for women — and so in that effort my mother was ultimately defeated.

Marriage came to her not as the result of any romance (hardly known in those days to children of her circle) but in the regular way through a marriage broker who brought the parents together. My mother's hard common-sense realism is best reflected in her story of what happened when she first met my father. She was in charge of a booth at an annual fair, selling some linens, when my father, his father, and the marriage broker approached and pretended that they wanted to buy some of the things that she was selling. She realized what they were after and said to my father, "What is the use of pretending? I know why you came. Do I please you?" My father was a tall handsome young man with an unusually sweet expression on his face. But my mother told me that she would have married a Tartar to be released from the domination of her father.

I have no hesitation in repeating this story because of the moral that may be drawn from the sequel. Despite the fact that my father and mother were of diametrically opposite temperments in most respects, they lived together in mutual devotion and absolute fidelity for sixty-seven years. The love that grows out of devotedly living together in common efforts proved at least in their case more enduring than the romantic love that is often only temporary attraction.

Anna Snitkina and Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Anna Snitkina (1846-1918) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881). Married 1867.

Anna Snitkina Dostoyevskaya and Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Fyodor Dostoyevsky was a great Russian novelist. In 1866 he was already famous as the author of *Poor Folk, Notes from Underground,* and *Crime and Punishment* among other works. His first wife Maria Dmitriyevna Isaeva had died in 1864, with no children.

Anna Snitkina was 20 years old in 1866. She had graduated high school and trained as a stenographer, and started working as a stenographer for Dostoyevsky on his novel *The Gambler* in October 1866. A month later he proposed to her, and on February 15, 1867, they were married. They had four children together (one died in early childhood). In later life she wrote two memoirs of her life with Dostoyevsky.

From Anna Dostoyevskaya, *Dostoyevsky Reminiscences* trans. Beatrice Stillman

The eighth of November, 1866, was one of the great days of my life. That was the day Fyodor Mikhailovich told me that he loved me and asked me to be his wife. Half a century has passed since then, and yet every detail is as sharp in my memory as if it had happened a month ago.

It was a brilliant, frosty day. I walked to his house, and therefore arrived half an hour later than the appointed time. He had apparently been waiting for me for a long time. When he heard my voice he appeared in the vestibule at once.

"So you're here at last!" he said happily and becan helping me undo my hood and take off my coat. Together we went into his study. It was very bright on this occasion, and I was surprised to notice that he was excited about something. The expression on his face was heightened, fervid, almost ecstatic, and made him look much younger.

"How happy I am that you've come! I was so afraid you'd forget your promise."

"What on earth made you think such a thing? Once I give my word I always keep it."

"Forgive me—I know you always keep your word. It's only that I'm so very glad to see you again!

"And I'm glad to see you, Fyodor Mikhailovich, and in such a cheerful mind at that. Has something pleasant happened to you?"

"Yes, it has. Last night I had a marvelous dream."

"Oh, is that all!" And I started to laugh.

"Please don't laugh. I attribute great meaning to dreams. My dreams are always prophetic. When I dream about my dead brother Misha or particularly when I dream of my father, I know that it portends some catastrophe."

"In that case, please tell me your dream!"

"Do you see that big rosewood box? That is a gift from my Siberian friend Chokan Valikhano and I value it very much. I keep my manuscripts and letters in it, and other things that are precious to me for their memories. And so this is my dream: I was sitting in front of that box and rearranging the papers in it. Suddenly something sparkled among them, some kind of bright little star. I was leafing through the papers and the star kept appearing and disappearing. And this was intriguing to me. I started slowly putting all the papers to one side. And there among them I found a little diamond, a tiny one, but very sparkling and brilliant."

"And what did you do with it?"

"That's the pity of it—I can't remember! There were other dreams after that and I don't know what became of the diamond. But that was a good dream!"

"You know that dreams are usually explained as having the opposite meaning." I remarked, and instantly regretted my words. His face quickly changed, seemed to darken.

"So you think no happiness will ever come to me? All that ... all that is only a vain hope?" he said pitifully.

"I'm not capable of interpreting dreams, and anyway I don't really believe in them."

...

It has long been our custom, when I came to take his dictation, for him to tell me what he had been doing and where he had been during the time we weren't together. So I was quick to ask him how he had been keeping busy during the last days.

"I've been thinking up a plot for a new novel," he answered.

"You don't say! An interesting novel?"

"To me, quite interesting. The thing is, though that I can't seem to work out the ending. The psychology of a young girl is involved in it. If I were in Moscow I would ask my niece, Sonechka, but as it is I shall turn to you for help.

Proudly I prepared to give my "help" to the brilliant novelist. "Who is the hero of your novel, then?"

"An artist. a man no longer young — well, in a word — a man about my own age."

"Oh tell me, do tell me about it," I begged, very curious about this new novel.

And now a brilliant improvisation poured out. Never, neither before nor afterwards, did I hear from him such an inspired tale as on that day. The further he went, the clearer it grew to me that he was telling about his own life, only changing names and situations. Here were all the things that he had previously spoken of to me in bits and fragments, but now his detailed consecutive account explained a great deal about his relationships with his family and with his late wife.

The new novel also contained a harsh childhood, the early loss of a beloved father. some kind of fatal circumstance (a serious malady) which for ten years tore the artist away from life and his beloved art. Then, his return to life (the artist's recovery from his illness), his meeting with the woman with whom he fell in love, the torments this love caused him, the death of his wife, and of someone else close to him (a beloved sister), poverty, debt ...

The hero's inner state, his loneliness, his disenchantment with the people close to him, his hunger for a new life, his need for love, his passionate desire to find happiness again were depicted so vividly and with such fire that it was evident they were not merely the fruit of his imaginative power but had been experienced by the author himself.

Dostoyevsky did not spare the darker shades in delineating his hero. By his own words his hero was a man grown old before his time, sick with an incurable disease (a paralyzed hand), gloomy, suspicious; possessed of a tender heart, it is true, but incapable of expressing his feelings; an artist and a talented one, perhaps, but a failure who had not once in his life succeeded in embodying his ideas in the forms he dreamed of, and who never ceased to torment himself over that fact.

Seeing Fyodor Mikhailovich himself in the hero of his novel, I could not keep

from interrupting, “But why, Fyodor Mikhailovich, do you insult your hero so?”

“I see that you do not find him likable.”

“On the contrary, I find him very likable. He has a splendid heart. Think how many sorrows have fallen to his lot, and how meekly he submits to them! Another man experiencing so much misery in his life would doubtless have grown hard, but your hero goes on loving people and helping them. No, you are being decidedly unfair to him.”

“Yes, I agree that he has a kind and loving heart. And how happy I am that you understand him!”

He went on with his story: “And so, in that critical period of his life, the artist meets a young girl of our age, or perhaps a year or two older. Let’s give her the name of Anya so as not to have to call her “the heroine”. It’s a nice name, Anya.”

These words confirmed my conviction that by “the heroine” he was alluding to his former fiancée Anna Korvin-Krokovskaya.[6] It quite went out of my head at that moment that my own name was also Anna—so little did I feel that the story had any connection with myself. The theme of the new novel might have come into being (or so I thought) as a result of a letter he had recently received from her from abroad, which he had told me about a few days before.

The heroine’s portrait was painted in different colors from the hero’s. According to the author, Anna was gentle, wise, kind, bubbling with life, and possessed of great tact in personal relationships. But I, who in those days attached much importance to feminine beauty, couldn’t keep from asking, “And is your heroine pretty?”

“She isn’t a real beauty, of course, but she is very nice-looking. I love her face.”

Now I felt that he had let the cat out of the bag. Something pinched in my heart. A hateful feeling toward Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya took hold of me and I said, “But, Fyodor Mikhailovich, you are over-idealizing your ‘Anya’. Can she really be all that?”

“She is just precisely ‘all that’! I have studied her through and through!”

He went on with his story: “The hero used to meet Anya in art circles and the more he saw of her the more he liked her and the stronger his conviction grew that he might find happiness with her. And still, his dream seemed to him almost impossible. For, as a matter of fact, What could this elderly, sick, debt-ridden man give a young, alive, exuberant girl? Wouldn’t her love for him involve a terrible sacrifice on her part? And afterwards, wouldn’t she bitterly regret uniting her life with his? And in general, would it be possible for a young girl so different in age and personality to fall in love with my artist? Wouldn’t that be psychologically false? That is what I

[6]Snitkina’s account is mistaken here; as we will see in the next item in this collection, Dostoyevsky proposed to Anna Korvin-Krokovskaya but she rejected him.

wanted to ask your opinion about, Anna Grigoryevna."

"But why would it be impossible? For if, as you say, your Anya isn't merely an empty flirt and has a kind, responsive heart, why couldn't she fall in love with your artist? What if he is poor and sick? Where's the sacrifice on her part, anyway? If she really loves him, she'll be happy, too, and she'll never have to regret anything!"

I spoke with some heat. Fyodor Mikhailovich looked at me in excitement. "And you seriously believe she could love him genuinely, and for the rest of her life?"

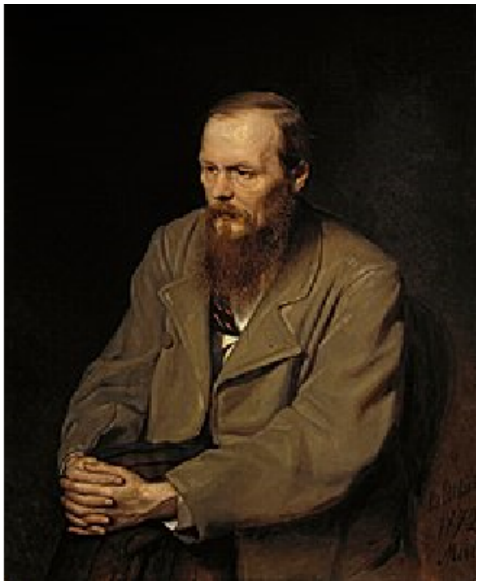
He fell silent, as if hesitating. "Put yourself in her place for a moment," he said in a trembling voice. "Imagine that this artist — is me; that I have confessed my love to you and asked you to be my wife. Tell me, what would you answer?"

His face revealed such deep embarrassment, such inner torment, that I understood at long last that this was not a conversation about literature; that if I gave him an evasive answer I would deal a deathblow to his self-esteem and pride. I looked at his troubled face, which had become so dear to me, and said, "I would answer that I love you and will love you all my life."

I won't try to convey the words full of tenderness and love that he said to me then; they are sacred to me. I was stunned, almost crushed by the immensity of my happiness and for a long time I couldn't believe it.

Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya and Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya (1843-1887) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881). Proposal rejected, 1865.



Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya and Fyodor Dostoyevsky
The painting of Dostoyevsky is by Vasil Perov, 1872

This is the only item in this collection narrated by a third party; consequently, only a small part of the actual proposal is recorded. However, it is much too good a story to leave out.

The account here is taken from memoirs of Anna's younger sister, Sofya Kovalevskaya (1850-1891), *A Russian Childhod*. Kovalevskaya herself was a extraordinary woman. She was a mathematician and a physicist, arguably the greatest woman mathematician, or even the greatest woman scientist, before the twentieth century. She was the first woman in the nineteenth century to earn a Ph.D. and the first woman to hold a university professorship (there were earlier women who did both in eighteenth-century Italy). She was also, as will become clear, an accomplished writer; *A Russian Childhood* was an immediate success and was translated into Swedish, French, German, Dutch, Danish, Polish, Czech, Japanese, and English.

Kovalevskaya's account of her own and her sister's relation with Dostoyevsky occupies a chapter and a half — forty pages — in her memoir. It is altogether worthwhile reading in full, but out of scale here, so I will summarize and present excerpts. My summaries are in small font.

To start with the epilogue: After rejecting Dostoyevsky's proposal,, Anna Korvin-Krukovskaya became increasingly involved with the radical politics of the time, as a socialist and feminist activist. In 1869 she went to Paris, and began a common-law marriage with Victor Jaclard, a member of the National Guard during the Paris Commune; consequently, she is generally known historically as Anne Jaclard. She was active in many ways — working as a paramedic, serving on the committee supervising the education of girls, founded a newspaper, and so on. When the Commune was suppressed, her husband was arrested, but he managed to escape or was rescued (it is not clear) and got to Switzerland. Anna went to England, where she stayed at the house of Karl Marx. The Jaclards moved back to Russia in 1874, where they were involved in revolutionary politics. She died in 1887.

Despite her rejection of Dostoyevsky's proposal, and despite the wide divergence in their politics, the Jaclards remained on friendly terms with him and his wife. In fact, in 1887, six years after Dostoyevsky's death, his widow did the Jaclards an enormous service, intervening on their behalf with Ministry of Internal Affairs, who had ordered them to leave the country in two days, after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. It is thought that the character Aglaya Epanchina in Dostoyevsky's novel *The Idiot* is based on Anna.[7]

Returning to the story of the proposal: Anna and Sofya Korvin-Krukovskaya were brought up in a wealthy, aristocratic family. Their father was a general and very conservative; Sofya was taught by a governess, but her father would not allow her to be taught science or math beyond basic arithmetic, so she had to study them in secret. In 1864 Anna wrote a story and sent it to Dostoyevsky's journal, *The Epoch*. (Anna was twenty-one, Sofya was fourteen, Dostoyevsky was forty-three.) He accepted it for publication and wrote to her warmly, encouraging her to continue to write. She wrote a second story, which he also accepted, but unfortunately his second letter back, with payment for the stories, was intercepted by her father, who threw a fit:

He summoned Anyuta to his study and upbraided her mercilessly. One sentence in particular etched itself very deeply in her memory: "Anything can be expected from a girl who, in secret from her father and mother, is capable of entering into a correspondence with a strange man and taking money from him. Now you are selling your stories, but the time will come — mark my words — when you'll sell yourself."

. . .

At first, in the heat of his anger, he demanded that his daughter promise to stop writing and would agree to forgive her only under this condition. Anyuta, it goes without saying, would not agree to give any such promise. Consequently they did not speak to one another for days on end, and Anyuta did not even appear at dinner.

[7] I hope it is OK for me to refer to Anna by her first name and Dostoyevsky by his last, but "Korvin-Krukovskaya" is a mouthful, and there are two of them.

Finally, Father capitulated. The first step on the road to conciliation was his agreement to have Anyuta's story read to him. The reading proceeded in great solemnity. The entire family was present. Fully aware of the importance of the moment, Anyuta read in a voice trembling with excitement. . . .

Father listened without saying a word all through the reading. But when Anyuta reached the final pages and, barely holding back her own sobs, started reading about Lilenka on her death bed, bewailing her wasted youth, big tears suddenly appeared in his eyes. He got up without a word and walked out of the room. Neither that evening nor in the days following did he say anything to Anyuta about her story. He only addressed her with amazing gentleness and tenderness, and everyone in the family understood that her cause was won. . . .

Father gave Anyuta permission to write to Dostoevsky with the single condition that she show him the letters. Moreover, he promised that on the next trip to Petersburg he would meet Dostoevsky personally.

> In January, the whole family travelled from their country estate to their house in St. Petersburg. Anna immediately arranged for Dostoyevsky to be invited to the house. Father was still unenthusiastic.

"Dostoevsky is not a man of our social world. What do we know about him? Only that he's a journalist and a former convict. Fine recommendation, I don't think! You'll have to be extremely careful about him."

> The first visit was not a success; Dostoyevsky barely said anything, and her mother was unable to draw him out. However,

About five days later, however, Dostoevsky came to see us once again, and this time things worked out as beautifully as could be. Neither my mother nor my aunts were at home. My sister and I were alone together, and somehow the ice melted right away. Fyodor Mikhailovich took Anyuta by the hand, they sat down side by side on the couch and immediately began talking together like two old friends. The conversation didn't drag as it had on the previous occasion, moving stiffly from one boring subject to another. Now both Anyuta and Dostoevsky seemed in a rush to express their thoughts, interrupted each other, joked and laughed.

. . .

From that day on he was very much at home in our house and, inasmuch as our stay in Petersburg would not last for long, he began coming to visit very often, three or four times a week.

. . .

Toward the end of our stay in Petersburg Mama planned to give a farewell party and to invite all our friends. Dostoevsky, of course, was also invited.

That was a disaster. Dostoyevsky was no good in large parties.

My mother was quick to introduce him to our guests, but instead of greeting them he muttered something inaudible that sounded like a grumble, and turned his back. Even worse, he immediately stated his claim to Anyuta's total attention. He took her off to a corner of the drawing room, revealing the obvious intention of keeping her there. This, of course, was contrary to all the social amenities. On top of that, his manner toward her was very far from what was acceptable in polite society. He took her hand. When he talked with her he bent down to her very ear.

And then things got even worse.

Among the guests was one who had made himself especially hateful to Fyodor Mikhailovich from the first moment. This was a distant relative of ours . . . a young German and an officer of one of the Regiments of the Guard. He was regarded as a very brilliant young man. He was handsome and intelligent and cultivated and received in the very highest society, and all this in the proper measure, in moderation and without excess. Even his career was proceeding in the proper measure, not with arrogant speed, but solidly, estimably. He knew how to make himself pleasing to the proper parties, but without over-eagerness or sycophancy.

By his rights as a relative, he paid a good deal of attention to his cousin Anyuta when he met her at the aunts', but this too was in proper measure, not conspicuously, but merely letting it be known that he had "intentions." As always happens in such cases, everyone in the family knew that he was a potential and eligible suitor, but they all pretended not even to suspect such a possibility.

. . .

Dostoevsky had only to take one look at this handsome, strapping, self-satisfied figure to conceive a dislike for him verging on frenzy.

. . .

Fyodor Mikhailovich looked at this pair, and a whole story composed itself in his mind: Anyuta loathes and despises this "cheeky little German," this "smug braggart," but her parents want to marry her off to him and are bringing them together in every way possible. The whole evening, of course, was arranged with this sole aim.

The fashionable topic of conversation that winter was a book published by an English clergyman discussing the parallels between Russian Orthodoxy and Protestantism. In that Russo-German circle this was a theme of interest to all, and when the conversation touched on it the atmosphere livened up a little. Mama, herself of German origin, remarked that one of the advantages of the Protestants over the Orthodox consisted in the fact that they read the Gospel more.

"But was the Gospel written for society ladies?" suddenly blurted out Dostoevsky, who had remained stubbornly silent until then. "The Gospel says, 'First God created man and woman,' and further, 'Let a man forsake his father and mother and cleave to his wife.' That was how Christ understood the meaning of marriage! But what will the mamas say to that, when their only idea is how to marry their daughters off profitably?"

. . .

Dostoevsky's relationship with Anyuta was somehow transformed after that evening, as though it had entered a new phase of its existence. He no longer overawed her in the least. On the contrary, she developed a desire to contradict him, to tease him.

. . .

"Where were you yesterday?" he would ask crossly.

""At a ball," she would answer with indifference.

"And did you dance?"

"Naturally."

"With that second cousin of yours?"

"Yes, with him and with others too."

"And does that amuse you?" the interrogation would continue.

Anyuta shrugged her shoulders. "For lack of anything better, even that is amusing," she would answer, and pick up her needlework again.

Dostoevsky looked at her for a few moments in silence. "Then you're an empty-headed girl, you're a foolish little brat, that's what you are!" he would conclude.

. . .

"All the young people nowadays are stupid and uncultured! Dostoevsky would shout. "For them, blacked boots are worth more than Pushkin!"

"Pushkin really is passé for our times," my sister would remark calmly, well aware that nothing in the world could infuriate Dostoevsky more than a disrespectful attitude toward Pushkin.

. . .

As the relationship between my sister and Dostoevsky was, to all appearances, deteriorating, my own friendship with him kept growing. With each passing day I admired him more and more and fell completely under his spell. He could not help noticing my boundless admiration, and he found it pleasant. He held me up as a constant example to my sister.

If he happened to express some profound idea or brilliant paradox which went counter to conventional morality, Anyuta would suddenly take it into her head to pretend not to understand. My eyes would blaze rapturously, but she, deliberately, in order to exasperate him, would offer some threadbare platitude in response.

"You have a worthless, petty little soul!" Fyodor Mikhailovich would flare up then. "Your sister is quite another thing! She is still a child, but how she understands me! Because she has a sensitive spirit!"

I would flush bright red with pleasure. I would have let myself be cut to pieces if necessary to prove to him how well I understood him.

. . .

Among those agreeable talents whose cultivation Dostoevsky encouraged was music. Up to then I had taken piano lessons the same as most girls do, without any special partiality or dislike for them.

. . .

Now I prepared a surprise for Dostoevsky. He had once told us that of all musical works, his favorite was Beethoven's *Sonata Pathéthique,* and that this sonata never failed to plunge him into a whole world of forgotten sensations. Although the sonata was much more advanced than anything thing I had played up to that time, I resolved to learn it no matter what. And, as it turned out, after expending untold hours of labor on it, I reached the point of playing it fairly tolerably. Now I awaited only a fitting occasion to gladden Dostoevsky with it. That occasion presented itself very soon.

. . .

Mama and all the aunts had been invited to an important dinner party at the Swedish embassy, for the Ambassador was an old friend of the family. Anyuta, who by this time had had enough of visits and dinner parties, excused herself on the ground of a headache. The two of us were alone in the house. That evening Dostoevsky came to see us.

So this, then, was the perfect time to play him his favorite sonata! I rejoiced in advance at the thought of all the pleasure I was going to give him.

I began to play. The difficulty of the piece, the necessity of following every note, the fear of striking a wrong note soon engulfed my attention so completely that I blotted out my surroundings and didn't notice anything that was happening around me. I finished the sonata with the self-satisfied awareness of having played well. There was an enjoyable tiredness in my fingers. Still under the spell of the music and the stimulus of the pleasurable excitement which always takes hold of one after a piece of work well done, I waited for my well-deserved praise. But there was only silence. I looked around: there was no one in the room.

My heart sank. Having as yet no definite suspicion but feeling a dim presentiment of something wrong, I went into the next room. It, too, was empty. Finally I lifted the portiere draped over the door to a little corner salon, and saw that Fyodor Mikhailovich was there with Anyuta. But Lord, what did I see!

They were sitting side by side on a small settee. The room was dimly lit by a lamp with a big shade. The shadow fell directly on my sister so that I couldn't make out her face, but I saw Dostoevsky's face distinctly. It was white and agitated. He was holding Anyuta's hand in his. Leaning toward her, he spoke in the same passionate, spasmodic whisper I knew and loved so well.

"My darling Anna Vasilievna, try to understand ... I fell in love from the first minute I saw you. Even before that. I had an intimation even from your letters. And it's not in friendship that I love you but in passion, with all my being."

My eyes blurred. A feeling of bitter loneliness, of deadly insult suddenly gripped me and there was a rush of blood, first, it seemed, to my heart, and then surging in a hot stream to my head.

I dropped the curtain and ran out of the room.

. . .

Feelings I had never experienced before filled and overflowed my heart: bitterness, hurt, shame. Mostly, it was shame and hurt. Up to that moment I had not acknowledged even in my most secret thoughts how I felt about Dostoevsky and had not admitted even to myself that I was in love with him.

> Sofya assumed that they were engaged, but she was so angry and hurt that she would not talk to Anna. She was surprised that the next day Dostoyevsky did not come and Anna went cheerfully to a concert. That evening, Anna explained the situation to her:

"Then you don't really love him?" I whispered, almost suffocating with excitement.

Anyuta grew thoughtful. "Well, it's like this . . ." she began, evidently searching for the right words and having difficulty finding them. "Of course I love him very much and I respect him, I respect him terrifically! He's so kind, so intelligent ... he's a genius!"

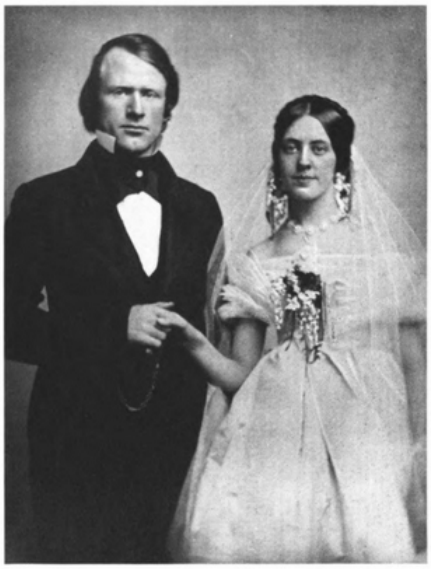
She was quite animated, and again I felt my heart pinch. "But ... how shall I explain it to you? I don't love him the way that he ... well, anyway, I don't love him the way you love somebody you want to marry!" she suddenly concluded.

"You see, I'm even surprised myself sometimes that I can't love him! He's such a wonderful person. In the beginning I thought I might come to love him. But he needs an entirely different kind of wife from me. His wife will have to dedicate herself

to him utterly, utterly, to give up her whole life to him, to think about nothing but him. And I can't do that . . . I want to live myself! And then, he's so nervous and demanding. He always seems to be taking possession of me and sucking me up into himself. When I'm with him I can never be myself."

From Sofya Kovalevskaya, *A Russian Childhood,* trans. Beatrice Stillman

Malvina Shanklin (1839-1916) and John Marshall Harlan (1833-1911) married 1856.



John Harlan and Malvina Shanklin, 1856

John Marshall Harlan was a Supreme Court Justice (1877-1911). He is known as "The Great Dissenter" for his notable dissents, in opposition to segregation and in favor of civil rights for Blacks, in the notorious "Civil Rights" cases of 1883 and Plessy vs. Ferguson in 1896, in which the court decided in favor of discriminatory laws.

As described below, Harlan met Malvina Shanklin in 1854, when he was 21 and she was 15, and proposed after a week's courtship. They were married three years later. Shanklin was the only daughter of a prosperous, strongly abolitionist, family in Indiana. Harlan was the fifth son of James Harlan, a prominent politician in Kentucky, a close friend of Henry Clay, and a slaveholder. At the time, John Harlan was a lawyer and a rising star in the Know-Nothing party, known as a public speaker.

Malvina Harlan wrote her memoirs *Some Memories of a Long Life, 1854-1911,* in 1915, after her husband's death. They remained unpublished, among Harlan's papers at the Library of Congress. In 2011, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and her clerk Laura Brill were collecting material about women associated with the Court and found the memoirs. Recognizing their literary quality and historical importance, Ginsburg arrange for its publication, first as a special issue of *Historical Society Journal,* and then, when that got favorable attention in the press, as a book.

From Malvina Shanklin Harlan, *Some Memories of a Long Life, 1854-1911.*

One day during the late summer of 1853 in Evansville, Indiana, a small but growing town in the Southwestern part of the State — a young girl of fifteen, suffering from affection of the eyes, had been confined by the physician's order to a darkened room.

Happening at the moment to peep through a narrow crack of the almost close window-shutters she saw a young man passing by. As she had lived all her life in that town and was familiar with almost every face in it, she knew at once that he was a stranger.

That was sixty-one years ago; but, as clearly as if it were yesterday, she can still see him as he looked that day — his magnificent figure, his head erect, his broad shoulders well thrown back — walking as if the whole world belonged to him.

On the sixth of the following February, 1854, she was invited to take supper with the family of Dr. J.G. Hatchitt, a young physician living in the block beyond her father's residence. To her surprise, as she sat talking to her hostess, a young man — with a rope to each arm, as he "played horsey" for the little nephew that was the delightful and uproarious Jehu — suddenly pranced into the room. The young girl at once recognized him as the interesting stranger who had caught her eye six months before, as she peeped through the narrow crack of her window-shutters and whom, after the romantic style of that period, she had (to herself) called "A Prince of the Blood".

Very much amused and yet covered with manly confusion, at thus being caught by a strange young girl in the act of "playing the boy," the young man who proved to be John Marshall Harlan, of Frankfort, Kentucky, and a brother of the hostess (Elizabeth Harlan) — was duly presented to "Miss Malvina Shanklin".

His conversation during that evening greatly interested the young girl, showing unusual thought and intelligence, for a youth of only twenty-one, and that night he escorted her home.

. . .

During the next week, a daily call from this new friend gave me a new interest in life; and at the end of the week, before he left for his Kentucky home to my great surprise, he asked me to be his wife.

"Does the course of true love ever run smoothly?" Considering the strain put upon it in this case, where disenchantment might so easily have followed, I can say that for me it did.

In those days early marriages were quite common and in my case the young man urged an immediate consummation of his wishes. But the wiser counsels of parents prevailed and for two years — during which I was at school and he at the practice of

law in his father's office in Frankfurt, we corresponded, an occasional visit from him making the time seem shorter.

The young man's letter to my father asking for my name in marriage was somewhat different, I fancy, from similar letters written at the present time. He said nothing whatever of the worldly or material aspects of the matter. After expressing the hope that he could make me happy, he referred my father for information as to his character, to prominent men with whom my father was acquainted in Henderson, a neighboring town on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River.

I never heard any question from either parents as to what he had in worldly goods or prospects — his character and habits being their one and only thoughts. Perhaps if they had known what the young wife afterwards learned, namely that my "Young Lochinvar from out of the" South had to borrow $500 from his father for the expenses of our wedding and for our start in life, my parents might have looked on their decision as a trifle unwise and hasty.

. . .

In those days, in the community in which I was brought up, the announcement of an "engagement" would have seemed somewhat indelicate; and in my case it was *not until* the receipt of an invitation from my parents, announcing simply that they would be "At Home" on December 23, 1856, and enclosing two cards tied together at the top with a tiny tell-tale bow of white ribbon — one bearing the name of "John Marshall Harlan" and the other the name of "Malvina French Shanklin — *that any of the friends on either side had any idea that a marriage was in prospect.* The only exceptions were the six bridesmaids, who were pledged to secrecy. A dressmaker from New York had been smuggled into the house and was carefully hidden from view for two whole months, during the preparation of my simple trousseau. Thus bidden in the quaintly reserved fashion of those early days, a large company of our friends gather promptly at nine o'clock in the evening of December 23, 1856, in the large front parlor of my father's house, to witness what was called a "Tableau Wedding" — which at that time was quite an innovation.

In the smaller back parlor, which was shut off by folding doors from the front room, until the great moment arrived, the bridal party of fourteeen were grouped in a semi-circle facing the wedding guests — six bridesmaids alternating with six groomsmen, the Bride and Groom standing in the centre. At weddings in those early days (as I recall it) there was no "best man" — at all events, at *my* wedding, the Groom (to one person, at least) was the only "best man"; so that in the semi-circle that formed our "Tableau", a bridesmaid instead of a groomsman stood at the Groom's right hand, while a groomsman stood at my left.

Two of the bridesmaids were dressed in pink, two in blue, and two in buff, the Bride, of course being in white.

The Groom wore the traditional black dress-coat . . .

The immediate members of the two families and the officiating clergyman were the only other persons in the back parlor.

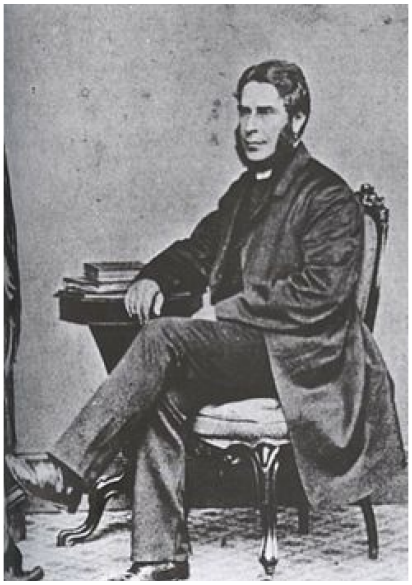
When all things were ready, the folding doors were then thrown open, thus revealing the "Tableau", and the ceremony was performed in the presence of the large company of friends who were gathered in the front parlor.

At every entertainment in those days, amateuar music, both vocal and instrumental, made part of the pleasure of the occasion. And in marked contrast to the formality and conventionality of social life at the present time, I may recall the fact that the Bride on the December night, fifty-nine years ago, was escorted to the piano by the young husband, that she might contribute to the pleasure of the evening. I had had advantages in the way of musical education that were rather unusual in those days in my part of the country, and it was not until I had sung three or four of the popular ballads of the day that I was allowed to leave the piano.

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855)

Proposal from Henry Nussey (1812-1860). Declined (1839).
Proposal from David Pryce (1811-40). Declined (1839).
Proposal from Arthur Nicholls (1819-1906). Initially declined (1852), then accepted.
Married 1854.

Charlotte Brontë



Arthur Nicholls

Proposal from Rev'd Henry Nussey, March 1839, Declined

Charlotte Brontë, famous as the author of *Jane Eyre*, was the daughter of the Reverend Patrick Brontë (one of whose own marriage proposals is included further on in this collection), a minister in an Anglican church in Haworth, Yorkshire, and Maria Branwell Brontë. She was the third of six children: Maria (born 1814), Elizabeth (b. 1815), Charlotte (b. 1816), Branwell (b. 1817), Emily (b. 1818), and Anne (b. 1820). Her mother died in 1821. Her older sisters Maria and Elizabeth both died of tuberculosis in 1825, largely due to the appalling conditions at the Cowan School which they, Charlotte, and Emily were then attending. (The Cowan School and Maria were the models for Lowood Institution and Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*).

Charlotte Brontë spent a year and a half, from January 1831 to June 1832 at the Roe Head School run by Margaret Wooler, about 15 miles from home. She was a star student but in general she did not enjoy it. In 1839 she returned to Roe Head School to work as a teacher. However she hated teaching — she considered her students "fat-headed oafs" — and after a few months she

returned home in a state of collapse. While she was recovering at home and considering what she should do next, she received two proposals of marriage.

Proposal from Reverend Henry Nussey, March 5 1839

Ellen Nussey (1817-1897) was a fellow student of Charlotte's at Roe Head School. The two became lifelong friends (with occasional periods of coolness). Over her life, Charlotte wrote her about 500 letters of which 350 survive; six of these are included below. (All of Ellen's letters to Charlotte were burned at the instruction of Charlotte's husband).

In 1839 Ellen's brother Henry (1812-1860) was a curate at a church in a small village in Sussex, who was hoping to become a missionary. (Apparently he was the model for St. John Rivers in *Jane Eyre*.) He decided at that point that he needed a wife, so, apparently, he went down the list of eligible and acceptible unmarried women in his acquaintance. His diary entry for March 1 1839 reads as follows:

Diary of Henry Nussey, March 1, 1839

On Tuesday last, received a decisive reply from M.A.L.'s[8] papa. A loss but I trust a providential one. Believe not her will but her father's. All right. God knows best what is good for us, for his Church, and for his own Glory. This I humbly desire. And his will be done & not mine in this or in anything else. Evermore give me this Spirit of my Lord and Master! Wrote to a Yorkshire friend C.B.

Henry Nussey did, indeed write to Charlotte proposing marriage a few days after being rejected by Margaret Lutwidge. His letter does not survive. Her answer to him declining the proposal and a letter to Ellen discussing her reasons for rejecting him are below. Note: Charlotte's punctuation and capitalization in her letters were non-standard. In particular, she often used dashes instead of periods as separators between sentences. I have followed *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë* in that regard. In all these letters, ellipses marked with three dots are editorial.

Charlotte Brontë to Rev'd Henry Nussey, 5 March 1839

Haworth

[8]Margaret Anne Lutwidge — incidentally the aunt of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson a.k.a. Lewis Carroll, then seven years old.

My dear Sir

Before answering your letter. I might have spend a long time in consideration of its subject; but as from the first moment of its reception and perusal I determined on which course to pursue, it seemed to me that delay was wholly unnecessary.

You are aware that many reasons to feel grateful to your family, that I have peculiar reasons for affections toward one at least of your Sisters, and also that I highly esteem yourself. do not therefore accuse me of wrong motives when I say that my answer to your proposal must be a *decided negative.* In forming this decision — I trust I have listened to this dictates of conscience more than to those of inclination; I have no personal repugnance to the idea of a union with you — but I feel convinced that mine is not the sort of disposition calculated to form the happiness of a man like you. It has always been my habit to study the characters of those amongst whom I chance to be thrown, and I think I know yours and can imagine what description of woman would suit you for a wife. Her character should not be too marked, ardent and original — her temper should be mild, her piety undoubted, her spirits even and cheerful, and her "*personal attractions*" sufficient to please your eye and gratify your just pride. As for me you do not know me, I am not the serious, grave, cool-headed individual you suppose — you would think me romantic and eccentric — you would say I was satirical and severe — however I scorn deceit and I will never for the sake of attaining the distinction of matrimony and escaping the stigma of an old maid take a worthy man whom I am conscious I cannot render happy. . . . It is a pleasure to me hear that you are so comfortably settled and that your health is so much improved. I trust God will continue his kindness toward you — let me say also that I admire the good sense and absence of flattery and cant which your letter displayed. Farewell—! I shall always be glad to know you as a friend—

believe me Yours truly
C. Brontë

Henry Nussey's Diary, 9 March 1839

Received an unfavorable reply from C.B. The Will of the Lord be done.

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 4 August 1839

My dearest Ellen

...

You ask me my dear Ellen whether I have received a letter from Henry — I have about a week since — The Contents I confess did a little surprise me, but I have kept them to myself, and unless you had questioned me on the subject I would never have adverted to it. — Henry says that he is comfortably settled at Donningon in Sussex that his health is much improved & that it is intention to take pupils after Easter — he then intimates that in due time he shall want a Wife to take care of his pupils and frankly asks me to be that Wife. Altogether the letter is written without cant or flattery — & in a common-sense style which does credit to his judgment — Now my dear Ellen there were in this proposal some things that might have proved a strong temptation — I thought if I were to marry so, Ellen could live with me and how happy I should be, but again I asked myself two questions — Do I love Henry Nussey as much as a woman ought to love her husband? Am I the person best qualified to make him happy —?— Alas Ellen my Conscience answered "*no*" to both these questions. I felt that though I esteemed Henry — though I had a kindly leaning toward him because he is an amiable — well-disposed man. Yet I had not, and never could have that intense attachment which would make me willing to die for him — and if ever I marry it must be in that light of adoration that I will regard my Husband ten to one I shall never have the change again but n'importe. Moreover I was aware that Henry knew so little of me he can hardly be conscious to whom he was writing – why it would startle him to see me in my natural home-character he would think I was a wild romantic enthusiast indeed — I could not sit all day long making a grave face before my husband – I would laugh and satirize and say whatever came into my head first — and if he were a clever man & loved me the whole world weighed in the balance against his smallest wish should be light as air —

Could I — knowing my mind to be such as that could I conscientiously say that I would take a grave quiet young man like Henry? No it would have been deceiving him — and deception of that sort is beneath me. So I wrote a long letter back in which I expressed my refusal as gently as I could and also candidly avowed my reason for that refusal. I describe to him too the sort of Character I thought would suit him for a wife. — Goodbye my dear Ellen — write to me soon and say whether you are angry with me or not.

C. Brontë

Charlotte remained at least somewhat in contact with Henry Nussey, and a few further letters from her to him have survived. In a letter dated October 28, 1839, she congratulated him on a promising attachment to another lady,

who had not been identified. However, apparently that fell through. In May 1845, Henry Nussey married Emily Prescott, a wealthy woman. He had mental problems that eventually became acute, and in the 1850s he was admitted to a lunatic asylum. He died in 1860.[9]

Proposal from Reverend David Pryce, July 1839

In May 1839, Charlotte took a two-month appointment as governess in a family with two children. By July she had returned to her father's house.

Reverend David Pryce (1811-1840) was born in Wiklow, Ireland and graduated Trinity College, Dublin in 1830. He paid a visit to the Brontës looking for a woman to marry.

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 4 August 1839

Haworth

. . .

I have an odd circumstance to relate to you prepare for a hearty laugh — the other day — Mr Hodgson — Papa's former Curate — now a Vicar — came over to spend the day — with us — bringing with him his own Curate. The latter Gentleman by name Mr Price is a young Irish Clergyman — from Dublin University — it was the first time we had any of us seen him, but however after the manner of his Countrymen he soon made himself at home — his character quickly appeared in his conversation — witty — lively, ardent — clever too — but deficient in the dignity & discretion of an Englishman at home you know Ellen I talk with ease and am never shy — never weighed down and oppressed by that miserable mauvaise honte which torments & constrains me elsewhere — so I conversed with this Irishman & laughed at his jests — & though I saw faults in his character excused them because of the amusement his originality afforded — I cooled a little indeed & drew in toward the latter part of the evening — because he began to season his conversation with something of Hibernian flattery which I did not quite relish, however they went away and no more was thought about them.

A few days after I got a letter the direction of which puzzled me it being in a hand I was not accustomed to see — evidently it was neither from you nor Mary Taylor, my only Correspondents — having opened & read it proved to be a declaration of attachment — & proposal of Matrimony — expressed in the ardent language of the sapient young Irishman!

[9]Information about Henry Nussey's later life is taken from the web page "What Became Of the Real St. John Rivers?"

well thought I — I've heard of love at first sight but this beats all. I leave you to guess what my answer would be — convinced that you will not do me the injustice of guessing wrong.

When we meet I'll shew you the letter. I hope you are laughing heartily. this is not like one of my adventures is it? it more nearly resembles Martha Taylor's – I'm certainly doomed to be an old maid Ellen — I can't expect another chance — never mind I made up my mind to that fate ever since I was twelve years old. I need not tell you to consider this little adventure is told in confidence —- write soon

C. Bronte

Proposal from Reverend Arthur Nicholls. Declined December 1852, then accepted in April 1854. Married July 1854

In October 1847, Charlotte published *Jane Eyre* under the pseudonym Currer Bell. It was immediately an enormous success. In December Emily and Anne published *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* under pseudonyms Ellis and Acton Bell; those were also great successes, though more controversial. Between September 1848 and May 1849, Branwell, Emily, and Anne all died; Charlotte and her father were thus the only surviving members of the family. In 1849 Charlotte published *Shirley.* In November-December 1849 and May-June 1850 Charlotte made two trips to London, meeting many of the leading writers and cultural figures of the time.

Arthur Bell Nicholls (1819-1906) was born near Belfast. He graduated Trinity College, Dublin in 1844. He became an assistant curate to Patrick Brontë in June 1845. Charlotte[s immediate reaction, in a letter to a friend, was that he "appears to be a respectable young man, reads well, and I hope will give satisfaction."

In July 1846, Ellen Nussey wrote the Charlotte, saying that someone had asked her "whether Miss Brontë was going to be married to her father's curate?" Charlotte wrote back, entirely denying it.

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 10 July 1846

I scarcely need say that never was rumour more ill-founded — it puzzles me to think how it could possibly have originated — A cold, far-away sort of civility are the only terms on which I have ever been with Mr Nicholls — I could by no means think of mentioning such a rumour to him even as a joke — it would make me the laughing-stock of himself and his fellow-curates for half a year to come. They regard me as an old maid, and I regard them, one and all, as highly uninteresting, narrow and unattractive specimens of the "coarser sex"

There is reason to think that Nicholls had fallen in love with Charlotte at least by June 1847, when he declined an offer of a better position. Be that as it may, in December of 1852, he summoned the nerve to pop the question.

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 15 December 1852

Haworth

Dear Nell,

. . .

I enclose another note which — taken in conjunction with the incident immediately preceding it — and with a long series of indications whose meaning I scarce ventured hitherto to interpret to myself — much less hint to any other — has left on my mind a feeling of deep concern.

This note — you will see is from Mr. Nicholls. I know not whether you have ever observed him specially — when staying here —: your perception in these matters is generally quick enough — *too* quick — I have sometimes thought — yet as you never said anything — I restrained my own misgivings — which could not claim the sure guide of vision.[10] What Papa has seen or guessed — I will not inquire — though I may conjecture. He has minutely noticed all Mr. Nicholls' low spirits — all his threats of expatriation — all his symptoms of impaired health — noticed them with little sympathy and much indirect sarcasm.

On Monday evening — Mr. N — was here to tea. I vaguely felt — without clearly seeing — as without seeing, I have felt for some time — the meaning of his constant looks — and strange, feverish restraining.

After tea — I withdrew to the dining room as usual. As usual — Mr. N sat with Papa till between eight & nine o'clock. I then heard him open the parlour door as if going. I expected the clash of the front-door. — He stopped in the passage: he tapped: like lightning it flashed on me what was coming. He entered — he stood before me. What his words were — you can guess; his manner — you can hardly realize — nor can I forget it — Shaking from head to foot, looking deadly pale, speaking low, vehemently yet with difficulty — he made me for the first time feel what it costs a man to declare affection when he doubts response.

The spectacle of one ordinarily so statue-like — thus trembling, stirred, and overcome gave me a kind of strange shock. He spoke of sufferings he had borne for months — of sufferings he could endure no longer — and craved leave for some hope. I could only entreat him to leave me then and promise a reply on the morrow. I asked

[10]It is not clear to me whether this, and the references to "without seeing" in the next paragraph are purely metaphorical or whether they refer to Charlotte's extremely poor eyesight.

him if he had spoken to Papa. He said — he dared not — I think I half-led, half put him out of the room. When he was gone I immediately went to Papa — and told him what had taken place. Agitation and Anger disproportionate to the occasion ensued — if I had *loved* Mr. N — — and had heard such epithets applied to him as were used — it would have transported me past my patience — as it was —my blood boiled with a sense of injustice — but Papa worked himself into a state not to be trifled with — the veins on his temples started up like whip-cord — and his eyes became suddenly blood-shot — I made haste to promise that Mr. Nicholls should on the morrow have a distinct refusal.

I wrote yesterday and got this note. There is no need to add to this statement any comment — Papa's vehement antipathy to the bare thought of any one thinking of me as a wife — and Mr. Nicholls' distress — both give me pain. Attachment to Mr. N — you are aware I never entertained — but the poignant pity inspire by his state on Monday evening — by the hurried revelation of his sufferings for many months — is something galling and irksome. That he cared something for me — and wanted me to care for him — I have long suspected — but I did not know the degree or strength of his feelings

Dear Nell — good-bye

C. Brontë

Charlotte Bronte to Ellen Nussey, December 18, 1852

Haworth

Dear Nell

You may well ask, how is it? for I am sure I don't know. This business would seem to me like a dream — did not my reason tell me it has been long brewing It puzzles me to comprehend how and whence comes this turbulence of feeling.

You ask how Papa demeans himself to Mr. N. I only wish you were here to see Papa in his present mood: you would know something of him. He just treats him with a hardness not to be bent — and a contempt not to be propitiated.

The two have had no interview as yet: all has been done by letter. Papa wrote — I must say — a most cruel note to Mr. Nicholls, on Wednesday. In his state of mind and health (for the poor man is horrifying his landlady — Martha's Mother — by entirely rejecting his meals) I felt that the blow must be parried, and I thought it right to accompany the pitiless dispatch by a line to the effect that — while Mr. N must never expect me to reciprocate the feeling he had expressed — yet at the same

time — I wished to disclaim participation in sentiments calculated to give him pain; and I exhorted him to maintain his courage and spirits.

On receiving the two letters, he set off from home. Yesterday came the enclosed brief epistle.

You must understand that a good share of Papa's anger arises from the idea — not altogether groundless — that Mr. N has behaved with disingenuousness in so long concealing his aims — forging that Irish fiction &c. I am afraid also that Papa thinks a little too much about his want to money; he says the match would be a degradation — that I should be throwing myself away — that he expects me, if I marry at all — to do very differently; in short — his manner of viewing the subject — is — on the whole, far from being one in which I can sympathize. — My own objections arise from a sense of incongruity and uncongeniality in feeling, tastes — principles.

How are you getting on — dear Nell — and how are all at Brookroyd? Remember me kindly to everybody — Yours — wishing that Papa would resume his tranquility — and Mr. Nicholls his beef and pudding

C. Brontë

Arthur Nicholls left his position at Haworth in May; between his own feelings for Charlotte and Patrick Brontë's undisguised hostility, his position there had become impossible. However, he had an secret ally in Charlotte's friend Elizabeth Gaskell (see below), who persuaded her friend Richard Monckton Milnes to visit Nicholls in January 1854 and offer him a choice of two positions, substantially better than the one he held. With this improvement in his standing he resumed his courtship of Charlotte, who now decided to marry him. She, Nicholls, and their friends; they assured him that they would continue to live with him and take care of him. Her father first acquiesced to the plan and then became enthusiastic about it.

Charlotte Bronte to Ellen Nussey, 11 April 1854

My dear Ellen

Thank you for the collar — It is very pretty, and I *will* wear it for the sake of her who made and gave it.

Mr Nicholls came on Monday 3rd. and was here all last week.

Matters have progressed thus since last July. He renewed his visit in September — but then matters so fell out that I saw little of him. The correspondence pressed on my mind. I grew very miserable in keeping it from Papa. At last sheer pain made me gather courage to break it. — I told all. It was very hard and rough work at

the time — but the issue after a few days was that I obtained leave to continue the communication. Mr. N came in January — he was ten days in the neighborhood. I saw much of him — I had stipulated 'with Papa' for opportunity to become better acquainted — I had it and all I learnt inclined me to esteem and, if not love — at least affection — Still Papa was very — very hostile — bitterly unjust. I told Mr. Nicholls the great obstacles that lay in his way. He has persevered — The result of this is last visit is — that Papa's consent is gained — that his respect, I believe is won — for Mr. Nicholls has in all things proved himself disinterested and forbearing. He has shewn too that while his feelings are exquisitely keen — he can freely forgive. Certainly I must respect him — nor can I withhold from him more than mere cool respect. In fact, dear Ellen, I am engaged.

Mr. Nicholls in the course of a few months will return to the curacy of Haworth. I stipulated that I would not leave Papa — and to Papa himself I proposed a plan of residence — which should maintain his seclusion and convenience uninvaded and in a pecuniary sense bring him gain instead of loss. What seemed at one time — impossible — is now arranged — and Papa begins really to take a pleasure in the prospect.

For myself — dear Ellen — while thankful to One who seems to have guided me through much difficulty, much and deep distress and perplexity of mind — I am still very calm — *very* — inexpectant. What I taste of happiness is of the soberest order. I trust to love my husband — I am grateful for his tender love to me — I believe him to be an affectionate – a high-principled man — and if with all this, I should yield to regrets — that fine talents, congenial 'tastes' and thoughts are not added — it seems to me I should be most presumptuous and thankless.

Providence offers me this destiny. Doubtless then it is the best for me — Nor do I shrink from wishing those dear to me one not less happy.

It is possible that our marriage may take place in the course of the Summer. Mr. Nicholls wishes it to be in July. He spoke of you with great kindness and said he hoped you would be at our wedding. I said I thought of having no other bridesmaid. Did I say right? I mean the marriage to be literally *as quiet as possible.*

Do not mention these things just yet. I mean to write to Miss Wooler shortly. Good-bye — There is a strange — half-sad feeling in making these announcements. The whole thing is something other than imagination paints it beforehand: cares — fears — come mixed inextricably with hopes. I trust yet to talk the matter over with you — Often last week I wished for your presence and said so to Mr. Nicholls — Arthur — as I now call him — but he said it was the only time and place when he could not have wished to see you.

Good bye
Yours affectionately
C. Brontë

Margaret Wooler, the head-mistress of Roe School, was a life-long friend and correspondent of Charlotte's

Charlotte Brontë to Margaret Wooler, 12 April 1854

Haworth

My dear Miss Wooler

The truly kind interest which you have always taken in my affairs makes me feel that it is to due to you to transmit an early communication on a subject respecting which I have already consulted you more than once.

I must tell you then — that since I wrote last — Papa's mind has gradually come round to a view very different to that which he once took, and that after some correspondence, and as the result of a visit Mr. Nicholls paid here about a week ago — it was agreed that he is to resume the curacy of Haworth, as soon as Papa's present Assistant is provided with a situation, and in due course of time he is to be received as an inmate into this house.

It gives me unspeakable content to see that — now my Father has once admitted this new view of the case — he dwells on it complacently. In all arrangements his convenience and seclusion will be scrupulously respected. Mr. Nicholls seems deeply to feel the wish to comfort and sustain his declining year. I think — from Mr. N's character — I may depend on this not being a mere transitory impulsive feeling, but rather that it will be accepted steadily as a duty — and discharged tenderly as an office of affection.

The destiny which Providence in His goodness and wisdom seems to offer me will not — I am aware — be generally regarded as brilliant — but I trust I see in it some germs of real happiness. I trust the demands of both feeling and duty will be in some measure reconciled by the step in contemplation. It is Mr. N's wish that the marriage should take place this Summer — he urges the month of July — but that seems very soon.

...

Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 15 April 1854

Haworth
Saturday

My own dear Nell

I hope to see you somewhere around the 2nd. week in May.

...

I suppose I shall have to go to Leeds. My purchases cannot be either expensive or extensive — You must just revolve in your head the bonnets and dresses something that can be turned to decent use and worn after the wedding-day will be best — I think.

I wrote immediately to Miss Wooler and received a truly kind letter from her this morning. If you think she would like to come to the marriage I will not fail to ask her.

Papa's mind seems wholly changed about this matter. And he has said both to me and when I was not there — how much happier he feels since he allowed all to be settled. It is a wonderful relief to me to hear him treat the thing rationally — and quietly and amicably talk over with him themes on which, once I dared not touch. He is quite anxious that things should get forward now — and takes quite an interest in the in the arrangement of preliminaries. His health improves daily, though this east-wind still keeps up a slight irritation in the throat and chest.

The feeling which had been disappointed in Papa — was ambition — paternal *pride,* ever a restless feeling — as we all know. Now that this unquiet spirit is exorcised — Justice, which was once quite forgotten — is once more listened to — and affection — I hope — resumes some power.

My hope is that in the end this arrangement will turn out more truly to Papa's advantage — than any other it was in my power to achieve. Mr. N only in his last letter — refers touchingly to his earnest desire to prove his gratitude to Papa by offering support and consolation to his declining age. This will not be mere *talk* with him — he is no talker — no dealer in professions. Dear Nell — I will write no more at present. You can of course tell your Sister Ann & Mr. Clapham — the Healds too if you judge proper — indeed I now leave the communication to you — I know you will not obtrude it where no interest would be taken.

Yours affectionately
C. Brontë

Elizabeth Stevenson Gaskell (1810-1865), usually known as "Mrs. Gaskell", was a successful and important Victorian novelist. She became fascinated by Charlotte Brontë with the publication of *Jane Eyre* and met her at the home of a common friend in 1850. The two soon became close friends. After Charlotte's death, Mrs. Gaskell wrote a biography, published in 1857.

Charlotte Brontë to Mrs Gaskell, ?18 April 1854

Haworth

My dear Mrs Gaskell,

I should have deferred writing to you till I could fix the day of coming to Manchester, but I have a thing or two to communicate which I want to get done with.

You remember — or perhaps you do not remember — what I told you when you were at Haworth. Towards the end of autumn the matter was again brought prominently forward. There was much reluctance, and many difficulties to be overcome. I cannot deny that I had a battle to fight with myself; I am not sure that I have even yet conquered certain inward combatants. Be this as it may — in January last papa gave his sanction for a renewal of acquaintance, Things have progressed I don't know how. It is no use going into detail. After various visits and as the result of perseverance in one quarter and a gradual change of feeling in others, I find myself what people call 'engaged'. Mr. Nicholls returns to Haworth. The people are very glad — especially the poor and old and very young — to all of whom he was kind, with a kindness that showed no flash at first, but left a very durable impression. He is to become a resident in this house. I believe it is expected that I shall change my name in the course of summer—perhaps in July. He promises to prove his gratitude to papa by offering faithful support and consolation to his age. As he is not a man of fine words, I believe him. The Rubicon once passed, papa seems cheerful and satisfied; he says he has been far too stern; he even admits that he was unjust — terribly unjust he certainly was for a time, but now all this is effaced from memory — now that he is kind and declares himself happy — and talks reasonably and without invective. I could almost cry sometimes that in this important action in my life I cannot better satisfy papa's perhaps natural pride. My destiny will not be brilliant, certainly, but Mr Nicholls is conscientious, affectionate, pure in heart and life. He offers a most constant and tried attachment — I am very grateful to him. I mean to try and make him happy, and papa too ...

... in contemplating the coming event — I cannot boast these things. I won't say any more on paper. I may venture to consult you a little when I see you

Good bye

Yours faithfully & affectionately
C Brontë

Mrs Gaskell to John Forster ?17 May 1854 Extract

... I enclose you Miss Brontë's announcement of her marriage-to-be.— It is quiet, quaint, & a little formal; but like herself & meaning the full force of every word she uses. She told me of Mr. Milnes interview with Mr Nicholls, & of the latter's puzzle to account for Mr. Milnes interest in him. She never for an instance suspected anything; or my head would not have been safe on my shoulders. To hear her description of the

conversation with her father when she quietly insisted on her right to see something more of Mr. Nicholls was really fine. Her father thought that she had a chance of some body higher or at least farther removed from poverty. She said "Father I am not a young girl, not a young woman even — I never was pretty. I now am ugly. At your death I shall have 300£ besides the little I have earned myself — do you think there are many men who would serve seven years for me?" And again when he renewed the conversation and asked her if she would marry a curate? — "Yes I must marry a curate if I marry at all; not merely a curate but *your* curate; not merely *your* curate but he must live in the house with you, for I cannot leave you." The sightless old man stood up & said solemnly 'Never. I will never have another man in this house', and stalked out of the room. For a week he never spoke to her. She had not made up her mind to accept Mr. Nicholls, & the worry on both sides made her ill – Then the old servant interfered, and asked him, sitting blind & alone, "if he wished to kill his daughter?" and went up to her and abused Mr. Nicholls for not having "more brass." And so it has ended where it has done. Since I have seen her I am more content than this letter made me at first.

Charlotte Brontë and Arthur Nicholls were married on June 29, 1854. Charlotte died on March 31, 1855; it is believed that her death was caused by complications of pregnancy. Nicholls lived with Patrick Brontë and supported him until his death in 1861. He then returned to Ireland where he managed a small farm. He died of bronchitis in 1906.

The information here is taken from *Charlotte Brontë: A Life* by Claire Harman and *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a selection of letters by family and friends* ed. Margaret Smith.

Rutherford B. Hayes and Lucy Webb

Rutherford B. Hayes (1822-1893) and Lucy Webb (1831-1889). Married 1851.

Rutherford B. Hayes and Lucy Webb, wedding daguerreotype

Rutherford B. Hayes, 19th President of the United States, is now chiefly remembered for the scandal of the 1876 Hayes vs. Tilden election. Prior to being President, he was a lawyer who defended runaway slaves, an abolitionist, a general in the Union army, a Congressman, Governor of Ohio, and a diarist.

Lucy Webb Hayes was the first First Lady to be widely covered in the press, and the first to have a college degree. She was known for her pro-temperance views (social functions at the White House were dry during Hayes' Presidency) and her advocacy for African Americans. These earned her intense admiration from some and mockery from others.

Hayes and Webb first met in 1845. In 1850, Hayes was building a law practice in Cincinnati. Webb had graduated college (the Cincinnati Wesleyan Female College). Hayes' older sister Fanny Platt encouraged him to visit with Lucy again and they soon fell in love. He proposed to her in person on June 14, 1851, and sent her a long love letter on June 22. They were married December 30, 1852.

From Rutherford B. Hayes' Diary Saturday June 14, 1851

[I] went on my way ... and naturally turned into the gate south side of Sixth, next house east of Dr. Priestley's church — a blessed vicinity forever more in my memory

— and soon was chatting gaily with my — since a goodly time — "received *ideal*" of a cheerful, truthful, trusing, loving, and lovable girl, who might have been the original in many points of Hawthorne's Phoebe — the sunbeam in "The House of the Seven Gables"; or of the fairy in Ik Marvel's revery over the anthracite, with "the deep eye reaching back to the spirit; not the trading eye, weighing your purse; nor the beastly eye, weighing your appearance; but the *heart's eye*, weighing your soul! An eye full of deep, tender, earnest feeling. An eye which looked on once, you long to look on again; an eye which will haunt your dreams; an eye which will give a color; in spite of you, to all your reveries. An eye which lies before you in your future, like a star in the mariner's heavens, by which unconsciously you take all your observations."[11]

I listened carelessly, with a free and easy feeling, to her talk "soft and low" — tones and voice just matching that otherwise matchless eye; not matchless for its brilliancy, or magnetizing power, or beauty even, but for its tenderness and goodness. We finally spoke of Delaware and then of the Agards, an humble family of no special interest to me, except as joined in my memory with dear recollections of childhood. I proposed to call and see them. We stopped a few doors west into their domicile; had a queer cordial welcome from the two old maids and Theron. Oh, how fallen from the "big boy" as I remember him years ago! After our return *she*, with the fine voice and eye, compared the two spinsters to Dora's aunts in "Copperfield". We spoke of different topics. I was sleepy from bad rest the night before, told her so, but talked on.

On a sudden the impulse seized me — unthought of, un[pre]meditated, involuntary, and (I was sitting in a rush bottom rocking-chair in front of her, she on a short sofa) I grasped her hand hastily in my own and with a smile, but earnestly and quick accents, said "I love you." She did not comprehend it; *really*, no sham; and I repeated [it] more deliberately. She was not startled — no fluttering; but a puzzled expression of pleasure and surprise stole over her fine features. She grew more lovely every breath, returned the pressure of my hand. I *knew* it was as I wished, but I waited, perhaps repeated [my declaration] again, until she said, "I must confess, I like you very well." A queer, soft, lovely tone, it stole to the very heat, and I. without loosing her hand took a seat by her side and — — — and the faith was plighted for life!

A quiet, smiling, satisfied silence, broken by an occasional loving word followed. She said, "I don't know but I am dreaming. I thought I was too light and trifling for you." I spoke of friends. She said in reply to [my question] "What would your mother think of her daughter's foolish act?" — "What would your sister think of it?" And so and so — [Her] brother Joseph came in, and after a short while I went home to dream of it all again and again.

Diary and Letters of Rutherford Burchard Hayes vol. 1 pp. 365-6 ed. Charles

[11] According to the editor of Hayes' diary, this is misquoted, though the general content is correct.

Richard Williams, Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1922.

Letter from Rutherford Hayes to Lucy Webb

[The editor of Hayes' letters has made some cuts in this letter and I have made a few more. The editor points out that both of the quotes of poetry are from Milton's *Comus*, and both are slightly misquoted.]

Columbus, June 22, 1851

Dearest Lucy:— I know it is very wicked of me to spend this holy Sabbath morning writing sweet nonsense to my lady-love instead of piously preparing to go to church with mother, as a dutiful son out to do, but then I'm hardly responsible. This love is, indeed, an awful thing, as Byron said, "it interferes with all a man's projects for good and glory." Besides I am only fulfilling my scriptural destiny in "forsaking father and mother" and all that — and — I can't quote any farther. But the pith of it is — leaving your mother to go alone to church and stealing off up into a quiet chamber to spoil good paper with wretched scribbling to puzzle the eye of the dearest girl of all the world. Well, you'll forgive the sin I hope. I *know* you have if you have thought a tithe as much about me — but you haven't — as I have about you, the five or six days past — and with a pardon beaming from your — I was a-going to say *deep,* and then *sweet,* but no one word *can* describe it — eye, I can feel a heathenish indifference to any other forgiveness. For "at this present" that eye has become to me, and I trust will ever continue, "like a star in the mariner's heaven" — an eye which is to give color, shape, and character to all my future hopes, fancies, and "reveries." ...

To think that I am beginning that revery! To think that *that* lovely vision is an actual, living, breathing being, and is loved by me, and loves in return, and will one day be my bride — my abiding, forgiving, trustful, loving wife — to make my happy home blessed indeed with her cheerful smile and silver voice and warm true heart!

I don't know, Lucy dearest, what you think of it, but — if I *could* quote Tom Moore I would —

"... if there be an Elysium of bliss
It is this —it is this!

I thought when I began this letter I would talk only about facts, persons, and such little bits of gossip as I have picked up about our common friends and acquaintances here and at Delaware, but behold I only talk of love, and tell you what I suppose I shall tell you a million times hereafter, how fast you are becoming the "be-all and end-all" of my hopes, thoughts, affec tions, nay, existence. I was never of a melancholy

turn of thought or feeling. I should always have been selected, I think, as one of the constitutionally happy. But really I begin to suspect that I have never known much about living. Long before I thought the time had come to tell you of the warm feeling that was nestling snugly in my heart, I had tried to form an opinion of your sentiments towards me, and, to speak truly, I always had a presentiment that Fate or Fortune, or Heaven had linked our destinies together. Yet notwithstanding this feeling, the being told so, the hearing it from your own lips, the learning it from your own warmly clasped hand and granted kiss, has made a happy fellow of me ever since. I can say with a character in one of Milton's smaller poems, –

"Such a home-felt delight
Such a sober certainty of waking bliss,
I never felt till now."

I feel that you will not only be the making of my happiness, but also of my fortunes or success in life. The truth is I never did half try to be anything, or to do anything. There was no motive — no "call," as you Methodists would say. I could be respected, after a fashion, for the mere possession of certain powers and acquirements without exercising them, and so I have lived, not an *idle*, but a *useless* sort of life. Hereafter I hope all that will be quite changed. Your position and happiness are to depend on me, and no higher motive could now be named to stimulate me to effort. Not that I am a-going all of a sudden to become an ambitious schemer, struggling for a name, or an avaricious dog, toiling for wealth. No, no. In the future as in the past, happiness by quiet humble paths shall be the prize. Only now I believe I shall have purpose and steadiness to keep ever *doing,* looking to your happiness and approval as my best reward. You will think me very egotistical to talk so much of self and selfish motives, aims, and resolves; but, Lucy, I *think* of these things and *feel* this way, and hereafter *with you* I mean to *think aloud* and I wish you to do the same with me. If we are to spend our lives *with* and *for* each other, the more intimately and thoroughly we understand each other the better each will be able to please the other.

I can not be vain enough to think that love will blind you to my deficiencies and faults; but doubtless there are many which I might remove or remedy if I could but fully know your thoughts and tastes in regard to them. Some faults and imperfections we all have which cannot be got rid of; and with such, sensible people will always cheerfully bear in those they love; but I cannot help feeling surprise every day that friends and lovers are not more true to their duties in aiding each other in cultivating the graces of character and life which depend more on education and habit than on the natural constitution. Within certain limits the formation of character and manners, tastes and disposition, is within our own control. If we do but try — try heartily and cheerfully — we *can* be, for all the purposes of every-day happiness, precisely what *we would wish to be.* But I have sermonized too long even for a Sunday. If you

don't like such preaching, you must adopt my theory, and endeavor to break me of the habit. In future I am your pupil, and if you do not form me to such character, tastes, and disposition, as will be congenial to your own, and make your life happy with me, remember you must share in the responsibility.

Fanny noticed the ring on my finger and asked me where I got it. I told her, when she replied, smiling archly, "I thought it meant something." This is the only intimation I have given as to *what* is *what.* Mrs. Dr. Little inquired particularly after you, but I gave her no *new* light. Mrs. Solis too wanted to have her eyes opened but I talked about Miss K- and hardly said "Lucy" once. Nevertheless she rather suspects "rats," I guess. My old flame, Miss K-, was very inquisitive about that ring. She was sure it was not worn without an object, I stoutly denied all. Finally she said, "Give it to me." I said, "No, I will exchange," and took a ring from her finger which I knew her "adored" had given her. She has bantered me a good deal, and finally said I must bring you to see her when she came to Cincinnati again. I promised to do so, if you would consent to walk with me, "and then," she says, "I can tell." . . . .

There now, haven't I written you a long letter? If you are as much puzzled with my pothooks and quail-tracks as some of my friends have been you will have to wait till I return before you know what I have written. You better try, however, to spell it out. You must learn to read it sometime you know, and for your consolation, I would remark that I can write a great deal worse and not half try either!

Believe me faithfully yours,

RUTHERFORD

Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett

Robert Browning (1812-1889) and Elizabeth Barrett (1806-1861). Married 1846.

Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning
Paintings by Thomas Read (1853)

Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning were both important poets in Victorian England.

Elizabeth Barrett wrote poetry from the age of eleven. At the age of the fifteen, she developed a life-long chronic illness, with severe head and spinal pain, which she treated with opiate. She began publishing adult poems at the age of 38. In 1844 she published two volumes of *Poems* with great success. In particular Robert Browning, at the time a much less successful poet, was enormously impressed, and first wrote to her, then visited her. A warm friendship soon turned into a passionate romantic attachment. The two married secretly on September 12, 1846, and travelled to Italy. Barrett's domineering father disinherited her (he disinherited all his children who married).

The first letter below is from Browning to Barrett (I have included only the last paragraph); the second is her answer.

The groups of three dots in these letters are the authors' own punctuation, not editorial ellipses.

Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett

[Post-mark, September 25, 1845.]

How 'all changes!' When I first knew you — you know what followed. I supposed you to labour under an incurable complaint — and, of course, to be completely dependent on your father for its commonest alleviations; the moment after that inconsiderate letter, I reproached myself bitterly with the selfishness apparently involved in any proposition I might then have made — for though I have never been at all frightened of the world, nor mistrustful of my power to deal with it, and get my purpose out of it if once I thought it worth while, yet I could not but feel the consideration, of what failure would now be, paralyse all effort even in fancy. When you told me lately that 'you could never be poor' — all my solicitude was at an end — I had but myself to care about, and I told you, what I believed and believe, that I can at any time amply provide for that, and that I could cheerfully and confidently undertake the removing that obstacle. Now again the circumstances shift — and you are in what I should wonder at as the veriest slavery — and I who could free you from it, I am here scarcely daring to write ... though I know you must feel for me and forgive what forces itself from me ... what retires so mutely into my heart at your least word ... what shall not be again written or spoken, if you so will ... that I should be made happy beyond all hope of expression by. Now while I dream, let me once dream! I would marry you now and thus — I would come when you let me, and go when you bade me — I would be no more than one of your brothers — 'no more' — that is, instead of getting to-morrow for Saturday, I should get Saturday as well — two hours for one — when your head ached I should be here. I deliberately choose the realization of that dream (— of sitting simply by you for an hour every day) rather than any other, excluding you, I am able to form for this world, or any world I know — And it will continue but a dream.

God bless my dearest E.B.B.

R.B.

You understand that I see you to-morrow, Friday, as you propose.

I am better — thank you — and will go out to-day.

You know what I am, what I would speak, and all I would do.

Elizabeth Barrett to Robert Browning

Friday Evening.
[Post-mark, September 27, 1845.]

I had your letter late last night, everyone almost, being out of the house by an accident, so that it was left in the letter-box, and if I had wished to answer it before I saw you, it had scarcely been possible.

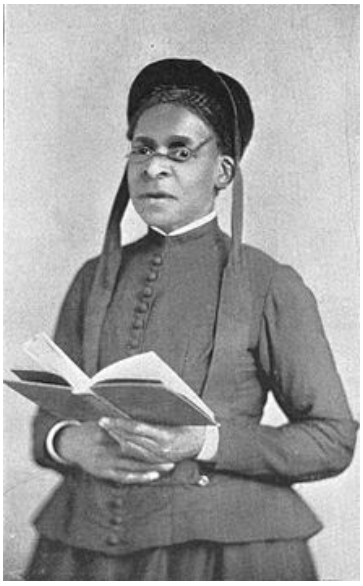
But it will be the same thing — for you know as well as if you saw my answer, what it must be, what it cannot choose but be, on pain of sinking me so infinitely below not merely your level but my own, that the depth cannot bear a glance down. Yet, though I am not made of such clay as to admit of my taking a base advantage of certain noble extravagances, (and that I am not I thank God for your sake) I will say, I must say, that your words in this letter have done me good and made me happy, ... that I thank and bless you for them, ... and that to receive such a proof of attachment from you, not only overpowers every present evil, but seems to me a full and abundant amends for the merely personal sufferings of my whole life. When I had read that letter last night I did think so. I looked round and round for the small bitternesses which for several days had been bitter to me, and I could not find one of them. The tear-marks went away in the moisture of new, happy tears. Why, how else could I have felt? how else do you think I could? How would any woman have felt ... who could feel at all ... hearing such words said (though 'in a dream' indeed) by such a speaker?

And now listen to me in turn. You have touched me more profoundly than I thought even you could have touched me — my heart was full when you came here to-day. Henceforward I am yours for everything but to do you harm — and I am yours too much, in my heart, ever to consent to do you harm in that way. If I could consent to do it, not only should I be less loyal ... but in one sense, less yours. I say this to you without drawback and reserve, because it is all I am able to say, and perhaps all I shall be able to say. However this may be, a promise goes to you in it that none, except God and your will, shall interpose between you and me, ... I mean, that if He should free me within a moderate time from the trailing chain of this weakness, I will then be to you whatever at that hour you shall choose ... whether friend or more than friend ... a friend to the last in any case. So it rests with God and with you — only in the meanwhile you are most absolutely free ... 'unentangled' (as they call it) by the breadth of a thread — and if I did not know that you considered yourself so, I would not see you any more, let the effort cost me what it might. You may force me feel: ... but you cannot force me to think contrary to my first thought ... that it were better for you to forget me at once in one relation. And if better for you, can it be bad for me? which flings me down on the stone-pavement of the logicians.

And now if I ask a boon of you, will you forget afterwards that it ever was asked? I have hesitated a great deal; but my face is down on the stone-pavement — no — I will not ask to-day — It shall be for another day — and may God bless you on this and on those that come after, my dearest friend.

Julia and George Foote

Julia A. J. Foote (1823-1900). Married George Foote, 1841.



Julia A.J. Foote (I can find no record of her maiden name) overcoming discrimination due to both her gender and her race, preached as a noted itinerant minister and evangelist for over fifty years. In 1894, she became the first woman deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Her memoirs, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch* was published in 1879. George Foote was a seafarer.

Soon after my conversion, a young man, who had accompanied me to places of amusement, and for whom I had formed quite an attachment, professed faith in Christ and united with the same church to which I belonged. A few months after, he made me an offer of marriage. I struggled not a little to banish the thought from my mind, chiefly because he was not sanctified. But my feelings were so strongly enlisted that I felt sure he would some day be my husband. I read to him and talk to him on the subject of a cleansed heart. He assented to all my arguments, saying he believed and would seek for it.

The few weeks that he remained with us I labored hard with him for his deliverance, but he left us to go to Boston, Mass. We corresponded regularly, he telling me of his religious enjoyment, but that he did not hear anything about sanctification. Great was my anxiety lest the devil should steal away the good soul out of his heart. The Lord, and he only, knows how many times I besought him to let the clear light of holiness shine into that man's heart.

. . .

George returned in about a year to claim me as his bride. He still gave evidence of being a Christian, but had not been cleansed from his carnal mind. I still continued to pray for his sanctification, and desired that it should take place before our union, but I was so much attached to him that I could not resist his pleadings; so, at the appointed time, we were married, in the church, in the presence of a large number of people, many of whom followed us to my father's house to offer their congratulations.

Julia A.J. Foote, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch*

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert

Queen Victoria (1819-1901) and Prince Albert (1819-1861)

L to R: Prince Alfred, Prince Edward, Queen Victoria, Prince Albert,
Princesses Alice, Helena, and Victoria. Painting by Franz Xaver Winterhalter, 1846.

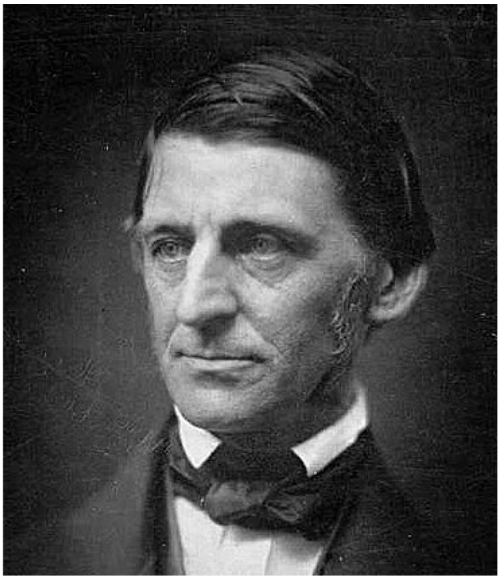
Tuesday, October 15. — Got up at 10, and breakfasted at ½ p. Saw my dear Cousins come home quite safe from the Hunt, and charge up the hill at an immense pace. Wrote to Feodore &c. Saw Esterhazy. Wrote to Victoire. At about ½ p.12, I sent for Albert; he came to the Closet where I was alone, and after a few minutes I said to him, that I thought he must be aware why I wished them to come here,- and that it would make me too happy if he would consent to what I wished (to marry me); we embraced each other over and over again, and he was so kind, so affectionate; oh! to feel I was, and am, loved by such an Angel as Albert, was too great delight to describe! he is perfection; perfection in every way, — in beauty — in everything! I told him I was quite unworthy of him and kissed his dear hand, — he said he would be very happy, "das Leben mit dir zu zubringen", and was so kind, and seemed so happy, that I really felt it was the happiest brightest moment in my life, which made up for all that I had suffered and endured. Oh! how I adore and love him, I cannot say!! how I will strive to make him feel as little as possible the great sacrifice he has made; I told him it was a great sacrifice, — which he wouldn't allow; I then told him of the necessity of keeping it a secret, except to his father and Uncle Leopold and Stockmar, to whom he said he would send a Courier next day, — and also that it was to be as early as the beginning of February. I then told him to fetch Ernest, which he did, and who congratulated us both and seemed very happy. I feel the happiest of

human beings. Albert went in and talked to Lehzen; and then said to me how perfect his brother was. returned, and we talked so comfortably and happily together, till past 1, when I sent them off, giving dearest dear Albert a kiss.

From *Queen Victoria's Journals*

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Lydia Jackson

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Lydia Jackson (1802-1892) married 1835.



Lydia Jackson Emerson with Edward Waldo Emerson / Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson was an essayist, poet, lecturer, and philosopher, and a leader of the Transcendentalist movement. He married his first wife, Ellen Louisa Tucker, in 1829, but she died of tuberculosis in 1831. He was licenced as a minister and ordained to the Unitarian Church in 1829, but left the church and resigned his position as a pastor in 1832. In 1833 he began a career as a public lecturer (by the end of his life, he had given 1500 lectures). In 1835 he had not yet done any significant writing.

Lydia Jackson came from a poor family. In 1834 she heard Emerson lecture twice; the second time she met him at a social gathering. Soon afterward, Emerson proposed to her in the letter below. She was very much involved in the social issues of her time, including the abolition of slavery, the rights of women and of Native Americans, and the welfare of animals.

Concord 24 January 1835

To Miss Lydia Jackson,

I obey my highest impulses in declaring to you the feeling of deep and tender respect with which you have inspired me. I am rejoiced in my Reason as well as in my Understanding by finding an earnest and noble mind whose presence quickens in mine all that is good and shames and repels from me my own weakness. Can I resist the impulse to beseech you to love me? The strict limits of the intercourse I have enjoyed, have certainly not permitted the manifestation of that tenderness which is the first sentiment in the common kindness between man and woman. But I am not less in love, after a new and higher way. I have immense desire that you should love me, and that I might live with you always. My own assurance of the truth and fitness of the alliance — the union I desire, is so perfect, that it will not admit the thought of hesitation — never of refusal on your part. I could scratch out the word. I am persuaded that I address one so in love with what I love, so conscious with me of the everlasting principles, and seeking the presents of the common Father through means so like, that no remoteness of condition could much separate us, and that an affection founded on such a basis, cannot alter.

I will not embarrass this expression of my heart and mind with any second considerations. I am not therefore blind to them. They touch the past and the future — our friends as well as ourselves, & even the Departed. But I see clearly how your consent shall resolve them all.

And think it not strange, as you will not, that I write rather than speak. In the gravest acts of my life I more willingly trust my pen than my tongue. It is as true. And yet had I been master of my time at this moment, I should bring my letter in my own hand. But I had no leave to wait a day after my mind was made up. Say to me therefore anything but NO. Demand any time for conversation, for consideration, and I will come to Plymouth with a joyful heart. And so God bless you, dear and blessed Maiden, and incline you to love your true friend.

Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Fanny Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1805-1847) and Wilhelm Hensel (1794-1861), married 1829

Fanny Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Wilhelm Hensel in 1829. Sketches by Hensel.

Fanny Mendelssohn Bartholdy[12] was an important composer in the first half of the nineteenth century. She was the older sister of the composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) (the two siblings were very close); and during her lifetime and for more than a century after her death, was very much overshadowed by him. Her family discouraged her from pursuing a career or publishing her compositions, and some of her works were attributed to Felix. However, in recent years, her own oeuvre has been increasingly appreciated, studied, and performed.

Her grandfather was Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), a philosopher and theologian, and the founder of Reform Judaism. Her father Abraham Mendelssohn (1776-1835), sometimes known as "Middle" Mendelssohn, is chiefly remembered for the rueful quip, "Once I was the son of a famous father, now I am the father of a famous son." However, he was a successful banker, and he and his wife Lea had a salon in Berlin that attracted many of the musical, literary, artistic, and scientific leading figures of the time. Fanny's extraordinary musical talents

[12]It has become somewhat common practice recently to name her as "Fanny Hensel" or "Fanny Hensel geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy" so as to bring her out from under her brother Felix's shadow and, in particular, to counteract a widespread misimpression that she was Felix's wife rather than his sister. However, since my subject is her marriage proposal, I will use the maiden name, as I have done with the other women in this collection.

were apparent from a very young age, and she studied musical performance and composition with some of the leading teachers of the time.

Wilhelm Hensel was a painter and a celebrity portratist.

Fanny and Wilhelm first met in 1821. Around Christmas 1822, they came close to an "understanding". However, Fanny's parents, especially her mother, strongly opposed it; Wilhelm's professional and financial situation were precarious and, at the time, he was considering converting to Catholicism. Wilhelm then spent five years in Italy 1823-1828. During that time he and Fanny were forbidden from corresponding directly; he did, however, send letters to her parents. When he returned to Berlin in late 1828, he rapidly got on more secure professional footing, and he was still a Protestant, so then he became more acceptable to the Mendelssohn parents.

Fanny and Wilhelm became engaged on January 22, 1829, as described in the excerpt from her diary below. They were married on October 3. Their son Sebastian (1830-1898) was born June 16, 1830. Fanny dies suddenly of a stroke on May 14, 1847. (Her brother Felix, already in poor health, never recovered from the shock; he died after a series of strokes on November 4, 1847). Wilhelm continued his career in Berlin; he died November 26, 1861.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Laura Stokes, who supplied the diary text and its translation, and the information about the courtship.

From Fanny Mendelssohn's *Tagebücher*, (ed. Hans-Günter Klein and Rudolf Elvers. Breitkopf & Härtel, 2002.)

den 30sten Januar 29.

Nur 8 Tage, aber allerdings von einiger Wichtigkeit. Ich konnte immer nicht zum Schreiben kommen, jetzt, Nachmittags, wo ich Hensel erwarte, bin ich gestimmt dazu. Donnerst., gestern vor 8 T. [Jan. 22] war der Anfang. Es war ein curioser Abend. Ich hatte mich eben hingesetzt, Clavier spielen, als Dirichlet kam, gleich nachher Hensel auf kurze Zeit, da er zur Robert herübermusste. Mutter war etwas unfreundlich gegen ihn, und ich mehr als gewöhnlich davon affizirt, so dass ich in die übelste Laune gerieth, und Reb ein Paarmal mit mir hinausging, mich zu beruhigen. Dann kam Gans, der uns eben laut perorirend eine Stelle aus einem Stägemannschen Gedicht vorlas, als er, etwa um 10 durch Humboldts Eintritt unterbrochen ward, welcher sogleich mit der Nachricht v. Hensels Anstellung heraus fuhr. Reb. gratulirte mir leise, und wir waren den Rest des Abends etwas preoccupirt. Felix war auf einem Ball bei Heyd und kam erst den andern Morgen um 2, als schon Alles fertig war. Als wir zu Bett waren, besprachen wir noch den ganzen folgenden Tag, und richteten ihn so ein, wie er nachher wirklich kam.

Den andern Morgen. Freitag, früh schrieb ich an der Instrumentierung einer Händelschen Arie. Um 12 etwa kam Hensel, ich war gerade unten, und ging hinten

herum in meine Stube, wo ich mit Reb. bleib, während H mit den Eltern in der grauen Stube sprach. Nachdem ich mich angezogen hatte, las ich mit Beckchen Geographie. Etwa nach einer halben St. kam H. herein und in weniger Minuten waren wir einig. Wir gingen hinein und fanden Mutter überrascht, erschreckt von der Schnelligkeit der Entscheidung, und ausser Stande, ihre Einwilligung zu wiederholen. Vater war gleich sehr froh und zufrieden, Mutter brachten wir, tant bien que mal in Ordnung, die Geschwister waren glücklich, nach 2 kam Felix zu Haus. Auch er war anfangs überrascht, aber nachdem H fort war, nach Tisch, hatte ich ein Gespräch mit ihm, das mich äusserst glücklich machte.

Friday, the 30th of January 1829

Only 8 days, but, however, of singular importance. I couldn't always get to writing, now, in the afternoon, when I am waiting for Hensel, I'm in the mood for it [i.e. writing]. Thursday, 8 days ago [January 22] was the beginning. It was a strange evening. I had just sat down to play the piano when Dirichlet came, followed a short time later by Hensel, who needed to go to the Roberts. Mother was somewhat unfriendly to him, and I was more affected by it than usual, so that I got into the worst mood, and Rebecka had to go out with me a couple of times to calm me down. Then came Gans, who read out loud to us at length from a poem by Stägemann. This was broken off, around 10, by Humboldt's entrance; he immediately told us the news of Hensel's [new] position. Rebecca quietly congratulated me, and we were somewhat preoccupied for the rest of the evening. Felix was at a ball at the Heyd[emanns]', and didn't come until 2 in the morning, when everything was finished. After we [Fanny and Rebecka] went to bed, we talked about the whole next day, and arranged it, as it actually came out afterwards.

The next morning. Friday, the 23rd of January, early I worked on the instrumentation of a Handelian aria. Around noon, Hensel came, I was already downstairs, and went around back to my room, where I stayed with Rebecka, while Hensel talked with our parents in the gray room. After I got dressed, I read geography with Becky. After about half an hour, Hensel came in, and in a few minutes we were united. We went in and found Mother surprised, appalled at the speed of the decision, and unable to reiterate her consent to the engagement. Father was at the same time quite happy and contented, we got Mother back to rights as best we could, the siblings were happy, after 2 Felix came home. He was also surprised at first, but after Hensel left, after the meal, I had a talk with him [Felix], that made me extremely happy.

People referred to: Rebecka Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1811-1858): sister to Fanny. Peter Lejeune Dirichlet (1805-1859): mathematician, married Rebecka in 1832. Eduard Gans (1797-1839): Jewish German jurist. Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859): scientist, explorer, philosopher. Roberts and Heidemanns: family friends of the Mendelssohns.

In case the use of Hensel's last name (or last initial) in the diary seems cold, I include

also a letter that Fanny wrote to Wilhelm on Feb. 5. From *Fanny Hensel geb. Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Werk* ed. Martina Helmig, p. 143.

Wilhelm! Wilhelm! Wird Dich denn meine herzliche Liebe, meine treue Zuneigung nicht, nie befriedigen, darf ich das nicht hoffen? Fühlst du denn nicht von Herzen zu Herzen was Du mir bist? Ich klage mich bitter an, muss mein alter Launendämon immer daswischen treten und uns Tag um Tag die Freude storen.

Ich bin so wüthend auf mich, ich könnte mich schlagen. Brich meinen Eigensinn und bis zu ihn gebrochen sieh mein Herz dass Dich liebt duch meine Launen.

Komm so früh wie gestern, es hält mich ja nach Tisch nichts ab, oder komm jetzt einen Augenblick, wenn Du kannst.

Wilhelm! Wilhelm! Will my heartfelt love, my loyal affection, never satisfy you, may I not hope that? Don't you feel from heart to heart what you are to me? I complain bitterly, my old moody demon always has to interfere and day after day we are deprived of joy.

I am so angry with myself, I could beat myself. Break my stubbornness, and until it is broken, see my heart that loves you through my whims.

Come as early as yesterday, there is nothing to keep me away after lunch, or come now for a moment, if you can.

Mary Burder and Patrick Brontë

Patrick Brontë (1777-1861) proposed to Mary Burder (1788 or 1789-1866). She declined.

Patrick Brontë, c. 1860

Patrick Brontë, the father of the Brontë sisters, was the son of Hugo Brunty (or Prunty, O'Prunty, or Branty — his name was rarely and inconsistently spelled), an impoverished farm-hand, fence-fixer, and road-builder. Patrick was born in 1777 in Imdel, in southern Ireland. He had several apprenticeships: to a blacksmith, a linen draper and a weaver. In 1798 he became a teacher. He moved to England in 1802, having won a scholarhip to study theology at St. John's College, Cambridge. He was appointed curate at Wethersfield in Essex. He was ordained a deacon of the Church of England in 1805 and a parson in 1807.

In 1807 he and Mary Mildred Davy Burder, the niece of his landlady, met, fell in love, and became engaged. The match was broken off after a year or so, because Mary was a committed Congregationalist while Patrick was an Anglican minister. Mary, in the letter quoted below, indicates that Patrick broke it off because a marriage to her would get in the way of his professional advancement. There is also some reason to think that Mary's family objected to Patrick because of the religious difference. Patrick first took a post as a curate in Wellington, Shropshire, and then moved to Yorkshire. He also starting writing mediocre poetry; between 1810 and 1818, he published five volumes of the stuff.

In 1812, Patrick married Maria Branwell, the daughter of a successful Methodist merchant and civic leader. Maria died in 1821, leaving Patrick with six children:

Maria (7 years old), Elizabeth (6), Charlotte (5), Patrick (4), Emily (3) and Anne (1). His sister-in-law Elizabeth Branwell moved into his house to help him bring up the children. Patrick wanted to remarry. First, he proposed to Elizabeth Firth, the beautiful 25-year-old daughter of a close friend of him. She rejected him. Then he may have proposed to Isabelle Drury, a sister of a friend of his; if so, she also rejected him.

Next, Patrick decided to write to Mary Burder, whom he had not seen or communicated with for 15 years. In his letter, he didn't actually go so far as to immediately propose marriage — all that he actually proposed was that he pay her a visit — but quite clearly his intention was to propose, if things seemed favorable.

Patrick Brontë to Mary Burder

Haworth, near Keighley, Yorkshire
July 28, 1823

Dear Madam,

The circumstance of Mrs Burder not answering my letter[13] for so long a time gave me considerable uneasiness; however, I am much obliged to her for answering it at last. Owing to a letter which I received from Miss Sarah[14] and to my not receiving any answer to two letters which I wrote subsequently to that, I have thought for years past that it was highly probable that you were married, or, that at all events, you wished to hear nothing of me, or from me, and determined that I should learn nothing of you. This not unfrequently gave me pain, but there was no remedy, and I endeavored to resign, to what appeared to me, to be the will of God.

I experienced a very agreeable sensation in my heart, at this moment, on reflecting that you are *still* single, and am so selfish as to wish you to remain so even if you would never allow me to see you. *You* were the *first* whose hand I solicited, and no doubt I was the first to whom *you promised to give that hand.*

However much you may dislike me now, I am sure you once loved me with an unaffected innocent love, and I feel confident that after all which you have seen and heard, you cannot doubt respecting my love for you. It is now almost fifteen years since I last saw you. That is a long interval of time and may have effected many changes. It has made me look something older. But, I trust I have gained more than I have lost, I hope I may venture to say that I am *wiser* and better. I have found this world to be but vanity, and I trust I may aver that my heart's desire is to be found in the ways of divine Wisdom and in her paths, which are pleasantness and peace.

[13]Brontë had written to Mrs. Burder, Mary's mother, with news of himself, on April 21, 1823.
[14]Mary's sister

My Dear Madam, I earnestly desire to know how it is in these respects with you. I wish, I ardently wish, your *best* interest in *both* the worlds. Perhaps you have not had much trouble since I saw you, nor such experience as would unfold to your view in well-defined shapes the unsatisfactory nature of all earthly considerations. However, I trust you possess in your soul a sweet peace and serenity arising from communion with the Holy Spirit and a well-grounded hope of eternal felicity. Though I have had much bitter sorrow in consequence of the sickness and death of my dear Wife, yet I have ample cause to praise God for his numberless mercies. I have a *small* but *sweet* little family that often soothe my heart, and afford me pleasure by their endearing little ways, and I have what I consider a competency for the good things of this life. I am *now settled* in a part of the country *for life* where I have many friends, and it has pleased God in many respects to give me favor in the eyes of the people, and to prosper me in my ministerial labours. I want but *one* addition to my comforts and then I think I should wish for no more on this side eternity. I want to see a dearly Beloved Friend, kind as I once saw her, and as much disposed to promote my happiness. If I have ever given her any pain I only wish for an opportunity to make her ample amends, by every attention and kindness. Should that very dear Friend doubt respecting the veracity of any of my statements, I would beg leave to give her the most satisfactory reference, I would beg leave to refer her to the Rev. John Buckworth, Vicar of Dewsbury near Leeds, who is an excellent and respectable man, well known both as an Author and as an able Minister of the Gospel to the religious world.

My dear Madam, all I have to request at present is that you will be so good as to answer this letter as soon as convenient, and tell me candidly whether you and Mrs Burder would have any objection to seeing me at Finchingfield Park as an *Old Friend*. If you would allow me to call there in a friendly manner, as soon as I could get a supply for my church and could leave home, I would set out for the South. Should you object to my stopping at Finchingfield Park over night, I would stop at one of the Inns in Braintree — as most likely my old friends in that town are either dead or gone. Should you and Mrs Burder kindly consent to see me as an old friend, it might be necessary for me before I left home to write *another* letter in order that I might know when you would be at home. I cannot tell how *you* may feel on reading this, but I may say *my* ancient love is rekindled, and I have a *longing* desire to see you. Be so kind as to give my best respects to Mrs Burder, to Miss Sarah, your brothers, and the *Little Baby.* And whatever you resolve upon, believe me to be yours Most Sincerely

P. Brontë

Miss Burder,
Finchingfield Park, near Braintree, Essex.

As Claire Harman writes in her biography of Charlotte Brontë, "Life rarely offers a slighted woman a chance to disburden herself, and Mary Burder grasped it with relish."

Mary Burder to Patrick Brontë

Finchingfield Park August 8, 1823

Reverend Sir, As you must reasonably suppose a letter from you presented to me on the 4th inst. naturally produced sensations of surprise and agitation. You have thought proper after a lapse of 15 years and after various changes in circumstances again to address me, with what motives I cannot well define. The subject you have introduced so long ago buried in silence and until now almost forgotten cannot I should think produce in your mine anything like satisfactory reflection. From a recent perusal of many letters of yours bearing date eighteen hundred and eight, nine, and ten, addressed to myself and my dear departed Aunt many circumstances are brought with peculiar force afresh to my recollection. With my present feelings I cannot forbear in justice to myself making some observations which may possibly appear severe, of their justice I am convinced. This review Sir excites in my bosom increased gratitude and thankfulness to that wise, that indulgent Providence which then watched over me for good and withheld me from forming in very early life an indissoluble engagement with one whom I cannot think was altogether clear of duplicity. A union with you under then existing circumstances must have embittered my future days and would I have no doubt been productive of reflections upon me as unkind and distressing as events have proved they would have been unfounded and unjust. Happily for me I have not been the ascribed cause of hindering your promotion, of preventing any brilliant alliance, nor have those great and affluent friends that you used to write and speak of withheld their patronage on my account, young, inexperienced, unsuspecting, and ignorant as I then was of what I had a right to look forward to.

Many communications were received from you in humble silence which ought rather to have met with contempt and indignation even considering the sacredness of a promise. Your confidence I have never betrayed strange as was the disclosure you once made unto me; whether those ardent professions of devoted lasting attachment were sincere is now to me a matter of little consequence. 'What I have seen and heard' certainly leads me to conclude very differently. With these my present views of past occurrences is it possible think you that I or my dear Parent could give you a cordial welcome to the Park as an old friend? Indeed I must give a decided negative to the desired visit. I know of no ties of friendship ever existing between us which the last eleven or twelve years have not severed or at least placed an insuperable bar to any revival. My present conditions upon which you were pleased to remark has hitherto been the state of my choice and to me a state of much happiness and comfort

tho' I have not been exempted from some sever trials. Blessed with the kindest and most indulgent of friends in a beloved Parent, Sister and Brother, with a handsome competency which affords me the capability of gratifying the best feelings of my heart, teased with no domestic cares and anxieties and without anyone to control or oppose me, I have felt no willingness to risk in a change so many enjoyments in possession. Truly I may say, 'My Cup overfloweth,' yet it is ever my desire to bear in mind that mutability is inscribed on all earthly possessions. 'This is not my rest' and I humbly trust that I have been led to place all my hopes of present and future happiness upon a surer foundation, upon that tried foundation stone which God has laid in Zion. Within these last twelve months I have suffered a severe and protracted affliction from typhus fever. For twenty-eight weeks I was unable to leave my bedroom and in that time was brought to the confines of an eternal world. I have indeed been brought low, but the Lord has helped me, He has been better to me than my fears, has delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from falling, and I trust the grateful language of my heart is, 'What shall I render until the Lod for all his benefits?' The life so manifestly redeemed from the grave I desire to devote more unreservedly than I have ever yet done to His service.

With the tear of unavailing sorrow still ready to start at the recollection of the loss of that beloved relative whom we have been call'd to mourn since you and I last saw each other, I can truly sympathise with you and the poor little innocents in your bereavement. The Lord can supply all your and their need. It gives me pleasure always to hear the work of the Lord prospering. May he enable you to be as faithful, as zealous, and as successful a labourer in His vineyard as was one of your predecessors the good old Mr Grimshaw who occupied the pulpit at Haworth more than a half-a-century ago, then will your consolations be neither few nor small. Cherishing no feelings of resentment or animosity, I remain, Revd Sir, sincerely your Well Wisher, Mary D. Burder.

Patrick sulked about Mary's letter until January, and then wrote her the following whiny response:

Patrick Brontë to Mary Burder

Haworth near Keighley Jany. 1st, 1824

Dear Madam,

In the first place, I wish you the compliments of the season. My earnest wish and ardent prayer is that you may soon recover from the effect of your late severe illness and that every New Year's day may add to your blessings, as well as privileges and comforts in this life, and open to your view brighter and more cheering prospects in reference to another world. This world with all its pains, pleasures, fears, hopes will

soon have an end; but an eternity of unutterable happiness or misery is the grand characteristick of the next world. When we take this just view of the subject through the medium of faith all the concerns of this life are at once immerged and lost in the vast and sublime concerns of the life to come. From some expressions in your last letter to me I am led to suppose that you have directed your face heavenward and are taking the Blessed Savior for the pillar of fire and cloud to guide you on your way through this wilderness.

Yet, my dear Madam, I must candidly tell you that many things in that letter surprised and grieved me. I only made a civil request, which I think, and do verily believe, no one in all England but yourself would have refused to grant me, and not only did you do this but you added many keen sarcasms, which I think might well have been spared, especially as you knew the pale countenance of death was still before my eyes and that I stood far more in need of consolation than reproach. I do solemnly assure you that no consideration whatsoever could have induced me to treat you in the same manner — no, nor I trust, anyone living. When I had the pleasure of knowing you, you seemed to me (and I shall still believe it) to be considerate, kind, and forgiving. But when I look at your letter and see it in many parts breathe such a spirit of disdain, hatred, and revenge — after the lapse of so long an interval of time — I appear to myself to be in an unpleasant dream. I can scarcely think it a reality. I confessed to you that I had done some things which I was sorry for, which originated chiefly in very difficult circumstances that surrounded me, and which were produced chiefly by yourself. This, I think, might have satisfied you; at least, it might have disarmed you of everything like a spirit of hatred, scorn, and revenge. However you may hate me *now* — I am sure you *once* loved me — and perhaps, as you may yet find, better than you will ever love another. But did I ever in any one instance take advantage of this or of your youth or inexperience? *You know* I did *not.* I, in all things, as far it was then in my power, behaved most honourably and uprightly. The letters which were written in your absence and which I entreat you never more to read, but to burn, were written when my mind was greatly distressed, and the only object of which was to hasten your return. These letters, I say, greatly distressed me soon after, and have greatly distressed me many a time since. For this, and every other word and action towards you and yours in which Ihave been wrong, I ask your pardon, I do not remember the things you allude to, but as far as I can collect from your letter I must have said something or other highly unbecoming and improper. Whatever it was, as a Christian Minister and a gentleman, I feel myself called upon to acknowledge my great sorrow for it. Such an apology becomes me, and is, I deem, required of me. And such an apology I now make. Your Aunt and Mother were always kind to me, and if there were any others that wished me ill or spake ill of me, I freely forgive them. And should it ever be in my power, instead of doing them harm, I would do them good.

You wonder what my reason was for wishing to call on you. I will honestly tell you. I said, and resolved, that if my circumstances changed for the better I should,

if I was spared, return on a visit to your neighbourhood. They have changed for the better, and I wished to keep my word. You also distinctly promised (they were nearly the last words I heard you utter) when I last saw you in Wethersfield, that if I called again you *would see me as friend.* I, moreover, loved you, and notwithstanding your harsh and in some respects cruel treatment of me, I must confess I love you still. The reason of this, I suppose, is I retain in my mind the *past* impressions. I see you still as you once were — affectionate, kind, and forgiving, agreeable in person, and still more agreeable in mind. I cannot forget our walks from Wethersfield to the Broad, and some of our interviews there. But I will say no more on this subject; it may be disagreeable to you, and it greatly disturbs my own mind. You may think and write as you please, but I *have not* the *least doubt* that if you had *been mine* you would have been happier than you *now* are or *can* be as one in *single* life. You would have had other and kindlier views and feelings. You would have had a *second self* — one nearer to you than Father or Mother, sisters or brother; one who would have been continually kind and whose great aim would have been to have promoted your happiness in *both* the worlds. Our rank in life would have been in every way genteel, and we should together have had *quite enough* of the things of this life. We should have had even *more* than the prophet Agar prayed for in his most judicious prayer. Once more let me ask you whether Mrs Burder and you would object to my calling on you at the Park some time during next spring or in the summer? If you cannot see me as a friend, surely you can see me without feelings of revenge or hatred and speak to me civilly. I give you my word of honour that I will say *nothing* in reference to what is past, unless it should be as agreeable to you as to me, and that I will not stop a moment longer than you wish me. Surely you cannot object to this. It can do *no one living* any harm, and might, I conceive, be productive of some good. Remember me very respectfully to Mrs Burder and all her family, and believe me yours very respectfully and sincerely,

P. Brontë

Miss Burder,
Finchingfield Park, near Braintree, Essex.

Presumably Mary didn't bother to answer this second letter from Patrick. In 1824 she married the Reverend Peter Sibree, a Dissenting minister in Wethersfield, and she had four children. Patrick stopped proposing and remained unmarried. He outlived all six of his children, and died in 1861.

The above letters are from Dudley Green (ed.) *The Letters of the Reverend Patrick Brontë*, Nonsuch Publishing, 2005. The biographical information is from the Wikipedia article, "Patrick Brontë" and from Claire Harman, *Charlotte Brontë: A Life*, Viking Press, 2015.

Mary Fairfax and an unnamed suitor

Mary Fairfax, at that time Mary Fairfax Greig, declined a proposal from an unknown suitor sometime between 1807 and 1811.

Painting by Thomas Phillips, 1834

Mary Fairfax (1780-1872), generally known by her married name Mary Somerville, was a mathematician, astronomer, polymath, and feminist. She and Caroline Herschel were the first female Honorary Members of the Royal Astronomical Society. Somerville College, at Oxford, is named after her.

She was married twice. Her first marriage was to Lieutenant Samuel Greig, in 1804. They had two children but did not get along, as he did not approve of her studies. He died in 1807. Her second marriage in 1811 to her cousin Dr. William Somerville (1771-1860) was a very happy one. They had four children together.

She wrote a very entertaining set of memoirs. These were published by her daughter Martha in 1873 in a somewhat edited form under the title, *Personal Recollections, from Early Life to Old Age.* A more complete version, edited by Dorothy Macmillan, was published in 2009 under the title *Queen of Science: Personal Recollections of Mary Somerville.* Regrettably Somerville did not describe either of the proposals that she accepted or anything about those courtships. However, the Recollections does include this three-sentence description of a proposal she received and rejected from an unnamed suitor. Though very short, I trust you will agree that it is too good not to include here.

I forgot to mention that during my widowhood I had several offers of marriage. One of the persons whilst he was paying court to me, sent me a volume of sermons with the page ostentatiously turned down at a sermon on the Duties of a Wife, which were expatiated upon in the most illiberal and narrow-minded language. I thought this as impertinent as it was premature; sent back the book and refused the proposal.

Bettina Brentano (1785-1859) and Achim von Arnim (1781-1831), married 1811

Achim von Arnim,
Portrait by Peter Edward Stroehling, 1803

Bettina Brentano
Drawing by Ludwig Emil Grimm 1809

Apparently, in better quality reproductions of the drawing of Bettina Brentano than I can find online, it is possible to see that the book she is holding is *Wintergarten*, a collection of short stories by Achim von Arnim (1809).

Elisabeth Catharina Ludovica Magdalena Brentano, known as "Bettina" or "Bettine", was born in Frankfurt am Main. Her father was from the large Brentano family of Italian merchants. Her mother died when she was eight; her father died when she was twelve. She spent three years at a convent school, then lived in the houses of various relatives.

Bettina has been called an archetype of the Romantic movement. From an early age, she was passionately romantic; in a letter to her older brother and mentor Clemens (himself one of the leaders of German Romanticism), she wrote, "It is no use telling me to be calm; to me that conveys sitting with my hands in my lap, looking forward to the broth we are having for supper... My soul is a passionate dancer; she dances to hidden music which only I can hear... Whatever police the world may prescribe to rule the soul, I refuse to obey them."

For a longer account of Bettina's remarkable life, see the links at the bottom of this section; here, I note a few highlights before describing her courtship and engagement to Achim von Arnim. She collected folk music and folk tales and wrote original music, fiction, memoirs, and communist political tracts. She fell passionately in love with Goethe and she was a friend of Beethoven, the Brothers Grimm, and Karl Marx. Her music was praised by Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn, Robert and Clara Schumann, and Franz Liszt. She used her

influence to get the Brothers Grimm a job in Berlin when they had been fired for political activities as part of the "Göttingen Seven". She advocated for the Jewish community. She was also a considerable prevaricator; her books invented letters that were never written and incidents that never occured.

Carl Joachim Friedrich Ludwig von Arnim, known as "Achim", was born in Berlin to an aristocratic family. His father was the chamberlain of Prussia. He studied at the University of Halle and received a degree of Doctor of Medicine, but never practiced. He was a poet, a novelist, and a collector of folk tales.

Arnim and Bettina first met in 1801. Starting in January 1806, they started a steady correspondence. By September 1806, they were using each other's first names in their letter.[15] By July 1807, their relation had gotten to the point that Bettina wrote to Arnim, "Wenn Sie wüssten, wie viele Liebe auch für Sie in mein ganzen Leben eingewebt ist!" ("If you only knew how much love is woven into my whole life for you too!") By January 1808, they were addressing each other with the familiar second person "Du".

They became engaged on December 4, 1810. Bettina described their engagement thus, in a letter to Goethe:

Am 4 Dezember war kalt und schauerlich Wetter, es wechselte ab im Schneien, Regnen, und Eisen; da hielt ich verlobung mit Arnim unter freien Himmel um 1/2 9 Uhr abends in einem Hof, wo hohe Baüme stunden von denen der Wind den Regen auf uns herabschüttelte, es kam von umgefür.

On December 4, the weather was cold and dreadful, alternating between snow, rain, and hail. That evening, around half past eight, I became engaged to Arnim under the open sky in a courtyard where tall trees stood, from which the wind shook the rain down on us. It all happened by chance.

On Christmas Eve, they had an "official" engagement ceremony, at a party given at the home of Bettina's sister and brother-in-law, Kunegunde and Friedrich von Savigny. They exchanged engagement rings. Bettina gave Achim a ring with golden lilies against a black enamel background. Achim gave Bettina a ring with a chrysoprase, engraved with two hands clasping. Achim described the celebration in a letter to the Brothers Grimm:

Was hilf die Zieren, geradaus ich habe mit Bettine Verlobungsringe gewechselt, und seit die Weihnachtsabend, wo er mir bescheert wurde, prangt an meiner linken Hand ein golden Fingerlein mit goldnen Lilien auf schwartzemailliertem Grunde, der

[15] If that seems tame, keep in mind that in the novels of Jane Austen, who was born in the same year as Bettina, the use of a first name between people who are courting but not engaged was improper, and correspondence between them was absolutely prohibited. One might say that Bettina was what Marianne Dashwood wanted to become.

mir einwachen soll, wenn mir der erhoffte gute Zeit einen Bauch, und bequette fette Finger gewärt und kein ungeschicktes Geschickt ihn mir raubt. Wir hatten uns früher verlobt, auf freier Straß unter Gottes freiem Himmel. Die Ringe waren nur ein Erinnerung, doch war der Abend dieser Weihnacht recht schön.

What use are all pretences? To put it plainly: I have exchanged engagement rings with Bettine. And ever since that Christmas Eve, when it was presented to me, there has shone on my left hand a little gold ring with golden lilies on a black-enameled background, meant to stand guard so that, when the hoped-for good times give me a belly and plump, fat fingers, no untoward fate will rob me of it. We had become engaged earlier, in the open street under God's open sky. The rings were only a souvenir, but that Christmas evening was very beautiful.

This is the sonnet that Achim wrote for the occasion:

Es war ein Abend, sternlos, grau und feucht,
Gleichgültig zog der Wind am Strom entlang,
Und wieder trennen sollte uns der Gang,
Zu dem ich dir so still den Arm gereicht.

O Welt, wie anteillos und doch voll Klang,
O Herz, wie oft getäuscht und nicht gebeugt!
Der Tag, auf den du warst vertröstet, weicht
Und hat verscherzt der Hoffnung ernsten Drang.

Wir schieden schon – da drückt sich Hand in Hand,
Und beide ziehn im Glückstopf gleiches Los,
Uns eint auf freier Straß' ein freies Band,

Daß ich die Hand nun nimmer lasse los,
Das macht des Steines Sinnbild dir bekannt,
Der Ring sei nicht zu klein und nicht zu groß.

There are parts of this sonnet for which I have not found a translation that seems reasonable. To what extent this is due to the limitations of the software I am using and to what extent it reflects obscurities in the original, of course I can't say. I started with the output of ChatGPT-o1 and then made changes that hopefully make better sense, though they are further from the original. This is the best I have been able to do. If any reader can suggest improvements, I will be hugely obliged.

It was an evening, starless, gray, and damp,
Indifferent, the wind moved along the stream,
And once again our paths were about to part
Along which, in silence, I had offered you my arm.

O world, so apathetic yet filled with sound,
O heart, so often deceived yet never bowed!
The day you thought would bring you comfort now recedes,
And your most earnest hope is gone.

We were already parting — then hand pressed into hand,
We both draw the same lot in Fortune's cup,
A free road and a freely chosen bond unite us.

That I will never let go of your hand again —
This is what the symbol on the stone shows you:
The ring must be neither too small nor too large.

Bettina and Achim were married on March 11, 1811.

There is a large literature in German on Bettina von Arnim but I barely know any German and the literature in English is quite limited. The texts quoted in German above are quoted from *Bettine und Arnim: Briefe der Freundschaft und Liebe* ed. Otto Betz and Veronika Straub, Verlag Josef Knecht, 1986. The translations were done by me with the aid of Google Translate and ChatGPT-o1. Thanks to Christina Behme and Dan Zwick for catching errors in my transcription of the German.

Links:
Wikipedia page for Bettina von Arnim
Wikipedia page for Achim von Arnim
"A Virtuoso Muse" by Jan Swafford, *The Guardian*, August 22, 2003.
Portrait of Bettine Brentano with Achim von Arnim's "Wintergarten", European Romanticism in Association, May 27, 2023.

Jane Porter and Anna Maria Porter

Jane Porter (1775-1850) declined a proposal from Charles Rivers in Feb. 1804. She received a passionate declaration of love from Rev. William Terrot in November 1804; not a proposal, as he was already engaged. Maria Porter (1780-1832) and Frederick Cowell (1786-1815) became engaged in early 1805; she broke off the engagement in May 1809. Neither sister ever married.

Jane Porter

Anna Maria Porter

The sisters Jane Porter (1775-1850) and Anna Maria Porter (1778-1832) were prolific and innovative writers, primarily of historical novels, very much admired in their own time, though largely forgotten in ours. They are the subject of a recent brilliant biography by Devoney Looser, *Sister Novelists: The Trailblazing Porter Sisters, Who Paved the Way for Austen and the Brontës,* which both restores them to their proper place in literary history and paints a vivid, often repugnant, picture of the Regency England society they lived in.[16] All of the information here comes out of Looser's biography.

The sisters' father died before Maria was a year old, and left his widow forty pounds, a pension of ten pounds a year, and five children: Jane, Maria and three brothers. Mrs. Porter moved to Edinburgh and made ends meet by running a boardinghouse. Despite their poverty, however, she succeeded in getting her children an education and access to a fine library. Jane and Maria, in their teens, were very well read as well as intelligent, talented, and beautiful.

Maria published her first book, *Artless Tales,* a collection of short stories, in 1793, at the age of fourteen (in her preface, she claimed to be thirteen). Jane's first book, *The Spirit of the Elbe: A Romance,* a two-volume Gothic, was published in 1799.

[16] I reviewed the biography here.

In 1803 the sisters found their true niche with the publication of Jane's four-volume novel, *Thaddeus of Warsaw* about a Polish hero fighting against the Russians. It inaugurated a new genre; the "modern" historical novel, combining historical figures and events with fictional characters and personal drama. Within a few months, it had achieved a huge success with critics and readers alike.

In 1810, Jane published her masterpiece, *The Scottish Chiefs: A Romance* in five volumes about the historical Scottish hero William Wallace and his war against Edward I. This was an even greater success, and a more lasting one; it has remained in print; an abridged version, for children, was published in 1921 with illustrations by N.C.Wyeth; a Classics Illustrated comic book version was published in the 1950s; it may well have been one of the sources for the movie *Bravehearti*.

Overall in their lifetimes, Maria published 16 books, mostly three- and four-volume and an opera. Jane published 7 books and a play and was the ghost-writer for four long travelogues by her brother Robert. The two sisters collaborated on four books.

Not surprisingly for beautiful, intelligent women of remarkable character in the Romantic era, both sisters were involved in many different romantic situations, many of them complicated. The three that actually involved a proposal, or came close to that, are included here.

All of the documents reproduced here were transcribed by me from scans of original handwritten letters. I have done my best to keep the spelling and punctuation, but I have added some paragraph breaks. In a few places I am not sure I am reading correctly, or I am unable to conjecture what the correct reading is; those are marked with a question mark in parentheses.

Proposal from Charles Rivers to Jane Porter

As Jane Porter was setting out from home on a trip to Bath, Charles Rivers, a friend who was a painter of miniatures, handed her a letter and asked her to read it at her leisure. This letter does not survive; however Jane described his letter and her reaction to it in a letter a few days later to Maria.

Letter from Jane Porter to Maria Porter, Feb. 10, 1804[17]

Stop before you read the succeeding and marvel! I certainly *must* be married before I leave Bath for I was not here a morning before I opened an *offer* of *marriage!* To be plain, Mr. Rivers put a letter into my hand on parting on Thursday morning, and desired me to read it at my leisure. I could not open it until this morning and

[17]Huntington Library, Jane Porter Papers #1494

it has vexed me not a little. However, I shall answer it, probably tomorrow, so don't say anything to him, but that you received a few lines from me saying that I was well.

> Jane's answer to Rivers, declining the offer, also does not survive; however Rivers' long, lugubrious response to that rejection does.

Letter from Charles Rivers to Jane, Feb. 16, 1804[18]

> Ah! What is life? with ills encompassed 'round
> Amidst our hopes, Fate strikes the sudden wound.[19]

My dearest of all dear friends,

Your letter has been to me a most dreadfull [sic] shock, while I have power to think I think I must express my distracted thoughts. Could I suppose all that sweetness I have ever experienced from you meant no more than you say it does. I always thought our sentiments were reciprocal, good heavens, how am I to support a life which has for years (even from the first hour I saw you) been looking forward to that only happiness which now seems delusion, dreadful thought, wretched, wretched me, bereft of all. For years have I been struggling with an entire seclusion from the world to that end, as there can no [sic] end for me without you. The few hours at a time I have been in your company has [sic] ever been the only comfort I have known, & the anticipation of renewing those happy moments, I must say again, my only comfort. My dearest friend, you that possess every virtue that can adorn the soul, let my situation plead for me in your retired moments, and do not plunge into a state the most deplorable one whose life has ever been one continued series of affection toward you. From my soul I can say you have ever engaged the whole of my thoughts when I have been forced into company I have every had you before me. Good God with horror do I now see your letter which lays before me & at the part where you say and with regret that I should have entertained sentiments for you which must now be no more, oh this is insupportable, my hand trembles, my heart does cease to flow, my whole frame is struck as with death, even that would now be a pleasure. Your good sense must tell you that under sensations like these, even the hallowed word "friend' is not sufficient. Under such feelings can I ever see you again? Dreadful is the sentence. I must now ?? myself *I can never see you more.* Far, very far away must I remove from this once happy spot, never to intrude myself again *in your presence* & my eternal prayer shall be for the greatest happiness heaven can bestow on you, while eternal misery must be the doom of him who ever has & ever will be

your affectionate
& loving friend
Charles Rivers

[18]New York Public Library, Carl Pforzheimer collection
[19]From John Gay, "A Thought on Eternity".

At the request of your sister, I passed the evening in Gerrard St. All was well last night.

> Rivers turned out to be hard to get rid of. "He was convinced that Jane must be concealing an attachment to him. He told Maria he'd had conversations with five different Porter acquaintances, all of whom thought that Jane's kind letter of rejection was actually an encouragement. His subsequent letters to her were a mixture of arrogant pretension and roaring misery. ... They were becoming enraged at the man's stupid obstinacy."[20]

Reverend William Terrot declared his love for Jane Porter

In September 1804, Jane received a letter from her long-time mentor Percival Stockdale (1736-1811), a clergyman and a writer. Stockdale asked Jane to visit him for what he believed would be the last few months of his life. "Stockdale wanted Jane to nurse him ... He hoped she'd take on his domestic cares, sort through his papers, and edit his memoirs"[21] He also indicated that he would leave her a legacy in his will. Jane agreed, out of a mixture of motives: Christian charity, gratitude, interest in his memoirs, and financial considerations — the Porters were still so tight for money that it was a relief just to have Jane's daily living expenses paid for. The visit was not a success. Stockdale was notoriously impossible — he was estranged from his wife; he had quarrelled with everyone he knew; he was obsessed with the idea that he deserved greater success, and in particular with the idea that Samuel Johnson had stolen the contract for writing *Lives of the Poets* from him — and in his dealings with Jane he was demanding, selfish, manipulative, and possessive. He effectively kept her prisoner for some months by refusing to arrange her return trip at the agreed-on time. (When he died, in 1811, he left Jane "the remainder of his legacy" after some specific bequests; but he had overestimated his own wealth, and there was nothing left for her to inherit.)

Anyway, during the time Jane was living with him, his friend William Terrot came to visit him, with dramatic consequences described in Jane's letter.

Letter from Jane Porter to Maria Porter, Nov. 28, 1804[22]

Lesbury, Thursday night, Nov. 28, 1804

Your letter, my dearest Maria, with my Mother's precious addition, was my cordial after this day's dinner. The very sight of your handwritings, is balm to me; and all that you say in this epistle of the 24th, is pleasing to my heart. How my happiness hangs over ou! How my soul hovers near you, ahought my body is at this distance! You have all my affections and you ought to have all my thoughts, all that befalls your poor solitary in her retirement. But then do not *allow one word* of the

[20]Looser, p. 154
[21]Looser, p. 179.
[22]Huntington Library, Jane Porter papers, #1530

following subject to escape *either of your lips at any time.* I hold it good, for it flows with the stream of my love to you, to hide nothing from you, but then *honor* as well as *delicacy* demands silence with everybody else.

As Mrs. Maclaurin says, "to make short of a long story" — My arrival in this part of the world has brought temporary misery on one most amiable man. How strangely are our fates alloted! to pursue where we are avoided; to fly where we are pursued. But to proceed with my story. I have now leisure to write to you; for it is eleven at night, I hve a fire in my room, and no sleep in my eyes; so I cannot do better than really unburthen my heart to you on the subject, for in the midst of my *tremendous shock, this* also, found means to oppress me —

About a fortnight ago, I was sitting alone transcribing Mr Stockdale's memoirs (he being gone out). A gentleman was announced, who begged permission to write a few lines to Mr S; he sat down to do it, but some how [sic], before he had finished a note of four lines, he found by his watch, that he had sat an hour and a half. He was an elegant scholar, possessed a fine taste, and spoke with candour and animation on all the subjects of the Belles Lettres; consequently I did not regret the length of his visit, and, at parting, I learned that he was Mr Terrot, the English minister of Haddington, and that he was come into the neighbourhood on a visit to Mr Grey of Merrick. Mr Stockdale and he has been introduced to each other by Mr Grey. Suffice it to say, that he spent several days, at different intervals, afterwards in my company, and I enjoyed his amiable superiority over the rest of our visitors, with great zest. I learnt also from Mr S that he was under engagement to marry some lady near Cheviot (??). This was mere matter of information to me, and I very sincerely wished him happy, not doubting that he would be so, but alas! I was mistaken. He believes himself bound in honour to perform his promise (though I understand it was rashly given many years ago, when he was quite a youth) and to consign himself to the fate which such imprudence has entailed on him.

But now for *my* part in this story. Unfortunate that I am to give pain to any worthy heart. He staid two days with Mr Stockdale and then after many violent struggles, one evening when we were alone, the smothered flame burst out. He declared that he was the most wretched of mortals, that when he was half mad with folly, he had entered into engagements, which he had vainly tried to break, and though it was to no purpose, he could no restrain himself from telling me, that I was the only woman whom he could love — that I was the being which had been the subject of his dreams since he was a boy, and which, as a man he never expected to meet with. I was very much agitated, and the more so as your *dreadful letter*[23] had arrived that very day whilst he was absent. My spirits were not in a strain to bear such a scene with great composure. I esteemed his excellent qualities, I admired his sweetness of mind, and I compassionated his distress. I hardly know exactly what I said, but the result was

[23]Maria had written to Jane that their long-time friend Henry Caulfield had eloped with a married woman, Mrs. Campbell.

that our acquaintance had been so recent, he could not consider his sentiments of me rationally founded, and that I hoped he would meet the reality of all those good qualities in the lady he was engaged to, which he could now ony have fancied to be in me.

My remonstrances only drew fresh transports of passion, tenderness, and regret from him, and indeed I may safely say, that all that evening and the next day, we were never left alone, that he did not spend all his time on his knees before me, or hanging over my chair, bathing my hands with his tears. His emotions and my own agitated spirits so overwhelmed me at times that at last, for fear that so much unaccountable demonstrations of feeling on my part, could be *mistaken* by him as any kind of participation, with the most vehement nature of his distress — I at once explained to him the unhappy news I had received. And then the amiable creature, whilst his tears ran over my face, (for at that moment, Maria, as I ended, he had as it were unconsciously clasped me in his arms) pleaded for the misguided Henry. It was with difficulty that I persuaded him that Henry and I were not lovers. However, whether as *friend* or *lover*, he said everything to me which a true knowledge of the human heat and the most Christian compassion could dictate to induce me to expect his return into the path of rectitude. (That point is settled with my heart, and rests with the mercy of God to restore him.) This part of our conversation more and more impressed me with the excellence of Mr Terrot's heart and he ended it this way "pray for him, my dear Miss Porter — the Almighty will hear you, and at least it will be a comfort to yourself. For my part, since I first saw you, I have not known one moment free from msery, but when I was petitioning the God of Goodness for you."

When we parted, he said, "most likely we shall never meet again, until we do so in Heaven". — You cannot imagine how the strange, unexpected, and ardent feelings of this young man, have disordered me — But he is returned to his Duty at Haddington; and I trust its vocations will soon the deepest colours of my remembrance. He enters into his religious profession with the most ?? zeal — for I am told by people here, that when he meets a poor creature, after he has given away all his money, he then parts with everything about him, his neckcloth, hat —- anything which the poor creature may seem to want. — Mr Terrot is not handsome — but surely this is "the beauty of the heart(?)."

Maria Porter and Frederick Cowell became engaged.

The most remarkable romance involving the sisters — indeed, one of the most remarkable in this collection — was the courtship and engagement of Maria Porter and Frederick Cowell. A first-person account of this exists in the sisters' correspondence, primarily in the letters from Maria to Jane. I have myself seen these letters — that is, a scan of the original letters, which the Huntington library made available for me. However, I am unable to transcribe them, because, unfortunately, Maria's handwriting is not as clear as Jane's or as

Charles Rivers' and there are too often important words that I can't read. So the account below is third-hand, my summary of Looser's forty-page account. However, it does derive directly from a first-hand account, and it is much too good a story to leave out. Among other things, it is the only instance in this collection in which a woman proposed to a man rather than vice versa.

In the summer of 1803, Maria went for an extended visit to her friends, the Asplands, who lived on the Isle of Wight. One morning, Maria was looking out the window and a very handsome soldier, an "Adonis", she later told Jane, marched by, leading his regiment. The soldier stopped briefly at the window. Maria gazed at him. He gazed back. Then the regiment marched on. But the soldier came back, repeatedly. "The soldier stationed himself in front of the Asplands' window, where he had first seen her, at all times of the day and night, marking some lengths near the house. Maria began to watch for him, at certain times, with growing interest and curiosity."[24] But there was no one to introduce them, and no justification for them to talk to one another. The soldier cleverly succeeded in communicating his name — Frederick Cowell — to Maria by setting up a situation where the soldiers under his command would shout it out. This went on for some weeks. Maria became so unguarded about it that the Asplands commented on it. Maria's visit to the Asplands was coming to an end. She wrote a letter to the soldier at his regiment, under a false name, but somehow with enough information in it so that he would know it was from the woman he had been looking at and so that he would be able to answer the letter, perhaps by having him mail his letter to the local post office. (This letter of Maria's does not survive, regrettably; we know about it from her description in letters to Jane.)

Frederick Cowell answered her letter. Soon after, he and his regiment were sent off to Jamaica. He and Maria kept up a clandestine correspondence through the rest of 1803 and 1804. Maria's only confidante was Jane; when she and Jane were separated and were discussing it by mail, they used cryptic code words, so that if someone saw the letter (which once happened with brother Robert) they could not figure out the secret.

In late 1804, under Jane's urging, Maria finally wrote to Frederick, giving (at last) her true name, and declaring her love for her – in effect, proposing to him. She declared that "there was one heart in Europe that beat only for him." He wrote back amorously and enclosed a lock of his hair. They were engaged.

But, of course, Frederick was in Jamaica, and Maria was in England. Moreover he didn't seem to have much gumption (my phrase, not Maria's or Looser's); he had no idea how he was going to advance in life, nor any great ambition to. Maria gave her usual advice to people whose character seemed weak; she sent him a list of books he should read to improve himself.

Finally Frederick did succeed in returning to England, though there was no guarantee that he could stay there. In November 1806 the lovers finally suc-

[24]Looser, p. 142.

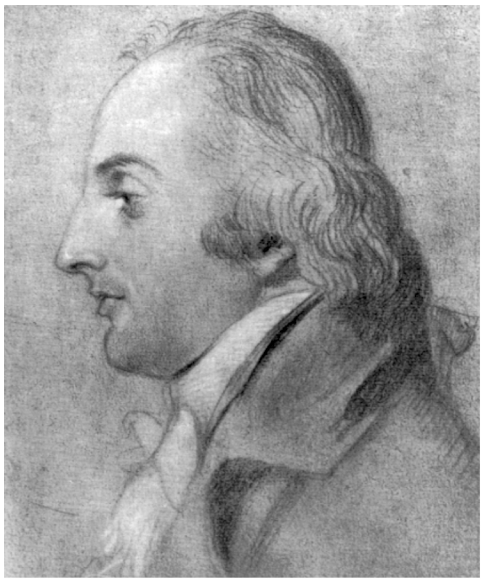
ceeded in meeting. This was still highly improper — brother Robert would have sternly disapproved — but Maria arranged the rendezvous at the house of a couple she knew who themselves were living together out of wedlock and so were not too fussy about these things.

Two years in the tropics had been hard on Frederick's looks – his complexion had faded, his hair was cut short, and he was fat. Worse, his depression about his life's course had gotten worse, and he found Maria completely intimidating. Maria reminded him about the books she had recommended, and told him that her love was conditional on his pulling himself together. That did not help Frederick's state of mind. Anyway, the engagement continued, unhappily, for three more years. Jane and Maria devised various plans to somehow pull strings to get him a promotion, or another position, or money, but with no success. The engagement gradually fizzled out, and in May 1809 Maria finally wrote him a letter breaking it off.

"The Proposal"
By William Powell Frith

Frances Burney

Frances Burney (1752-1840)
Proposal from Thomas Barlow (1750/1-?) Declined 1775.
Proposal from General Alexandre d'Arblay (1748-1818).[25] Accepted. Married 1793.



Alexandre D'Arblay
Unknown artist

Frances Burney.
Portrait by Edward Francis Burney

Frances (Fanny) Burney was one of the great comic English novelists of the 18th century. She also kept a very detailed diary, from which the excerpts below are taken. Her father, to whom she was very close, was Charles Burney, a musician and man of letters, not wealthy but with many friends and connections in both the intellectual and the aristocratic worlds.

In 1775, when she received a marriage proposal from Thomas Barlow, she was 22, and had not yet published anything. The long account of the proposal, including two letters from Barlow, one letter from Burney, and long excerpts from Burney's diary, is given below. For the current reader, Barlow's letters read so much like self-parodies, and it is so hard to believe that any human being, even a twenty-four year old suitor in 1775, could have written them with a straight face, that one would be tempted to suppose that Burney had used her comic gifts to improve them; but apparently the originals survive among Burney's papers. As far as I can determine, nothing is known of Barlow besides this record.

[25]The image of General D'Arblay is "from the original crayon drawing in the possession of F. Leverton Harris". It was downloaded from The Victorian Web

Burney immediately decided to decline Barlow's offer, but nonetheless consulted with her father and some friends. Her father favored accepting the proposal, but did not insist on it. Samuel Crisp, an older friend with whom she was extremely close (she wrote to him as 'Daddy') was much more insistent; he told her that she would be mad to decline such an eligible offer, and that it made him furious just to think of it. "You may live to the age of your grandmother and not meet with so valuable an offer." However, she stuck to her decision.

In 1778 Burney published her first novel *Evelina*, at first anonymously, but the secret soon leaked. It was a run-away success, though, being a first-time author with no idea how to negotiate with the publisher, it did not make her much money. In 1782 she published *Cecilia* likewise very successfully.

In 1785, Queen Charlotte offered her a position at court, which she accepted. She and still more her father were ardent monarchists. The duties turned out to be arduous, dreary, and unpleasant; she could barely do any writing and her health suffered for it. In 1790, her father was finally prevailed on to request that she be released from it, and she was awarded a pension of 100 pounds a year.

In 1791, she met General Alexandre d'Arblay. General d'Arblay had been a participant in the early stages of the French Revolution, and had been adjutant-general to Lafayette. But like Lafayette, when the Revolution became more radical, he had to flee, and he was in exile in England. D'Arblay proposed to Burney as described below. Her father was opposed to it, since d'Arblay was a constitutionalist, a Catholic, and an exile with no source of income. However, again she followed her own judgment, and they were married on July 28, 1795.

Frances Burney rejects a proposal from Thomas Barlow

From Frances Burney's journal, May 20, 1775

This month is called a *tender* one. It has proved so *to* me but not *in* me. I have not breathed one sigh, — felt one sensation, — or uttered one folly the more for the softness of the season. However, I have met with a youth whose heart, if he is to be credited, has been less guarded — indeed it has yielded itself so suddenly, that had it been in any other month — I should not have known how to have accounted for so easy a conquest.

The first day of this month I drank tea and spent the evening at Mr. Burney's, at the request of my sister, to meet a very stupid family, which she told me it would be charity to herself to give my time to. This family consisted of Mrs. O'Connor and her daughter, by a first marriage, Miss Dickenson, who, poor creature, has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. They are very old acquaintances of my grandmother Burney, to oblige whom my sister invited them. My grandmother and two aunts therefore

were of the party: — as as also Mr. Barlow, a young man who has lived and boarded with Mrs. O'Connor for about two years.

Mr. Barlow is rather short, but handsome. He is very well bred, ... good-tempered and sensible young man. ... He bears an excellent character both for disposition and morals. He has read more than he has conversed, and seems to know but little of the world; his language therefore is stiff and uncommon, and seems laboured if not affected — he has a great desire to please, but no elegance of manners; neither, though he may be very worthy, is he at all agreeable.

Unfortunately, however, he happened to be prodigiously civil to me, and though I have met with much more gallantry occasionally, yet I could not but observe a *seriousness* of attention much more expressive than complimenting.

As my sister knew not how to *wile away the time*, I proposed, after supper, a round of cross questions. This was agreed to. Mr. Barlow, who sat next to me, took near half an hour to settle upon what he should ask me, and at last his question was — What I thought most necessary in Love? I answered — *Constancy.* I hope for his own sake he will not remember this answer long, though he readily subscribed to it at the time.

The coach came for me about eleven. I rose to go. He earnestly entreated me to stay one or two minutes. I did not, however, think such compliance at all requisite, and therefore only offered to set my grandmother down in my way. The party then broke up. Mrs. O'Connor began an urgent invitation to all present to return the visit th next week. Mr Barlow, who followed me, repeated it very pressingly to *me*, hoping I would make one. I promised that I would.

When we had all taken leave of our host and hostess, my grandmother, according to custom, gave me a kiss and her blessing. I would fain have eluded my aunts, as nothing can be so disagreeable as kissing before young men; however, they chose it should go round; and after them Mrs. O'Connor also saluted me, as did her daughter, desiring to be better acquainted with me. This disagreeable ceremony over, Mr. Barlow came up to me, and making an apology, which, not suspecting his intention, I did not understand, — he gave me a most ardent salute! I have seldom been more surprised. I had no idea of his taking such a freedom. However, I have told my good friends that for the future I will not chuse to lead, or have led, so contagious an example. [I wonder *so modest a man* could dare be so bold.]

He came down stairs with us and waited at the door, I believe, till the coach was out of sight.

Four days after this meeting, my mother and Mrs. Young happened to be in the parlour when I received a letter which, from the strong resemblance of the handwriting in the direction to that of Mr. Crisp, I immediately opened and thought came from Chesington; but what was my surprise to see "Madam" at the beginning and at the conclusion — "Your sincere admirer and very humble servant, Thos. Barlow."

I read it three or four times before I could credit my eyes. An acquaintance so short, and a procedure so hasty astonished me. It is a most tender epistle and contains a passionate declaration of attachment, hinting at hopes of a *return,* and so forth.

Letter from Thomas Barlow to Frances Burney

Madam — Uninterrupted happiness we are told is of short duration, and is quickly succeeded by Anxiety, which moral Axiom I really experienc'd on the Conclusion of May-day at Mr. Charles Burney's, as the singular Pleasure of your Company was so soon Eclips'd by the rapidity of ever-flying Time; but the felicity, tho' short, was too great to keep within the limits of one Breast; I must therefore intreat your Pardon for the Liberty I take in attempting to reiterate the satisfaction I then felt, and paying a Tythe of Justice to the amiable Lady from whom it proceeded, permit me then Madam, with the greatest sincerity, to assure you, that the feelings of that Evening were among the most refined I ever enjoy'd, and discovered such a latent Spring of Happiness from the Company of the Fair, which I had positively before then been a Stranger to; I had 'til then thought, all Ladys might be flatter'd, but I now experience the contrary, and am assur'd, Language cannot possibly depict the soft Emotions of a mind captivated by so much Merit; and have now a Contest between my ardourous Pen, stimulated by so pleasing and so just a subject, on the one side, and a dread of being accused of Adulation on the other; however, endeavouring at Justice, and taking Truth (in her plainest Attire) for my Guide, I will venture to declare that the Affability, Sweetness, and Sensibility, which shone in your every Action, lead me irresistably to Love and Admire the Mistress of them, and I account it the road to the highest Felicity, if my *sincerity* might in any degree meet your Approbation; as I am persuaded *that is the first Principle*, which can be offer'd as a foundation for the least hope of a Lady's regard; and I must beg leave to observe, I greatly admire that Quality which yourself so justly declar'd, was most necessary in Love, I mean CONSTANCY, from which I would presume to infer, that we are naturally led from Admiration, to Imitation and Practice; All which in being permitted to declare to you—would constitute my particular happiness as far as Expression could be prevail'd on to figure the Ideas of the Mind; meanwhile I would particularly Request, you would condescend to favour me with a Line, in which I hope to hear you are well, and that you will honour us with your Company with good Mrs. Burney and Family some day next week, which that Lady is to fix; in which I trust we shall not be deny'd as 'twill not be possible to admit separating so particularly desirable a part of the Company, and as I am persuaded we are honored with your Assent to the Engagement:

I am dear Miss Frances's
Most sincere Admirer and very hble servant

Thos. Barlow

Burney's diary describes a second, very awkward, meeting with Barlow at a house call a few days later.

Barlow then sent her a second letter:

Second Letter from Thomas Barlow to Frances Burney

Madam — I have somewhere seen that powerful Deity, Cupid, and the invincible Mars, habited in a similar manner; and each have in their train several of the same disposition'd Attendants; the propriety of which Thought I own pleas'd me, for when drawn from the allegory, it is acknowledg'd, both Love and War are comparative in several particulars: they each require CONSTANCY, and the hope of Success stimulate each to Perserverance; and as the one is warm'd and encourag'd by the desire of Glory; so the other is much more profoundly fix'd and transported by the Charms of the Fair Sex: I have been told that Artifice and Deception are connected to both, but those Qualitys I shou'd determine to discard and substitute in the Place an open Frankness and undisguised Truth and Honour; and for Diligence, Assiduity, Care, and Attention, which are essential to both, and which some place in the Catalogue of the Labours of Love, I should have them happily converted to Pleasures in the honour of devoting them to Miss Frances Burney; if the bravest General may miscarry; so the most sincere Lover may lose the wish'd-for Prize; to prevent which I shou'd continue to invoke my guardian Genius that she may ever inspire me with such Principles and Actions as may enable me to reach the summit of my Ambition, in approving myself not unworthy the Esteem of your amiable self, and not unworthy — but stop, oh, *ardurous Pen and presume not* ('til in the front you can place PERMISSIONS to hope) ascending such sublime heights.

It has given me great Uneasiness that the excessive hurry of Business has so long prevented me the honour of waiting on you, and enquiring after your Welfare, which I earnestly wish to hear, but I determine, with your leave, e'er long to do myself that Pleasure, as methinks Time moves very slowly in granting me an Opportunity to declare, in some small degree (for I could not reach what I should call otherwise) how much I am, with the greatest Respect imaginable,

Dear Miss Frances
Your most devoted and most obedient servant,
Thos. Barlow

Second excerpt from Frances Burney's journal, the following day

About 2 o'clock, while I was dawdling in the study, and waiting for an opportunity to speak, we heard a rap at the door and soon after John came in and said — "A gentleman is below who asks for Miss Burney: Mr. Barlow." I think I was never more distressed in my life — to have taken pains to avoid a private conversation so highly disagreeable to me, and at last to be forced into it at so unfavorable a juncture, for I had now *two* letters from him, both unanswered. and consequently open to his conjectures. I exclaimed — "Lord! How provoking! What shall I do?"

My father looked uneasy and perplexed; he said something about not being hasty, which I did not desire him to explain. Terrified lest he should hit at the advantage of an early establishment — like Mr. Crisp — quick from the study — but slow enough afterward — I went down stairs. I was my mother pass [from the front] into the back parlour, which did not add to the *graciousness* of my reception of poor Mr. Barlow, who I found alone in the [front] parlour. I was not sorry that none of the family were there, as I now began to seriously dread any protraction of this affair.

He came up to me with an air of *tenderness,* and satisfaction, began some anxious enquiries about my health; but I interrupted him with saying, — "I fancy, Sir, you have not received a letter I — I —"

[I stopt, for I could not say which I had *sent!*]

"A letter? — No, Ma'am!"

"You will have it, then, to-morrow, Sir."

We were both silent for a minute or two, when he said — "In consequence I presume, Ma'am, of the one I—"

"Yes, Sir," cried I.

"And pray — Ma'am — Miss Burney! — may I — beg to know the contents? — that is — the — the —" He could not go on.

"Sir — I — it was only — it was merely — in short, you will see it tomorrow."

"But if you would favour me with the contents now, I could perhaps answer it at once?"

"Sir, it requires no answer."

A second silence ensued. I was really distressed myself to see *his* distress, which was very apparent. After some time he stammered out something of *hoping* and *beseeching* — which, gathering more firmness, I answered — "I am much obliged to you, Sir, for the too good opinion you are pleased to have of me — but I should be very sorry you should lose any more time upon my account — as I have no thoughts

of changing my situation and abode."

He seemed to be quite overset: having, therefore so freely explained myself, I then asked him to sit down, and began to talk of the weather. When he had a little recovered himself, he drew a chair close to me, and began making most ardent professions of respect and regard and so forth. I interrupted him as soon as I could, and begged him to rest satisfied with my answer.

"*Satisfied!* repeated he, "my dear Madam — is that possible?"

"Perhaps, Sir, said I, "I ought to make some apologies for not answering your first letter — but really I was so much surprised — on so short an acquaintance."

He then began making excuses for having written, but as to *short acquaintance* he owned it was a reason for *me*, but for *him* — fifty years could not have more convinced him of my etc. etc.

"You have taken a sudden, and far too partial idea of my character," answered I. "If you look round among your older acquaintance, I doubt not but you will very soon be able to make a better choice."

He shook his head. "I have seen, Madam, a great many ladies, it is true — but never —"

"You do me much honor," cried I, "but I must desire you take no further trouble about me — for I have not at present the slightest thought of ever leaving this house."

"*At present?*" repeated he, eagerly. "No, I would not expect it — I would not wish to precipitate — but in the future —"

"Neither now or ever, Sir," returned I, "have I any view of changing my condition."

"But surely, surely this can never be! so sever a resolution — you cannot mean it — it would be wronging all the world!"

"I am extremely sorry, Sir, that you did not receive my letter, because it might have saved you this trouble."

He looked very much mortified, and said in a dejected voice — "If there is anything in me — in my connexions — or in my situation in life, which you wholly think unworthy of you — and beneath you — or if my character or disposition meet with your disapprobation — I will immediately forgo all — I will not — I would not —"

"No, indeed, Sir," cried I, "I have neither seen or heard of anything of you that was to your disadvantage — and I have no doubts of your worthiness."

He thanked me, and seemed reassured; but renewed his solicitations in the most urgent manner. He repeatedly begged my permission to acquaint my family of the state of his affairs, and to abide by their decision; but I would not let him say two

words following upon that subject. I told him that my answer was a final one, and begged him to take it as such.

He remonstrated very earnestly: "This is the severest decision! ... Surely you must allow that the *social state* is what we were all meant for? — that we were created for one another? — that to form such a resolution is contrary to the design of our being?

"All this may be true," said I, "I have nothing to say in contradiction to it – but you know there are many odd characters in the world — and I am one of them."

"O, no, no, no — that can never be! but is it possible that you have so bad an opinion of the Married State? It seems to me the *only* state for happiness!"

"Well, Sir, you are attracted to the married life — I am to the single — therefore *every man in his humour — do you* follow *your* opinion — and let *me* follow *mine.*"

"But, surely, — is not this *singular?*"

"I give you leave, Sir," cried I, laughing, "to think me singular — odd — queer — nay, even whimsical, if you please."

"But my *dear* Miss Burney, only —"

"I entreat you, Sir, to take my answer — you really pain me by being so urgent."

"That would not I do for the world! I only bet you to suffer me — perhaps in future —"

"No, I shall never change — I do assure you you will find me very obstinate."

He began to lament his own destiny. I grew extremely tired of so often saying the same thing; but I could not absolutely turn him out of the house; and, indeed, he seemed so dejected and unhappy, that I made it my study to soften my refusal as much as I could without leaving room for further expectations.

About this time my mother came in. We both rose. I was horridly provoked at my situation.

"I am only come in for a letter," cried she, "pray don't let me disturb you." And away she went ...

This could not but be encouraging to him, for she was no sooner gone than he began again the same story, and seemed determined not to give up his cause. He hoped at least that I would allow him to enquire after my health?

"I must beg you, Sir, to send me no more letters."

He seemed much hurt, and looked down in silence.

"You had better, Sir, think of me no more, if you study your own happiness —"

"I *do* study my own happiness — more than I have ever had any probability of

doing before!"

"You have made an unfortunate choice, Sir, but you will find it easier to forget it than you imagine. You have only to suppose that I was not at Mr. Burney's on May Day — and it was a mere chance my being there — and then you will be —"

"But if I *could* — could I also forget seeing you at Miss Burney's? — and if I did —can I forget that I see you now?"

"O yes! In three months' time you may forget you ever saw me. You will not find it so difficult as you suppose."

"You have heard, Ma'am, of an old man being ground young? Perhaps you believe *that?* But you will not deny me leave to sometimes see you?"

"My father, Sir, is seldom, hardly ever, indeed, at home."

"I have never seen the Doctor — but I hope he would not refuse me the permission to enquire after your health? I have no wish without his consent."

"Though I acknowledge myself to be *singular* I would not have you think me either affected or *trifling,* — and therefore I must assure ou I am *fixed* in the answer I have given you — *unalterably* fixed."

His entreaties grew now extremely distressing to me. He besought me to take more time and said it should be the study of his life to make me happy. "Allow me, my *dear* Miss Burney, only to hope that my future conduct —"

"I shall always think myself obliged, nay honoured by your good opinion — and you are entitled to my best wishes for your health and happiness — but, indeed, the less we meet the better."

"What — what can I do?" cried he, very sorrowfully.

"Why — go and *ponder* upon this affair for about half an hour. Then say — what an odd, queer, strange creature she is — and then — think of something else."

"O no, no! — you cannot suppose all that? I shall think of nothing else — *your* refusal is more pleasing than any other lady's acceptance."

He said this very simply, but too seriously for me to laugh at. ...

I rose and walked to the window thinking it was high time to end a conversation already much too long; and then he again began to entreat me not to be so *very severe*. I told him that was *sure* I should never alter the answer I made at first; that I was very happy at home; and not at all inclined to try my fate elsewhere. I then desired my compliments to Mrs. O'Connor and Miss Dickenson and made a *reverence* by way of leave taking.

"I am extremely sorry to detain you so long, Ma'am" said he, in a melancholy voice. I made no answer. He then walked about the room; and then again besought

my leave to ask me how I did some other time. I absolutely, though civilly refused it, and told him frankly that, fixed as I was, it was better that we should not meet.

He then took his leave — returned back — took leave — and returned again. I now made a more formal reverence of the head at the same time expressing my good wishes for his welfare, in a sort of way that implied that I expected never to see him again. He would fain have taken a more *tender* leave of me — but I repulsed him with great surprise and displeasure. I did not, however, as he was so terribly sorrowful refuse him my hand, which he had made sundry attempts to take in the course of conversation. When I withdrew it, as I did presently, I rang the bell to prevent his again returning from the door.

Letter from Frances Burney to Thomas Barlow, written that night

Sir,

I am much concerned to find that my silence to the first letter with which you honoured me has not had the effect it was meant to produce, of preventing your giving yourself any further trouble on my account.

The good opinion you are pleased to express of me, however extraordinary upon so short an acquaintance, certainly claims my acknowledgements; but as I have no intention of changing my present situation, I can only assure you of my good wishes for your health and happiness, and request and desire that you will bestow no further thoughts, time, or trouble upon,

Sir,
Your most humble servant,
F. Burney

From *The Early Diary of Frances Burney, 1768-1778,* ed. Anne Raine Ellis, 1889, reprinted 1971, Books for Libraries Press. vol. 2 pp. 47-70.

Frances Burney and General Alexandre d'Arblay

The translations from French here are my own; I hope they are correct.

From Frances Burney's journal, April 10, 1793

We chatted together a moment, & then I ran forward to the Coach & M. de Narbonne returned up stairs. M. D'Arblay had so much retreated, that he hardly reached me in time to help me into the Carriage. I had already taken hold of Oliver's [the coachman] arm & the instant I was in, he began putting up the steps.

"Ah ha!" cried M. D'Arblay — &, leaping over them, got into the Coach, seating himself opposite to me.

I believe Oliver's surprise was equal to my queerness.

"Where is he to go, Ma'am?" cried he.

"To Chelsea," I answered. — And the door was shut. — & off he drove.

I cannot pretend to recollect with any regularity what followed: the situation was so extremely embarrassing — my mind was so filled with the thoughts of my Father — & the fear of a thousand things endless to name — that I wholly forget how & in what way our journey began — I only know he wished to speak of all I wished not to hear, from my dread of further involvement ...

[*After some conversation in the coach*]

"Mais! mais! mais! he cried with eagerness si je pouvais — s'il non m'étoit pas defendu — de parler — à *cette Personne* — comme j'aurois envi de la demander — s'il lui faudroit — ou non — pourvû que j'obtienne quelque chose — s'il lui faudroit passer quelque tems tous les années à Londres — avec ses amis — ou s'il faut toujours demeurer à la campagne — à Mickelham — pour la redrer heureuse! — —"

[*But! but! but! If I could — if it were not forbidden — to speak — to* that Person — *as I would like to ask — or not — as long as I get some answer — if it is necessary to spend some time every year in London — with her friends — or if it is necessary to always stay in the country — at Mickelham — to make her happy!*]

I can give you no idea of the emotion into which he worked himself in saying these last words. — I was obliged to make him no answer at all, but say something quite foreign —

"Mais! mais! he cried a little impatiently laissez moi parler! laissez — permittez — —"

[*But! but! but! let me speak! allow — permit —*]

"Non! non! non! non!" I kept crying — but for all that — he dropt on one knee

— which I was fain to pretend not to observe — & held up his Hand folded & went on —

I begged him to say no more then quite fervently —

"Mais — enfin, cried he, *pourquoi*? pourquoi faut il que je me taire toûjours?"

[*But then* why*? Why must I always be quiet.*]

"O mon Dieu cried I pour tant de raisons!"

[*O my God, for so many reasons!*]

"Tant, repeated he, tant? in a tone not well pleased & rising & retaking his Seat — il n'y est qu'un seul qui est bon! —"

[*So many, so many? There is only one good reason.*]

"Et qu'est ce, donc, que cet seul raison?"

[*And what is that sole reason, then?*]

'Vôtre — aversion!" cried he — Flinging himself back in the furthest corner of the Coach.

[*Your — dislike!*]

[*More conversation. Then later*]

To be sure — he kissed my Glove a few times for this! & was beginning all over again & so urgently that, at length, upon his repeated *pourquois* to my supplication he would be silent, I was forced to speak — & to say this little truth — 'Eh bien, M. D'Arblay, donc — c'est — pour VOUS — pour vous-même que je ne veux pas entendre."

[*Well, M. D'Arblay — it is — for YOU — for yourself that I do not want to hear.*]

"Mais comment ça? comment?" cried he, astonished.

[*But how is that? How?*]

"C'est — qu'il faut que vous songez plus à ce que vous faites! — oh oui! pensez! pensez! — Songez, songez! — à ce que vous faites! à ce que vous dites!"

[*It is — that you need to consider more what you are doing! — Oh yes! Think! Think! — Consider! Consider! — what you are doing! What you are saying!*]

Frances Burney to M. d'Arblay, some days before April 18, 1793

J'avais bien le dessein de vous parler — — mais vous êtes d'une vivacité à tout deranger. Pusqu'il faut que je parle, je vais le faire et trés clairement.

Eh bien — j'avoue que ce n'est pas manque d'estime — ce n'est pas pas manque de confiance — non c'est toujours pour *vous* que cette personne hesite et se trouve indecise. — Elle a craint que vous ne quittassiez l'angleterre, elle voudrait que vous y restassiez et que vous y restassiez son ami; et son dessein etait de tâcher de vous trouver *quelqu'autre personne* plus riche, plus belle, plus jeune, plus — plus — plus — toute chose de bien, n'ayant rapport ni au coeur, ni à la conformité de gouts et — — car sur ces derniers articles peut être elle ne trouverait pas facilement une personne qui sût mieux apprecier.

[*It was my intention to speak to you — — but you are quick to disturb everything. Since I have to speak, I will do it, and very clearly.*

Well — I confess that it is not from lack of esteem — it is not from lack of trust — no, it is always for you *that that person hesitates and is indecisive. She feared that you would leave England; she wanted you to remain there and remain her friend; and her plan was to try to find you someone else richer, more beautiful, younger, more — more — more — more — everything good, except as relates to heart, or to the conformity of tastes and — — because on these last articles she might not easily find a person who knows better how to appreciate you.*]

Answer from D'Arblay

Je n'ai pas besoin de reflechir longtems pour dire à mon amie dans toute las sincerité de mon ame: Si demain j'avais une fortune considerable, je le mettrais à ses pieds; et je me regarderais comme le plus heureux de tous les hommes si elle consentait à la partager, fiere de lui appartenir, je ferais mon bonheur du soin d'assurer le sien. Ce n'est donc pas à moi a reflechir, mais à elle, uniquement à elle. Je ne possede rien, je n'ai rien à attendre, ou du moins ce que je puis esperer est si incertain, et si peu consequent! — — Je n'ai point demandé ce q'avait mon amie — C'est à elle à voir si elle aura la courage de vivre retirée, et si nous serons à l'abri de besoin. Quant à moi j'aurai toujours assez!

[*I do not need to reflect long to say to my friend, with all the sincerity of my soul: If tomorrow I had a considerable fortune, I would put it at her feet; and I would regard myself as the happiest of all men if she would consent to share it. I would make my happiness the care of assuring hers. So it is not for me to reflect, but for her, only for her. I have nothing, I have nothing to expect, or at least what I can hope for is so uncertain and so inconsequential! I didn't ask what my friend has. It is for her to see if she has the courage to live in seclusion and if we will be safe from need. As for me, I will always have enough.*]

Answer from Burney

helas! ce qu'elle a est si peu! — c'est de la Reine seulement, qu'elle a 100 livres par an — mais cette pension n'est fondée quesur les bonté de cette Princesse. Elle a bien encore 20 livres par an qui lui restent de Cecilia: mais jusqu'a present cette somme a été distribuée en de petite pensions. — De son Pere, elle n'ose attendre pour le present, ni peut être avant un des plus grans malheurs de sa vie puisqu'elle sait qe se soeurs n'ont eu et n'auront rien jusques là. Enfin à cette epoque cruelle, elle ne sait point qu'elle aurait — 1000 livres seterline est tout ce qu'on a promis à ses soeurs. Elle croit cependant, qu'elle pourrait avoir quelque chose que cette somme: mais jusqu'ici elle s'est si peu souciée de tout cela! Pensez — Pensez donc encore! Reflechissez, meditez, deliberez encore!

[*Alas! What she has is so little! - It is from the Queen alone, that she has 100 pounds a year - but this pension is based only on the goodness of this Princess. She does have 20 pounds a year left from* Cecilia, *but up to now this sum has been distributed in small pensions.*[26] *– From her Father, she dare not expect anything for the present, nor can she, perhaps, until one of the greatest misfortunes of her life, since she knows that her sisters have had and will have nothing until then. Then at this cruel time she does not know what she will have; 1000 pounds sterling is all that was promised to her sisters. She believes, however, that she might have something more than this amount: but so far she cared so little about it! Think - Think again! Reflect, meditate, think again!*]

From Burney's journal, Thursday April 18, 1793

By the next journal entry, they had clearly become engaged — presumably in a direct conversation not recorded.

Thursday April 18.
...M. d'A. passed by the Sofa on which I was seated, & dropt a NOTE by the side of my arm. I soon unfolded it unobserved, by help of the News paper. It was dejected, but infinitely sweet, & conjuring me to tell him whether, in circumstances so perplexing & unpromising, I had no feelings of repentance for my engagement. This was a surmize I could not suffer to wound his generous delicacy an instant. I seiced a scrap of paper & answerd it frankly: I put it quickly on the table; his watchful Eye saw it — & to see it, possess, & read it was the work of the same moment I used in flitting from the room.

[26]It had been given out as gifts to indigent relatives.

The note she passed to d'Arblay

I cannot even a moment defer answering so serious & affecting a little Letter. There are few, very few, that *any where,* or in any station, could have the smallest rational chance to make me happy; but whose soever's *'Fate I could share'* in a Palace — I most simply & solemnly protest I would share equally & most chearfully, in every possible adversity. And never can I fear *'Repentance'* when Confidence & Trust are built on perfect esteem.

From *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay)*, ed. Joyce Hemlow and Althea Douglas, Oxford U.Press, 1972 Vol. 2 pp. 68-72, 81-85

Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real and William Gooch

Elizabeth Sara Villa-Real (1757-1807) and William Gooch. Married 1775.

Elizabeth Sara Villa-Real was a poet and novelist. She is mostly known for her memoir, *The Life of Mrs. Gooch. Written by Herself*, from which the description of her courtship, below, is taken. She regretted the engagement even before the wedding and tried to get out of it but Gooch threatened to sue her and ruin her reputation. The marriage was unhappy and soon broke up. (There are conflicting accounts of this. The Wikipedia article states, "Her husband took control of her money and abandoned her in Lille in 1778." However, Cynthia Pomerlau in *Resigning the Needle for the Pen: A Study of Autobiographical Writings of British Women Before 1800* `http://www.pomerleau.org/cindy/` writes, "Eventually she receives an apparently compromising note from her music teacher and, though insisting upon her innocence, endeavors unsuccessfully to conceal it from her husband. Gooch's family determines to make public the story and separate the couple. He retains custody of the children but refuses to grant the divorce she eventually requests, thus cutting her off from the possibility of remarriage. Her uncle advises her to wait out the storm in banishment in France and she blames him rather than herself for the seduction that follows." I have not further looked into this.) Mrs. Gooch went onto a career as an actress and writer, and to a number of affairs with aristocrats and military men.

We no sooner arrived there [Bath], than it was reported my fortune was much larger than it really was. On the first evening of my appearance (which was the first that I ever wore a woman's dress) I danced the last minuet with Mr. Wade, to render me conspicuous. As soon at that was over, he presented Mr. Gooch to my mother and myself, introducing him to me as a partner for the evening.

The first question I asked him was, whether he were related to the pretty Miss Gooch, of whom I had heard. He replied, that she was his sister, and he should be happy to introduce her to Mrs. Hutchinson and myself the following evening, when he engaged me to dance with him again.

The next morning Mr. Gooch called at our house, and at night introduced to us Lady Gooch, his mother-in-law, and Mis Gooch, who left their names the day after.

From that time Mr. Gooch became my constant attendant, and precluded all other men the possibility of dancing with me, who attempted to engage me with probability the same views as himself. In a few days, having overheated myself with dancing, I was obliged to be let blood; this, however, did not prevent me from keeping my engagement to dance with Mr. Gooch the following evening. I did so, and my arm began to bleed afresh, which forced me to sit down for the remainder of the time, and Mr. Gooch, seating himself by me, proposed my going off with him. He represented the infinite service my health would receive from the Spa waters and expatiated much

on the gaieties and pleasures to be met with abroad. To this proposal I strongly objected. I knew his OWN family to be unexceptionable, and all that I had heard against it was that Sir Thomas was NOW married to his daughter's *governess*.

I wrote a card, which I gave him at the next ball, that I would by no means encourage him in a clandestine manner, but that he might mke an open proposal and *then* be accepted. I gave him at the same time a letter, which I desired him to put in the post office; it contained a few lines I had hastly written to Mr. Charles Mellish, my uncle, desiring he would not oppose the match.

The next morning my mother received one from Sir Thomas Gooch, with proposals from himself for his son, and requested to be informed of the state of my fortune? She did not like the connection; but resolved on our immediately setting out for London to consult with the rest of my relations. We did so in the course of the following day; and at the same time all Sir Thomas Gooch's family set out for London also. Nor were these our only followers — Colonel Stafford and Mr. Lyon, two Irish gentlemen, with whom we had been acquainted at Bath, and who both had sought opportunities of addressing me, overtook us on the road: at that time, I began to think I should prefer Mr. Lyon to either of his competitors; but I was really hurried by the Gooches into this marriage, and not suffered to breathe (if I may be allowed the expression) or to consider for a moment on what I was doing. Sir Thomas, on his arrival, hired a house in Suffolk Street, and all the family became our *constant visitors*.

. . .

Lady Galway appeared perfectly indifferent with regard to my marriage; not indeed did any of my family ever give themselves the trouble to mention it, excepting Mr. Charles Mellish, who once or twice told me he did not perfectly approve it, but, unfortunately for me, he did not object forcibly enough to prevent it. Had he chosen to have done so, it might have been easily accomplished; such was my opinion of my uncle, and my affection for him, that he would never have found it difficult to persuade me to any thing, and particularly where my heart was so little interested, which by this time became less every hour. The same opinion and affection I have ever retained nor is it by many the only instance of my valuing those who least care about my fate.

My uncle was probably apprized of some motives existing of which I was *then* ignorant, and I wish I had remained so!

Lady Gooch's *maternal fondness* for Mr. Gooch pleaded forcibly for his interest and she used every endeavour to hasten our marriage; it was *indeed* hastened, for the article were immediately drawn. I saw Mr. Gooch for the first time, on the 5th of April 1775, and we were married at St. George's, Hanover Square, the 13th of May following.

Before this fatal day I had sincerely repented my engagements. Some things that

Mr. Mellish had said to me, some remarks I had myself made, and a dislike that I had, in consequence of both these, taken to Mr. Gooch's family, determined me of sezing the first favourable opportunity, when alone with him, of disclosing my sentiments. I did so one evening when my mother had left us together. I told him that my mind had changed, and it was my wish to break off the connection. His answer to me was, that if I did, it should be the ruin of my character, and the loss of half my fortune, for which he would sue me.

James Boswell and Margaret Montgomerie

James Boswell (1740-1795) married Margaret Montgomerie (1738?-1789) in 1769.

Margaret Montgomerie

James Boswell
Painting by George Willison, 1765

James Boswell is famous as the author of *The Life of Samuel Johnson* and *A Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson.* His diaries are extremely long and detailed, and remarkable for their frankness about his sex life; he was addicted to whoring, both before and after his marriage. He met Dr. Johnson in 1763, and by 1769 was starting his not very successful career as a lawyer.

Margaret Montgomerie was a first cousin of Boswell's. Boswell's father, who disapproved of most things about his son, including his friendship with Johnson, disapproved the match, because she was not rich or well connected.

Writers about Boswell agree that Boswell was fortunate in his wife (the reverse is less clear). The two of them remained fundamentally in love with one another, and she remained supportive of him, despite his constant sexual infidelity, and his gradual descent into alcoholism.

Letter from James Boswell to Margaret Montgomerie

Edinburgh, 20 July 1769

My dear Cousin — I know I shall have a friendly and affectionate answer to the last letter which I wrote to you. But in the meantime, I am going to write you a calm and determined epistle, in few words, but of infinite importance to me.

You never knew till we were in Ireland that I had at different points of my life been deeply in love with you. That has, however been the case; and had not vanity or some other artificial motive made me, from time to time, encourage my fancy in other schemes, the genuine inclinations of my heart would ever have been constant to my dear Peggie Montgomerie. As it was, you know how fond I have been of you, and how I have at different times convinced me that my love for you was truly sincere. While wavering in my resolutions, I was always determined that if your happiness depended on your having me, I would not hesitate a moment to make my best friend happy. And I accordingly begged in a late letter that you would tell me freely if that was the case.

I was at the assembly last night, and saw a variety of beauties. I was not inconstant to you for a moment. Indeed, after standing the trial you did in Ireland, there could be little fear. Any other person than you would be apt to disregard what I say in my present situation. But I think I may trust to the generosity of a *noble-minded woman,* as Dempster calls you. I therefore make you this proposal. You know my unhappy temper. You know all my faults. It is painful to repeat them. Will you, then, knowing me fully, accept of me for your husband as I am now — not the heir of Auchinleck, but one who has had his time of the world, and is henceforth to expect no more than £100 a year? With that and the interest of your £1,060, we can live in an agreeable retirement in any part of Europe that you please. But we are to bid adieu for ever to this country. All our happiness is to be our society with each other, and our hopes of a better world. Nor ought I to be surprised if a woman of your admirable sense and high character with all who know you should refuse to comply with it, should refuse to sacrifice every prudent considerations to me. But as I love you more than I can express, you will excuse me for making this proposal. I am ready upon these terms to marry you directly. And, upon my honour, I would not propose it now, were I not fully persuaded that I would share a kingdom with you if I had it. I also solemnly promise to do everything in my power to show my gratitude and make you happy. Think seriously of this. Give me any positive answer you honestly can. But I trust on no mediocrity, no reasoning, no hesitation. Think fully, and one way or other tell me your resolution. I am much yours.

James Boswell

Margaret Montgomerie's answer

Lainshaw, Saturday 22 July 1769

I have thought fully as you desired, and in answer to your letter I accept of your terms, and shall do everything in my power to make myself worthy of you. J.B. with £100 a year is every bit as valuable to me as if possessed of the estate of Auchinleck. I only regret the want to wealth on your account, not being certain if you can be happy without a proper share of it. Free of ambition, I prefer real happiness to the splendid appearance of it. I wish you could meet me at Glasgow on Saturday. Could you not come that length in the fly and return on Monday? Let me know and I'll be there any day you approve.

My heart determines my choice. May the Almighty grant His blessing and protection, and we need not be afraid; His providence extends over all the earth, so that wherever you go, I shall willingly accompany you and hope to be happy. Had you been, as you mention, in your former prosperity, I should perhaps have indulged myself in female prudence, &c, but I think this is not now the time for dissimulation. I am therefore ready to meet you when you please, and to join my fate to yours. Is not this as full an answer as you could wish? Say nothing of the affair to your father, as you are sure he will never consent, and to disobey after consulting is worse than doing it without saying a word.

My heart is more at ease than it has been for a long time, though still I feel for what I'm afraid you suffer. Be assured, my dear Jamie, you have a friend that would sacrifice everything for you, who never had a wish for wealth until now, to bestow it on the man of her heart.

I wrote two letters, one on Friday and one on Tuesday. I hope the contents of neither have offended you. My anxiety about your happiness made me use every argument in my power to prevail on you to stay at home. In hopes of meeting with you soon, I shall only add that I most sincerely am, my dear Jamie, your faithful and affectionate

M.M.

From *The Journals of James Boswell 1762-1795* ed. John Wain, Yale University Press 1991. 208-211.

Lady Mary Pierrepont and Edward Wortley Montagu

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (née Pierrepont) (1689-1762) and Edward Wortley Montagu (1678-1761), married 1712.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

Edward Wortley Montagu

Both paintings by Charles Jervas

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was a traveller, poet, and writer. She is chiefly remembered for her *Embassy Letters*, written while her husband was ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (1716-1718) and published posthumously. These give a detailed and vivid description of the Ottoman Court, and in particular of the royal harem, to which she, as a woman, had an access impossible for male travellers. She was also noteworthy as one of the leading early advocates of smallpox inoculation.

Her courtship with Edward Wortley Montagu is quite a tale in itself. Lady Mary Pierrepont was the eldest child of Evelyn Pierrepont, 1st Duke of Kingston-upon-Hull; thus, very aristocratic and very rich. She was also, from a very young age, remarkable for her beauty, her intelligence (she had taught herself Latin from the books in her father's library), and her literary gifts.

Edward Wortley Montagu, eleven years older than Mary, was the eldest son of the second son of the Earl of Sandwich — in the aristocracy, broadly speaking, but not titled, and an heir to a large estate.. He was an attorney. He had close friends both in government and in literary circles, particularly the essayists Joseph Addison and Richard Steele.

Wortley first met Mary in 1709, through his sister Anne, who was an extremely close friend of Mary's. Wortley and Mary met at friends' houses and at Court and they hit it off together. For a few months, Wortley communicated with Mary by means of messages included in letters from Anne to Mary. But Anne died in November 1709, so Mary and Wortley began a direct, secret, lengthy correspondence.

The Letters of Mary Wortley Montague includes, between March 1710 and their marriage in August 1712, sixty-eight letters from Mary to Wortley and forty-two letters from Wortley to Mary; but clearly there were additional letters that have not survived or have not been published. Mostly these were sent through the post office but some were delivered by friends or servants. The subject are primarily (a) making arrangements to carry out their correspondence — Mary could not be caught either receiving letters from Wortley or sending letters to him; (b) when they were both in town, making arrangements to meet, in places where they would be able to talk but their romance would not be suspected; (c) at times, financial discussions or considerations for how they would live together; (d), primarily, emotional drama. Both of them, especially Wortley, had an unhappy gift for, first, placing the worst possible interpretation on what the other had written, and second, expressing their hurt feelings in a way that made it inevitable that the other would read what they had written in the worst possible light. Additionally, Wortley was extremely jealous as regards Mary, extremely ready to believe that she favored some other suitor and was only playing with him, and (characteristically of his age) somewhat obsessed with the idea that she might cheat on him once they were married. Their correspondence is largely one long, quite painful, lovers' quarrel, until a couple of weeks before their elopement, when they start making plans for that, and become much more affectionate. They often threatened to break off the correspondence, or ordered the other to break it off, and indeed the correspondence was actually broken off for more than a year, between May 1711 and June 1712.

But I am getting ahead of my story. In April 1710, a letter from Wortley to Mary was found by a servant and was brought to her father. He was furious about it and berated her about the secret correspondence. She sent word about the discovery to Wortley. Wortley, however, assumed that she had deliberately arranged for her father to see it, so as to force him (Wortley) into acting, and, delighted with this proof that she was serious about him, he forthwith made a formal proposal to the Duke. "And the Lawyers were appointed to meet on both sides, according to Custom".

Or at least, that was Mary's account of it, in a fictionalized autobiographical romance about the courtship that she wrote, presumably just around this time, since the tale ends with the lawyers meeting, as quoted above, and presumably for her own amusement. It is not clear how much of this romance is accurate. Mary changed her and Wortley's names to "Laetitia" and "Sebastian" (though, incongruously, she mentions Addison under his own name), changed the locale

to Portugal, changed her own age from twenty to early teens and thus exaggerates her own precosity, and, comparing this account to the letters, considerably understates her own participation in the correspondence with Wortley. I include a couple of excerpts below.

What is certain is that Wortley made a formal proposal of marriage to Lady Mary's father; the lawyers met; and the negotiations fell through. The Duke insisted that £10,000 be entailed on Wortley and Mary's first son. Wortley refused to have such a large fortune tied up. So, as far as the Duke was concerned, that was the end of the affair. Wortley wrote an article for *The Tatler* complaining about this — from the vantage point of 2020, it seems equally extraordinary that he would choose to publicize his personal affairs this way and that *The Tatler* would publish it. Wortley and Mary resumed their secret, pretty acrimonious, correspondence, until, apparently, in May 1711, the Duke again found out about it, again blew up at Mary, and so, after a few more letters on both sides breaking off the correspondence, the correspondence did actually come to an end for just over a year.

In June 1712, Wortley again wrote to Mary — that letter is not published — she sent a favorable answer, and the correspondence started up again in rather friendlier tones than earlier. Around this time, things were approaching a crisis with her from a different direction. There was a second suitor, one Clotworthy Skeffington, son and heir of Clotworthy Skeffington, 3rd Viscount of Massereene. Mary's father the Duke was very enthusiastic about Skeffington, and the lawyers came to a mutually satisfactory arrangement about all the money issues. The Duke put extreme pressure on Mary to accept Skeffington's proposal. Mary wrote a letter to her father, saying that she hated the guy. The Duke had yet another conference with her, and told her that it was her decision, but that if she did not marry Skeffington, he would not provide any dowry for anyone else; all she would get would be an annuity of £400 as an inheritance when he died. He advised her to consult with her relatives. She did, and her relatives all advised her to marry Skeffington and not worry about not being in love with him. She had another meeting with her father, where he repeated what he had said before. She then wrote him a letter, repeating that she hated Skeffington, but agreeing to do what her father told her to. So her father and Skeffington started to arrange the wedding; her father spent £400 on her wedding clothes. To escape this situation, and because she and Wortley really did like one another, they arrange to elope together, and were married some time around August 12, 1712. And they lived more or less happily ever after until Wortley's death almost fifty years later.

So that's the story. As can be seen, there is no lack of first-hand written material; the question is selection. As far as I can tell, there is no single, clear-cut proposal or acceptance (except, perhaps, the formal proposals that Wortley and Skeffington addressed to the Duke, which I have not seen.) I have included below:

A. An early love letter from Wortley to Mary (April 20, 1710).

B. Mary's letter in response to (A) (April 25, 1710). She says she has friendly feelings toward him but does not love him; if he can live with that, she's willing to marry him. If he is serious, he has to work it out with her father, not write her love letters.

C. Two excerpts from Mary's fictionalized autobiographical romance, describing the courtship up through April 2010.

D. A rather warm letter from Mary to Wortley (March 24, 1711) just before they break off the correspondence.

E. Wortley's hostile response to (D) (March 29, 1711).

F. Letter from Mary to Wortley describing her father pressuring her to marry Skeffington (July 24, 1712)

G. Letter from Mary to Wortley discussing what their marriage will be like (August 6, 1712).

H. Answer from Wortley to (G), at last happy and properly loving (August 7, 1712).

I. Another, quite moving, letter from Mary to Wortley, discussing their plans for elopement, her fears and hopes. (August 16, 1712).

J. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's first letter to her husband after they were married (April 22, 1712); warm, affectionate, and relaxed in a way not previously seen in their correspondence.

Letter from Wortley to Mary, April 20, 1710

This is the second letter from Wortley to Mary that survives. The idea that he would be overjoyed if her illness very much marred her beauty, because that would drive away other men, (except that she herself might not be happy about it) and in fact wouldn't even mind if she lost her eyes, seems to me absolutely appalling, but one has to suppose that it was intended as an elegant gallantry, and was accepted as such, since Lady Mary did not complain about it.

Tho last night I was perfectly well till I saw the letter sign'd by you, I am this morning downright sick. Had there bin any such thing as Sympathy that is occasion'd by Griefe, I shou'd have bin sensible of it when you first fell ill. I had griev'd at your Illness, tho I had bin sure you hated me. An Aversion may possibly be remov'd, but the loss of you woud be irretrievable; there has not yet bin, there never will be, another L.M. You see how far a man's passion carries (his) reflexions. It makes him uneasy because the ⟨wor *angle*st may possibly happen from the least dangerous Distempers. I take yours to be so, and think a thousand to one that I hear of your recovery when I hear of you next. I am not the least concern'd to fancy your Colour may receive some Alteration. I shoud be overjoy'd to hear your Beauty was very

much impair'd, cou'd I be pleas'd with any thing that wou'd give you displeasure, for it woud lessen the number of your Admirers, but even the loss of a feature, nay of your Eyes themselves, wou'd not make you seem less beautifull to [—

Letter from Mary to Wortley, April 25, 1710

I have this minute receivd your 2 Letters. I know not how to direct to you, whether to London or the country, or if in the country to Durham or Wortley. Tis very likely you'l never receive this. I hazard a great deal if it falls into other hands, and I write for all that—

I wish with all my soul I thought as you do. I endeavor to convince my selfe by your Arguments, and am sorry my reason is so obstinate not to be deluded into an Opinion that tis impossible a Man can esteem a Woman. I suppose I should then be very easy at your thoughts of me. I should thank you for the wit and Beauty you give me and not be angry at the follys and weaknesses, but to my Infinite affliction I can beleive neither one nor tother. One part of my Character is not so good nor th'other so bad as you fancy it. Should we ever live together you would be disapointed both ways; you would find an easy equality of temper you do not expect, and a thousand faults you do not imagine. You think if you marry'd me I should be passionately fond of you one month and of some body else the next. Neither would happen. I can esteem, I can be a freind, but I don't know whether I can Love. Expect all that is complaisant and easy, but never what is fond in me. You Judge very wrong of my Heart when you suppose me capable of veiws of Interest, and that any thing could oblige me to flatter any body. Was I the most indigent Creature in the world I should answer you as I do now, without adding or deminishing. I am incapable of Art, and 'tis because I will not be capable of it. Could I deceive one minute, I should never regain my own good Opinion, and who could bear to live with one they despis'd?

If you can resolve to live with a Companion that will have all the deference due to your superiority of good sense, and that your proposals can be agreable to those on whom I depend — I have nothing to say against them.

As to travelling, tis what I should doe with great pleasure, and could easily quit London upon your account, but a retirement in the country is not so disagreable to me, as I know a few months would make it tiresome to you. Where people are ty'd for Life, tis their mutual Interest not to grow weary of one Another. If I had all the personal charms that I want, a Face is too slight a foundation for happynesse. You would be soon tir'd with seeing every day the same thing, where you saw nothing else. You would have leisure to remark all the defects, which would encrease in proportion as the novelty lessend, which is allwaies a great charm. I should have the displeasure of seeing a coldnesse, which tho' I could not reasonably blame you for, being involuntary, yet it would render me uneasy, and the more because I know a Love may be reviv'd which Absence, Inconstancy, or even Infidelity has extinguish'd,

but there is no returning from a *degout* given by Satiety.

I should not chuse to live in a croud. I could be very well pleasd to be in London without makeing a great Figure or seeing above 8 or 9 agreable people. Apartments, Table etc. are things that never come into my head. But [I] will never think of any thing without the consent of my Family, and advise you not to fancy a happynesse in entire solitude, which you would find only Fancy.

Make no answer to this. If you can like me on my own terms, tis not to me you must make your proposals. If not, to what purpose is our Correspondance?

However, preserve me your Freindship, which I think of with a great deal of pleasure and some Vanity. If ever you see me marry'd, I flatter my selfe you'l see a Conduct you would not be sorry your Wife should Imitate.

Excerpt from Mary's fictionalized autobiographical romance

Laetitia had naturally the strongest Inclination for Reading, and finding in her Father's house a well furnish'd Library, instead of the usual diversion of children, made that the seat of her Pleasures, and had very soon run through the English part of it. Her Appetite for knowledge encreasing with her years, without considering the toilsome task she undertook she began to learn her selfe the Latin Grammar, and with the help of an uncommon memory and indefagitable Labour made her selfe so far mistresse of that Language as to be able to understand allmost any Author. This extraordinary attachment to study became the Theme of Public discourse. her Father, tho no Scholar himselfe, was flatter'd with a pleasure in the progress she made; and this reputation, which she did not seek (having no end in view but her own Amusements), gave her Enviers and consequently Enemys amongst the Girls of her own Age. One of these was Mlle. —. She had a large fortune, which was enough to draw after a croud of those that otherwise would never have thought of her. She fancy'd she triumphed over Laetitia when she related to her the Number of her Conquests, and amongst others nam'd to her Sebastian as he that was most passionately her servant and had made the most impression on her Heart. Laetitia, who saw through the little vanity that agitated her, and had a very mean Idea of a Man that could be captivated with such charms, laughed at her Panegyric, and the other, who insisted on the merit of her imagin'd Lover, would make her Witness both of his agreeableness and passion. A party for this purpose was very easily contriv'd, and Laetitia invited to play where he was to tailly at Bassette. She was then but newly enter'd into her teens, but never being tall, had allready attain'd the height she allways had,and her person was in all the Childish bloom of that Age.

Sebastian who seriously design'd on the Fortune of Mlle. —, who was 3 year older [than Laetitia], propos'd nothing by coming there but an occasion of Obliging her, and being at that time near 30 did not expect much Conversation amongst a

set of Romps. Tea came in before Cards and a new play being then acted, it was the first thing mention'd on which Laetitia took occasion to criticise in a manner so just and knowing, he was as much amaz'd as if he had heard a piece of Waxwork talk on that subject. That led them into a discourse of Poetry; he was still more astonish'd to find her not only well read in the moderns, but that there was hardly any beautifull passage in the Classics she did not remember. This was striking him in the most sensible manner. He was a throrough [sic] Scholar, and rather an Adorer than an Admirer of Learning. The conversation grew so eager on both sides, neither Cards nor Mlle. were thought upon; and she was forc'd to call to him several times before she could prevail on him to go towards the Table. When he did it was only to continue his Discourse with Laetitia, and she had the full pleasure of triumphing over Mlle. who was forc'd to be silent while they talk'd what she could not understand.

. . .

One of those Jades, who make it their Busyness to find out people's Inclinations in order to find their account in serving them, seeing an unfeign'd melancholy in [Sebastian's] Air and behavior told him after the farewell Bow of Laetitia that she had given him permission to write to her and her selfe orders to convey the Letter. Nothing could be more improbable than this message in every light, but he was so transported with this surprizing favor, he wrote a very passionate declaration of love which he put into that Woman's hand next morning, to which she brought him a very kind Answer of her own Invention;. He too well knew the stile and character of Laetitia to take it for hers, but the contents were so agreable (however express'd) that he would beleive it was wrote by her order by her chambermaid. But having very little Opinion of the discretion of this Messenger he instructed a faithful servant of his own with the Answer. ...

This Letter was carry'd to the Duke's villa where the servant ask'd for Laetitia and deliver'd it to her own hand. I cannot describe the astonishment with which she read it. She had been educated with a strictness that made her look on a Love lettter as a mortal Crime, and to be accus'd of writing one to a Man she never had a tender thought for, made it doubly provoking. She look'd upon it as unpardonible vanity in him, and a want of Esteem for her to suppose her capable of it, and in the present Hurry of her Resentment in which she express'd it in the severest manner, which she gave to his Messenger.

But this was not the whole Consequence. It was a new thing in that regular family to have an unknown person enquire for Laetitia, deliver her a Letter, and receive an Answer, and her Governess was too attentive to let it pass without examination. She said nothing at the time, but searching her pocket at night found Sebastian's letter. The sight of a Man's hand alarmed her. She sent it immediately to the Duke as an affair of the last consequence, and he made haste to his daughter, who for the first time of his Life he severely reprimanded in so much Fury that he would not hear her Justification and treated her as if she had been surpris'd in the most criminal

Correspondence.

Poor Letitia retir'd to her Closet, drown'd in tears, and could thing of no Expedient to set her Innocence in a clear light, but to employ Sebastian, who she did not doubt had too much Generosity to let her suffer for his sake. She wrote to tell him, her Father had surpriz'd his Letter, that he was in the utmost rage against her for receiving it; and as he had occasion'd this mischeife, she left it to his conduct to justify it. She got this convey'd by a maid servant by the help of a guinea, but it had a different Effect from what she propos'd. Sebastian had so far flatter'd himselfe with her Love, he did not doubt she had her selfe carry'd his leter to her Father, and it was an Artifice to bring this affair to a proper Conclusion. He was delighted with the Wit of this Contrivance, which was very far from her thoughts, and full of the most charming hopes went next morning to her Father with a formal Proposal of marriage, accompany'd with the particulars of his Estate, which was too considerable to be refus'd. The Duke gave him as favorable an Answer as he could expect, and the Lawyers were appointed to meet on both Sides, according to Custom.

Letter from Mary to Wortley, March 24, 1711

Tho' your Letter is far from what I expected, haveing once promis'd to answer it with the sincere account of my inmost thoughts, I am resolv'd you shall not find me worse than my word, which is (what ever you may think) inviolable.

Tis no Affectation to say, I dispise the Pleasure of pleasing people that I dispise. All the fine Equipages that shine in the Ring never gave me another thought than either Pity or Contempt for the Owners, that could place Happynesse in attracting the Eyes of strangers. Nothing touches me with Satisfaction but what touches my Heart, and I should find more Pleasure in the secret Joy I should feel at a kind Expression from a freind I esteem'd, than at the Admiration of a whole Play house, or the Envy of those of my own Sex who could not attain to the same Number of Jewells, fine Cloths etc., supposing I was at the very top of this sort of Happynesse.

You may be this freind, if you please. Did you realy esteem me, had you any tender regard for me, I could, I think, passe my Life in any station, happyer with you than in all the Grandeur of the World with any other. You have some Humours that would be disagreable to any Woman that marryd with an Intention of finding her Happynesse abroad. That is not my Resolution. If I marry, I propose to my selfe a Retirement. There is few of my Acquaintance I should ever wish to see again, and the pleasing One, and only One, is the way I design to please my selfe.

Happynesse is the natural design of all the World, and every thing we see done, is meant in order to attain it. My Imagination places it in Freindship. By Freindship I mean an intire Communication of thoughts, Wishes, Interests, and Pleasures being undivided, a mutual Esteem, which naturally carrys with it a pleasing sweetnesse of

conversation, and terminates in the desire of makeing one or Another happy, without being forc'd to run into Visits, Noise, and Hurry, which serve rather to trouble than compose the thoughts of any reasonable Creature. There are few capable of a Freindship such as I have describ'd, and tis necessary for the generallity of the World to be taken up with Triffies. Carry a fine Lady or a fine Gentleman out of Town and they know no more what to say. To take from them Plays, Operas, and fashions is takeing away all their topics of discourse, and they know not how to form their thoughts on any other Subjects. They know very well what it is to be admir'd, but are perfectly ignorant of what it is to be lov'd.

I take you to have Sense enough not to think this Scheme Romantic. I rather chuse to use the word Freindship than Love because in the general Sense that word is spoke, it signifies a Passion rather founded on Fancy than Reason, and when I say Freindship I mean a mixture of Tendernesse and Esteem, and which a long acquaintance encreases not decays. How far I deserve such a freindship, I can be no Judge of my selfe. I may want the good sense that is necessary to be agreable to a Man of Merit, but I know I want the vanity to beleive I have, and can promise you shall never like me lesse upon knowing me better, and that I shall never forget you have a better understanding than my selfe.

And now let me intreat you to think (if possible) tolerably of my Modesty after so bold a declaration. I am resolv'd to throw off reserve; and use me ill if you please. I am sensible to own an Inclination for a Man is puting one's selfe wholly in his Power, but sure you have generosity enough not to abuse it. After all I have said, I pretend no tye but on your Heart. If you do not love me, I shall not be happy with you; if you do, I need add no farther. I am not Mercenary and would not receive an obligation that comes not from one that Loves me.

I do not desire my Letter back again. You have honnour and I dare trust you. I am going to the same place I went last Spring. I shall think of you there; it depends upon you, in what Manner.

Wortley to Mary, March 29, 1711

You judge very right that the secret of your esteeming me so much will be safe. Were I vain enough to believe it my selfe, I shoud never hope to convince any other or expose my selfe to ridicule in attempting it. Coud I have imagin'd your respect for me halfe what you say it is, I had long since endeavourd to be much more or less happy than I am at present. After all the unkindness you have express'd, my Passion is yet at such a height that I woud part with Life it selfe to be convinc'd your esteem is as you represent it. At last I own this weakness to you with a great deal of shame. I cannot help owning it now you have put it out of your power to take advantage of the Confession. After— (I am still griev'd at the thoughts of it and will not say what it is) no one can be persuaded he is esteemd. I shoud have taken my selfe to be the

most fortunate man alive, whatever price I had paid for you, coud I but have believ'd you as indifferent to all others as to me. To see you too well pleas'd with another is the only hard Condition to which I cou'd not have submitted. That I did not yield to this is your good Fortune as well as mine, thô I am worth a great deal more than I pretended to be, for you will certainly have many offers of those that are above me in wealth, in wit, in every thing that pleases you, tho'‘ you will never hear of one that loves you more. I shall, as soon as I am able, cease to be such a Lover, but you will never find me other than your servant.

[Passage omitted]

I am so foolish in all that relates to you, I cannot forbear thanking you for this letter, tho it plainly appears in it that all these obliging expressions are us'd to one that is valu'd very little. Did you ever see a line from me that did not prove a Passion? ??? will pardon the impertinence I have now bin guilty of in confirming the past. I coud not forbear doing it in answer to a letter which seems to be your last.

Mary to Wortley, July 24, 1712

I am going to write you a plain long letter. What I have allready told you is nothing but the truth. I have no reason to beleive I am going to be otherwaies confine'd than by my Duty, but I, that know my own Mind, know that is enough to make me miserable. I see all the Misfortune of marrying where it is impossible to Love. I am going to confesse a weaknesse [that] may perhaps add to your contempt of me. I wanted courrage to resist at first the Will of my Relations, but as every day added to my fears, Those at last grew strong enough to make me venture the disobliging them. A harsh word damps my Spirits to a degree of Silenceing all I have to say. I knew the folly of my own temper, and took the Method of writeing to the disposer of me. I said every thing in this Letter I thought proper to move him, and proffer'd in attonement for not marrying whom he would, never to marry at all. He did not think fit to answer this letter, but sent for me to him. He told me he was very much surpriz'd that I did not depend on his Judgment for my future happynesse, that he knew nothing I had to complain of etc., that he did not doubt I had some other fancy in my head which encourrag'd me to this disobedience, but he assur'd me if I refus'd a settlement he has provided for me, he gave me his word, whatever proposalls were made him, he would never so much as enter into a Treaty with any other; that if I founded any hopes upon his death, I should find my selfe mistaken — he never intended to leave me any thing but an Annuity of £400; that tho' another would proceed in this manner, after I had given so just a pretence for it, yet he had goodnesse to leave my destiny yet in my own choice; — and at the same time commanded me to communicate my design to my Relations and ask their Advice. —

As hard as this may sound, it did not shock my resolution. I was pleas'd to think at any price I had it in my power to be free from a Man I hated. I told my Intention

to all my nearest Relations; I was surpriz'd at their blameing it to the greatest degree. I was told they were sorry I would ruin my selfe, but if I was so unreasonable they could not blame my F[ather] whatever he inflicted on me. I objected I did not love him. They made answer they found no Necessity of Loveing; if I liv'd well with him, that was all was requir'd of me, and that if I consider'd this Town I should find very few women in love with their Husbands and yet a manny happy. It was in vain to dispute with such prudent people; they look'd upon me as a little Romantic, and I found it impossible to perswade them that liveing in London at Liberty was not the height of happynesse. However, they could not change my thoughts, tho' I found I was to expect no protection from them. When I was to give my final answer to [my Father] I told him that I prefer'd a single life to any other, and if he pleas'd to permit me, I would take that Resolution. He reply'd, he could not hinder my resolutions, but I should not pretend after that to please him, since pleaseing him was only to be done by Obedience; that if I would disobey, I knew the consequences—he would not fail to confine me where I might repent at Leisure; that he had also consulted my Relations and found them all agreeing in his Sentiments.

He spoke this in a manner hinder'd my answering. I retir'd to my chamber, where I writ a letter to let him know my Aversion to the Man propos'd was too great to be over-come, that I should be miserable beyond all things could be imagin'd, but I was in his hands, and he might dispose of me as he thought fit.—He was perfectly satisfy'd with this Answer, and proceeded as if I had given a willing consent. —I forgot to tell you he name'd you, and said if I thought that way, I was very much mistaken, that if he had no other Engagements, yet he would never have agreed to your proposalls, haveing no Inclination to see his Grandchildren beggars.

I do not speak this to endeavor to alter your opinion, but to shew the improbabillity of his agreeing to it. I confesse I am entirely of your Mind. I reckon it among the absurditys of custom that a Man must be oblig'd to settle his whole Estate on an eldest Son, beyond his power to recall, whatever he proves to be, and make himselfe unable to make happy a younger Child that may deserve to be so. If I had an Estate my selfe, I should not make such ridiculous settlements, and I cannot blame you for being in the right.

I have told you all my Affairs with a plain sincerity. I have avoided to move your compassion, and I have said nothing of what I suffer; and I have not perswaded you to a Treaty which I am sure my familly will never agree to. I can have no fortune without an entire Obedience.

Whatever your busynesse is, may it end to your Satisfaction. I think of the public as you do. As little as that is a Woman's care, it may be permitted into the Number of a Woman's fears. But wretched as I am, I have no more to fear for my selfe. I have still a concern for my freinds, and I am in pain for your danger. I am far from takeing ill what you say. ⟨I *angle* never valu'd my selfe as the daughter of —, and ever dispis'd those that esteem'd me on that Account. With pleasure I could barter

all that, and change to be any Country Gentleman's daughter that would have reason enough to make happynesse in privacy.

My Letter is too long. I beg your pardon. You may see by the situation of my affairs tis without design.

Mary to Wortley, August 6, 1712

You do me wrong in several parts of your Letter. You seem not very well to know your own mind. You are unwilling to go back from your word, and yet you do the same thing as telling me you should think your selfe more oblig'd to me for a refusal than a consent. Another woman would complain of this unsteadinesse of resolution. I think in an Affair of this nature, tis very natural to think one minute one thing, and the next another, and I cannot blame you. I remember an expression in one of your letters to me which is certainly just. Should we not repent, we should both be happy beyond example; if we should, we should, I fear, be both wretched in as high a degree. I should not hesitate one moment, was I not resolv'd to sacrifice every thing to you. If I do it, I am determin'd to think as little of the rest of the World — Men, Women, Acquaintance and relations — as if a deluge had swallow'd them. I abandonn all things that bear the name of pleasure but what is to be found in your companny. I give up all my Wishes, to be regulated by yours, and I resolve to have no other study but that of pleasing you.

These Resolutions are absolutely necessary if we are to meet; and you need have no doubt but I will perform them. I know you too well to propose to my selfe any satisfaction in marrying you that must not be center'd in your selfe. A Man that marrys a Woman without any advantages of Fortune or Alliance (as it will be the case) has a very good title to her future Obedience. He has a right to be made easy every other way, and I will not impose on your Generosity, which claims the sincerest proceeding on my side. I am as sensible as you your selfe can be of the generosity of your proposal. Perhaps there is no other man that would take a woman under these disadvantages, and I am gratefull to you with all the warmth gratitude can inspire. On the other side, consider a little whither there are manny other Women that would think as I do. The Man my familly would marry me to, is resolv'd to live in London. Tis my own fault if I do not (of the humour he is) make him allways think whatever I please. If he dies, I shall have £1,200 per Annum rent charge; if he lives I shall enjoy every pleasure of Life, those of Love excepted. With you, I quit all things but your selfe, as much as if we were to be plac'd alone together in an inaccessible Island, and I hazard a possibillity of being reduce'd to suffer all the Evils of poverty. Tis true I had rather give my hand to the Flames than to him, and cannot think of suffering him with common patience. To you — I could give it, without reluctance (it is to say more than I ought) but perhaps with pleasure.

This last consideration determines me. — I will venture all things for you. For

our mutual good, tis necessary for us to consider the method the most likely to hinder either of us from repenting; on that point our whole repose seems to depend. If we retire into the country, both your fortune and Inclination require a degree of privacy. The greatest part of my Familly (as the greatest part of all famillys) are fools; they know no happynesse but Equipage and furniture, and they Judge of every body's by the proportion they enjoy of it. They will talk of me as one that has ruin'd her selfe, and there will be perpetual enquirys made of my manner of living. I do not speak this in regard of my selfe; I have allways had a hearty contempt of those things, but on these and some other considerations I don't see why you should not persue the plan that you say you begun with your Freind. I don't mean take him with you, but why may not I supply his place? At Naples we may live after our own fashion. For my part, as I design utterly to forget there is such a place as London, I shall leave no directions with nobody to write after me. People that enter upon a solitude are in the wrong if they do not make it as agreable as they can. A fine Country and beautifull prospects to people that are capable of tasting them are (at least) steps to promoteing happynesse. If I liv'd with you, I should be sorry not to see you perfectly happy. I foresee the Objection you will raise against this, but it is none. I have no Acquaintance, nor I will make none, and tis your own fault if I ever see any creature but your selfe. Your commands shall regulate that. If you please, I can take with me a Lady you have heard me speak of, whom I am sure will follow me over all the world if I please, and I don't care if I never see any body else but her and you. If you agree to this, there is but one point farther to be consider'd, whether you can make me any Assurance of a provision if I should be so unhappy to lose you. You may think this an odd thing for me to name, when I bring you no fortune. My Brother would keep me, but there is something very severe to submit to a dependance of that Nature, not to mention a possibillity of his Death, and then, what am I to expect from the guardians of his son? I am sure I have nothing to expect from my F[ather]. By Assurance I only mean your word, which I dare entirely depend on.

I know no faults that you are ignorant of; on the contrary, I beleive you forgive more than you have occassion to forgive. I do not however look upon you as so far engag'd that you cannot retreat. You are at Liberty to raise what objections you please. I will answer them, or freely confesse any that are unanswerable. I make no reply to the accusation of haveing no value for you; I think it needs none when I proffer to leave the whole World for you. I say nothing of pin money etc. I don't understand the meaning of any divided interest from a Man I willingly give my selfe to. You speak of my F[ather] as if 'twere in my power to marry you with his consent. I know it is not. All is concluded with this other, and he will not put it off. If you are not of my Opinion (which however I am sure is right) you may do what you please in it, without nameing me, which will only serve to expose me to a great deal of ill usage, and force me to what he will.

Adeiu. I say nothing of time and place because I know not whither you will agree to what I speak of. We have now time enough, and I think we are in the wrong if we

do not settle every thing before we meet. I will not [last page missing]

Wortley to Mary, August 7, 1712

I had no sooner sent away an answer to your long letter but I accus'd my selfe of too much dissimulation in not having told you what effect it had upon me.

I can now no longer forbear laying my heart quite open and telling you the Joy I am in for being so near the greatest happiness I am capable of enjoying. Your letter of 3 sheets, which woud have pleasd me more than the rest for being the longest had it only bin of the same kind with them, has transported me by removing those doubts which I resolve shall never rise up again. I now, with the utmost pleasure, own you have convinc'd me of an esteem. The firm resolutions you have taken of putting yourselfe in my power and being pleas'd with any retirement in my company, I acknowledge to be such proofs of kindness as not many women of your condition woud have given . . . without some degree of Passion. These assurances, which might have bin acceptable from any woman of merit, are given me by her I have, ever since I knew her, believ'd to possess more charms than any other upon earth.

[Passage omitted]

You tell me of your Gratitude. Be assur'd I will always express mine in the best manner I am able. The greatest part of my life shall be dedicated to you. From every thing that can lessen my Passion I will fly with as much speed as I shoud from the Plague. I shall sooner choose to see my heart torn from my breast than divided from you. You have often spoke as if I were about to save you from ruin. I am now to ask relief of you. Since you have given me these assurances of kindness it is with impatience I want to know when we must begin to live together. I beg you will not recant any part of what you writ. It will now fall heavy upon me to be dismiss'd and I can hope for no ease but from You.

But I am indispos'd or I had said much more. The perplexity I was in for want of knowing what to do has made for some nights past my slumbers very short and [a] good part of last night, which I was under apprehensions of being so long without you. I now declare to you that I am already, if you please, marri'd to You. If you will condescend to say something like it, such a declaration on both sides I believe is as good a marriage as if it were by a minister, and I shall have this advantage if you make it, that you will go before one very soon and with a great deal of ease when you think you are doing but what you have already done, and is of no use but to satisfy others. I have more than once before bin indispos'd in the same manner and therefore am in no fear of not being well in a few months especially if I have your kindness, which I believe will be the best cordial to me. If this or any other illness carries me off I will, if I am able, take care you shall not fancy your fortune has bin diminish'd for my sake.

The gaining you in such a manner seems now to be the greatest good Fortune. Each of us has now reason to believe the other is sincere in promising an inviolable friendship and a lasting Affection. You will say perhaps these professions are not always made good, but when they are not, it is owing to the folly of one, if not both, of the parties that engage.

As you have more spirit I believe you are more generous than other women, otherwise I shoud not have trusted you with all this, for I know a warm letter is generally rewarded with a cool answer. Unless you think you can oblige me yet more than you did in that long letter, which I coud not help kissing very often, say nothing for fear I shoud not think you say enough. Name the hour and the place; Friday or Saturday if you please.

Mary to Wortley, August 16, 1712

Satterday Morning

I writ you a Letter last night in some passion. I begin to fear again; I own my selfe a coward.—

You made no reply to one part of my Letter concerning my Fortune. I am afraid you flatter your selfe that my F[ather] may be at length reconcile'd and brought to reasonable terms. I am convince'd by what I have often heard him say, speaking of other cases like this, he never will. The fortune he has engag'd to give with me was settle'd, on my B[rother's] marriage, on my sister and my selfe, but in such a manner that it was left in his power to give it all to either of us, or divide it as he thought fit. He has given it all to me. Nothing remains for my sister but the free bounty of my F[ather] from what he can save, which notwithstanding the greatnesse of his Estate may be very little. Possibly after I have disoblig'd him so much, he may be glad to have her so easily provided for, with Money allready rais'd, especially if he has a design to marry him selfe, as I hear.

I do not speak this that you should not endeavor to come to terms with him, if you please, but I am fully perswaded it will be to no purpose. He will have a very good Answer to make, that I suffer'd this Match to proceed, that I made him make a very silly figure in it, that I have let him spend £400 in wedding cloaths, all which I saw without saying any thing. When I first pretended to oppose this Match, he told me he was sure I had some other design in my head. I deny'd it with truth, but you see how little appearance there is of that Truth. He proceeded with telling me that he never would enter into treaty with another Man, etc., and that I should be sent immediately into the North, to stay there, and when he dy'd he would only leave me an Annuity of £400.

I had not courrage to stand this Vein, and I submitted to what he pleas'd. He will now object against me, why, since I intended to marry in this Manner, I did not

persist in my first resolution? that it would have been as easy for me to run away from T[horesby] as from hence, and to what purpose did I put him and the Gentleman I was to marry to Expence etc.? He will have a thousand plausible reasons for being irreconcilable, and tis very probable the World will be of his Side.—Reffiect now for the last time in what manner you must take me. I shall come to you with only a Nightgown[27] and petticoat, and that is all you will get with me.

I have told a Lady of my Freinds what I intend to do. You will think her a very good Freind when I tell you she has proffer'd to lend us her house, if we would come there the first Night. I did not accept of this, till I had let you know it. If you think it more convenient to carry me to your Lodging, make no scrupule of it. Let it be what it will; if I am your Wife, I shall think no place unfit for me where you are. I beg we may leave London next morning, where ever you intend to go. I should wish to go out of England if it suits with your Affairs. You are the best Judge of your father's temper. If you think it would be obliging to him, or necessary for you, I will go with you immediately to ask his pardon and his blessing. If that is not proper at first, ⟨I *angle* think the best Scheme is going to the Spaw. When you come back you may endeavor to Make your Father admit of seeing me, and treat with mine (tho' I persist in thinking it will be to no purpose). But I cannot think of living in the midst of my Relations and Acquaintance after so unjustifiable a step—unjustifiable to the World. — But I think I can justify my selfe to my selfe. —

I again beg you to hire a Coach to be at the door early Monday morning to carry us some part of our way, wherever you resolve our Journey shall be. If you determine to go to that Lady's house, you had better come with a coach and 6 at 7 a clock to morrow. She and I will be in the balconey that looks on the road; you have nothing to do but to stop under it, and we will come down to you. Do in this what you like best. After all, think very seriously. Your ⟨letter *angle*, which will be waited for, is to determine every thing. I forgive you a coarse Expression in your last, which however I wish had not been there. You might have said something like it without expressing it in that Manner, but there was so much complaisance in the rest of it, I ought to be satisfy'd. You can shew me no goodnesse I shall not be sensible of. However, think again, and resolve never to think of me if you have the least doubt, or that it is likely to make you uneasy in your Fortune. I beleive to travell is the most likely way to make a Solitude agreable, and not tiresome. Remember you have promis'd it.

Tis something Odd for a Woman that brings nothing to expect any thing, but after the way of my Education I dare not pretend to live but in some degree suitable to [it]. I had rather die than return to a dependancy upon Relations I have disoblig'd. Save me from that fear if you Love me. If you cannot, or think I ought not to expect it, be sincere and tell me so. Tis better I should not be yours at all, than for a short happynesse involve my selfe in Ages of Misery. I hope there will never be Occassion for this precaution but however tis necessary to make it. I depend entirely on your

[27]This meant an evening gown, not bedwear.

honnour, and I cannot suspect you of any way doing wrong. Do not imagine I shall be angry at any thing you can tell me. Let it be sincere. Do not impose on a Woman that leaves all things for you.

Mary to Wortley, October 22, 1712 (first letter after marriage)

Walling Wells,1 Oct. 22, which is the first post I could write, Monday Night being so fateigu'd and sick I went strait to Bed from the Coach.

I don't know very well how to begin; I am perfectly unacquainted with a proper matrimonial stile. After all, I think tis best to write as if we were not marry'd at all. I Lament your Absence as if you was still my Lover, and I am impatient to hear you are got safe to Durham and that you have fix'd a time for your return.

I have not been very long in this Familly, and I fancy my selfe in that describ'd in the Spectator. The good people here look upon their children with a fondnesse that more than recompences their care of them. I don't perceive much distinction in regard to their merits, and when they speak sense or nonsense it affects the parents with allmost the same pleasure. My freindship for the Mother and kindnesse for Mis Biddy makes me endure the Squalling of Mis Nanny and Mis Mary with abundance of patience, and my fore-telling the future conquests of the Eldest Daughter makes me very well with the Familly.—

I don't know whether you will presently find out that this seeming Impertinent Account is the tenderest expressions of my Love to you, but it furnishes my Imagination with agreable pictures of our future Life, and I flatter my selfe with the hope of one day enjoying with you the same satisfactions, and that after as many Years together I may see you retain the same fondnesse for me as I shall certainly mine for you; and the noise of a Nursery may have more charms for us than the Music of an Opera. ??? as these are the sure Effect of my Sincere Love, since tis the Nature of that passion to entertain the Mind with pleasures in prospect, and I check my selfe when I greive for your Absence by remembering how much reason I have to rejoyce in the hope of passing my whole Life with you, a good fortune not to be valu'd.—I am afraid of telling you that I return thanks for it to Heaven, because you will charge me with Hipocricy, but you are mistaken. I assist every day at public prayers in this familly, and never forget in my private Ejaculations how much I owe to Heaven for makeing me Yours.

Tis candle light, or I should not conclude so soon.

Pray, my dear, begin at the top and read till you come to the bottom.

William Byrd II and Lucy Parke

William Byrd II (1674-1744) and Lucy Parke (1688-1715). Married 1706.

William Byrd II, 1724
Painting by Hans Hysing
Virginia Historical Society

Lucy Parke, 1716
Unknown painter.
Virginia Museum of History & Culture.

William Byrd II was a planter in colonial Virginia, and the founder of Richmond, Virginia. He lived for ten years in London, studying law, and became a member of the Royal Society. He was an early advocate of inoculation against smallpox. He kept a detailed diary, extremely frank both about sex and about the brutalities of slavery.

Lucy Parke was a beautiful and rich young woman of 18. Her father, Daniel Parke II was governor of the Leeward Islands.

Below is a letter from Byrd to the father, proposing himself as a suitor, and a love letter from Byrd to Lucy. The florid pseudonyms he uses — Veramour (true lover) for himself, Fidelia (faithful) for Lucy — are typical of his style.

The Byrds had a difficult and quarrelsome marriage. Lucy died of smallpox in 1715.

Letter to Daniel Parke

Since my arrival in this Country I have had the hour to be acquainted with your Daughters, and was infinitely surpriz'd to find young Ladys with their accomplishments in Virginia. This surprise was soon improv'd into a Passion for the youngest

for who I have all the respect and tenderness in the world. However I think it my duty to intreat your approbation before I proceed to give her the last testimony of my affection. And the Young Lady her self whatever she may determine by your consent will agree to nothing without it. If you can entertain a favorable opinion of my person, I dont question but my fortune may be sufficient to make her happy, especially after it has been assisted by your Bounty. If you shall vouchsafe to approve of this undertakeing I shall indeavor to recommend my self by all the dutifull Regards to your Excellency and all the marks of kindness to your Daughter. Nobody knows better than your self how impatient Lovers are, and for that reason I hope youll be as speedy as possible in your determination whihc I passionately beg may be in favour of

Yours &c.

Love letter from William Byrd II to Lucy Parke

May angels guard my dearest Fidelia and deliver her safe to my arms at our next meeting and sure they wont refuse their protection to a creature so pure and charming that it would be easy for them to mistake her for one of themselves. If you could but believe how entirely you possess the empire of my heart, you would easily credit me, when I tell you, that I can neither think nor so much as dream of any subject than the enchanting Fidelia. You will do me wrong if you suspect that there was ever a man created that loved with more tenderness and sincerity than I do, and I should do you wrong if I could imagine that there ever was a nymph that deserved it better than you. Take this for granted, and then imagine how uneasy I am like to be under the unhappiness of your absence. Figure to yourself what tumults there will arise in my blood, what a fluttering of the spirit, what a disorder of the pulse, what passionate wishes, what absence of thought, and what crowding of sighs,and then imagine how unfit I shall be for business; but returning to the dear cause of my uneasiness: O the torture of six months' expectation! If it must be so long and necessity will till then interpose betwixt you and my inclinations, I must submit, though it be as unwillingly as pride submits to superior virtue or envy to superior success. Pray think of me, and believe that Veramour is entirely and eternally yours. Adieu. I beg you write as soon as you receive this, and commit your letter to the same trusty hand that brings you this.

Another Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover 1739-1741 With Letters and Literary Exercises 1696-1726. ed. Maud H. Woodfin. Translated and collated by Marion Tinling. Richmond, Va.:The Dietz Press. 1942. pp. 241-215, 223.

"The Proposal"
By Alfred W. Elmore

Anne Murray Halkett

Anne Murray (1622-1699).
A proposal from Thomas Howard (1619-1706) was declined (1644).
A proposal from Colonel Joseph Bamfield (?-1685) was accepted but they were never married.
A proposal from Sir James Halkett (1610-1670) was accepted. Married 1656.

> Anne Murray was born in 1622. Her father had a position at court. In her old age she published some religious writings to which she prefixed a short account of her life.
>
> In 1644, Thomas Howard (1619-1706), the brother of a close friend of Anne's, secretly courted and proposed to her. She declined the proposal but he persisted. After a little while his father, who disapproved the match, sent him away to France. He ended up marrying a richer woman and becoming Thomas Howard, 3rd Earl of Berkshire.
>
> During the English Civil War, she became closely involved with Colonel Bamfield (or Bampfield), a strong partisan on the Royalist side. Anne was involved in the escape of James II (then the Duke of York) from imprisonment at St. James Palace. It was reported that the Colonel's wife was dead, and he proposed to Anne. She accepted the proposal, but the marriage was postponed because of the chaos of the war. In 1650, she travelled to Scotland, to live with Royalist nobility there.
>
> In 1652, definitive news arrived that Colonel Bamfield's wife was alive. Immediately, Sir James Halkett (1610-1670), a knight on the Royalist side who knew her well, proposed. He had, in fact, made his romantic intentions clear earlier, but she had told him decisively that she was engaged to Bamfield. Anne initially rejected his proposal, but afterward continued close to him, and eventually accepted him. They were married in 1656.

Proposal from Thomas Howard, 1644

In the yeare 1644 I confese I was guilty of an act of disobedience, for I gave way to ye adrese of a person whom my mother, att the first time that ever hee had occation to bee conversantt with mee, had absolutely discharged mee ever to allow of: And though before ever I saw him severalls did tell mee that there would bee something more than ordinary betwixt him and mee (which I believe they fudged [typo for judged?] from the great friendship betwixt his sister and mee, for wee were seldome assunder att London, and shee and I were bedfellows when shee came to my sister's house att Charleton, where for ye most part shee staid while wee continued in the country,) yett he was halfe a yeare in my company before I discovered anything of a particular inclination for mee more than another; and, as I was civill to him both for his owne

merit and his sister sake, so any particular civility I received from him I looked upon it as flowing from the affection hee had to his sister,and her kindness to mee.After that time, itt seemes hee was nott so much master of himselfe as to conceale itt any longer. And having never any opertunity of being alone with mee to speake himselfe, hee imployed a young gentleman (whose confidentt he was in an amour betwixt him and my Lady Anne his cousin-german,) to tell mee how much hee had indeavored all this time to smother his passion, which he said began the first time that ever hee saw mee, and now was come to that height that if I did nott give him some hopes of faver he was resolved to goe back againe into France (from whence he had come when I first saw him) and turn Capucin. Though this discourse disturbed mee, yett I was a weeke or ten days before I would be persuaded so much as to heare him speake of this subject, and desired his friend to representt severall disadvantages that itt would bee to him to pursue such a designe. And, knowing that his father had sentt for him outt of France with an intention to marry him to sum rich match that might improve his fortune, itt would be high ingratitude in mee to doe anything to hinder such a designe, since his father had beene so obliging to my mother and sister as to use his Lordship's interest with ye Parliamentt to preventt the ruine of my brother's howse and k[in?]; butt when all I could say to him by his friend could not prevaile, butt that hee grewe so ill and discontented that all the howse tooke notice, I did yield so farre to comply with his desire as to give him liberty one day when I was walking in ye gallery to come there and speake to mee. What he saide was handsome and short, butt much disordered, for hee looked pale as death, and his hande trembled when he tooke mine to lead mee, and with a great sigh said, "If I loved you lese I could say more." I told him I could nott butt thinke myselfe much obleeged to him for his good opinion of mee, butt itt would be a higher obligation to confirme his esteeme of mee by following my advice, which I should now give him myselfe, since hee would not receave itt by his friend. I used many arguements to diswade him from pursuing what hee proposed. And, in conclusion, told him I was 2 or 3 yeare older than hee, and were there no other objection, yett that was of such weight with mee as would never lett mee allow his further adrese. "Madam, (said he,) what I love in you may well increase, butt I am sure itt can never decay." I left arguing, and told him I would advise him to consult with his owne reason, and that would lett him see I had more respect to him in denying than in granting what with so much passion he desired.

After that hee sought, and I shunned, all opertunittys of private discourse with him; butt one day,in ye garden, his friend tooke his sister by the hand and lead her into another walke, and left him and I together: and hee, with very much seriousnese, began to tell mee that hee had observed ever since hee had discovered his affection to mee that I was more reserved and avoided all converse with him, and therefore, since hee had no hopes of my faver, hee was resolved to leave England, since he could not bee hapy in itt. And that whatever became of him that might make him displease either his father or his friends I was the occation of it, for if I would not give him hopes of marying him hee was resolved to putt himselfe outt of a capacity of marying

any other, and go imediately into a conventt. And that he had taken order to have post horses ready against the next day. I confese this discourse disturbed mee, for though I had had noe respect for him, his sister, or his family, yett religion was a tye upon mee to endeaver the prevention of the hazard of his soule. I looked on this as a violent passion which would nott last long, and perhaps might grow the more by beeing resisted, when as a seeming complaisance might lessen itt. I told him I was sory to have him intertaine such thoughts as could nott butt bee a ruine to him and a great affliction to all his relations, which I would willingly preventt if itt were in my power. He said itt was absolutely in my power, for if I would promise to marry him hee should esteeme himselfe the most hapy man living, and hee would waite whatever time I thought most convenientt for itt. I replied I thought it was unreasonable to urge mee to promise that which ere long hee might repentt the asking; butt this I would promise to sattisfy him, that I would not marry till I saw him first maried. Hee kist my hand upon that with as much joy as if I had confirmed to him his greatest hapinese, and said hee could desire noe more, for hee was secure I should never seen or heare of that till itt was to myselfe.

Upon this wee parted both well pleased, for hee thought hee had gained much in what I promised, and I looked upon my promise as a cure to him, butt noe inconvenience to myself, since I had noe inclination to marry any. And though I had, a delay in itt was the least returne I could make to soe deserving a person. Butt I deceaved myselfe by thinking this was the way to moderate his passion, for now hee gave way to itt without any restraintt, and thought himselfe soe secure of mee as if there had beene nothing to opose itt, though hee managed itt with that discretion that it was scarce visible to any within the howse; nott so much as either his sister or mine had the least suspittion of it, for I had injoyned him not to lett them or any other know what his designes were, because I would not have them accesory, whatever fault might bee in the prosecution of itt.

Thus it continued till towards winter that his sister was to goe home to her father againe, and then, knowing hee would want much of the opertunity hee had to converse with mee, hee was then very importunate to have mee consent to marry him privately, which itt seemes hee pleased himselfe so with the hopes of prevailing with me that he had provided a wedding ring and a minister to marry us. I was much unsattisfied with his going that lengh, and, in short, told him hee need never expect I would marry him without his father and my mother's consent; if that could be obtained, I should willingly give him the sattisfaction hee desired, butt withoutt that I could not expect God's blesing neither upon him nor mee, and I would doe nothing that was so certaine a way to bring ruine upon us both. Hee used many arguments from the examples of others who had practised the same, and was hapy both in their parents' faver and in one another, butt, finding mee fixt beyond any persuasion, hee resolved to acquaintt my sister with itt, and to imploy her to speake of itt to his father and my mother. Shee very unwillingly undertooke it, because shee knew itt would be a surprise to them, and very unwellcome. Butt his impertunity prevailed, and shee first

acquainted my mother withitt; who was so pasionately offended with the proposall that,wheras his father might have beene brought to have given his consentt (having ever had a good opinion of mee and very civill), shee did so exasperate him against itt, that nothing could sattisfy her but presently to putt itt to Mr.H.'s choice either presently to marry a rich cittisen's daughter that his father hadde signed for him, or els to leave England.

Proposal from Colonel Bamfield

To bee short, affter a litle time hee one day, when I was alone with him, began to tell mee that now hee was a free man hee would say that to mee what I should have never knowne while hee lived if itt had beene otherways, which was, that hee had a great respect and honour for mee since the first time hee knew mee, butt had resolved itt should die with him if hee had not beene in a condittion to declare itt withoutt doing mee prejudice, for hee hoped if hee could gaine an interest in my affection itt would nott apeare so unreasonable to marry him as others might representt itt, for if itt pleased God to restore the King, of which hee was nott yett outt of hopes, hee had a promise of beeing one of his Majesties bedchamber; and, though that should faile, yett what hee and I had together would be about eight hundred pound sterling a yeare, which, with the Lord's blesing, might be a competency to any contentmentt minds. Hee so offten insisted on this when I had occation to be with him that att last hee prevailed with mee, and I did consentt to his proposal, and resolved to marry him as soone as itt apeared convenientt; butt wee delayed it till wee saw how itt pleased God to determine of the King's affaires.

Proposal from Sir James Halkett

Att last, one day when hee had beene some time with mee speaking of many variety of subjects, when I least expected itt, hee told mee hee could noe longer conceale the affection hee had for mee since the first visitt hee ever had made mee, and had resolved never to mention itt had my condittion beene the same itt was; butt now looking upon mee as free from all obligation to another, hee hoped hee might now pretend to the more faver, having formerly preferred my sattisfaction above his owne. I was much troubled att this discourse ,which hee could nott butt observe; for ye teares came in my eyes. I told him I was sencible that the civillity I had receaved from him were nott of an ordinary way of friendship, and that there was nothing in my power that I would nott doe to exprese my gratitude; butt if hee knew what disturbance any discourse like that gave mee hee would never mention itt againe, for as I never propose anything of hapinese to myselfe in this world, so I will never make another unhapy, and in this denyall I intend to evidence my respect to you much more then if I intertained your proposall, and therfore I intreatt you, if you love

either yourselfe or mee, lett mee never heare more of itt. Butt (said hee,) I hope you will nott debarre my conversing with you. Noe, (replied I,) I will nott bee so much my owne enemy, and upon the condittion you will forbeare ever to speake againe of what you now mentioned noe person shall bee wellcomer to mee, nor any will I bee willinger to serve whenever I have opertunity." Hee said itt should bee against his will to do eanything to displease mee, butt hee would make noe promises.

[Some months later]

After this money was receaved and paid where itt was most nesesary, and that I had sattisfied all that I knew anything was due to, I wentt to London for some few days, where Sir James came to mee in order to conclude our mariage, which I could nott now in reason longer deferre, since the greatest objections I had made against itt was removed, and that I was fully convinced noe man living could doe more to deserve a wife then hee had done to obleige mee; and therfore I intended to give him myselfe, though I could secure him of nothing more, and that was my regrett that I could nott bring him a fortune as great as his affection to recompence his long expectation.

Itt was nott withoutt many debates with myselfe that I came att last to bee determined to marry, and the most prevalentt argument that perswaded mee to incline to itt was the extreordinary way that Sir James tooke even in silence to speake what hee thought nesesary to conceale till itt apeared to bee fitt for avowing, and then nott to bee discouraged from all the inconveniences that threatned his pursuit was what I could nott butt looke upon as ordered by the wise and good providence of the Allmighty, whom to resist or nott make use of so good an opertunity as by his mercy was offred to mee I thought might bee offencive to his devine Majesty, who in justice might deliver mee up to the power of such sins as might bee a punishmentt for nott making use of the offer of grace to preventt them. And this consideration beeing added to Sir Jameses worth ended the contraversy. However, lest I might have beene mistaking, or Mr. D. Dickson in his opinion, who thought itt lawfull for mee to marry, I entred nott into that state withoutt most solemne seeking the determined will of God, which by fasting and prayer I suplicated to be evidenced to mee, either by hedging up my way with thornes that I might nott offend him, or that hee would make my way plaine before his face, and my paths righteous in his sight. And as I beged this with the fervor of my soule, so itt was with an intire resignation and resolution to bee contentt with whatever way the Lord should dispose of mee. To this I may add St Paul's attestation, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blesed forevermore, knoweth that I lie nott." (2 Cor. xi.31.)Affter this day's devotion was over, everything that I could desire in order to my mariage did so pleasingly concurre to the consumation of itt, and my owne mind was so undisturbed and so freed of all kind of doupts, that with thankefullnese I receaved itt as a testimony of the Lord's aprobation, and a presage of my future hapinese; and, blesed bee his name! I was nott disapointed of my hope.

The Autobiography of Anne Lady Halkett. ed. John Gough Nichols.

Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick

Mary Rich (1625-1678).
Proposal from Mr. Hambletone. Rejected.
Proposal from Charles Rich, later 4th Earl of Warwick (1623-1673) accepted. Married 1641.

Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick

Mary Rich was born in Youghal, County Cork. Rich is well known for her great love of literature and the diaries she kept from 1666 to 1677, which included many of the current events in seventeenth-century Ireland as well as her own domestic issues.

When she was thirteen or fourteen she received a marriage proposal (for when she was of age) from a Mr. Hambletone. Her father pressured her strongly to accept it; however, she disliked Hambletone and rejected him.

When she was sixteen she received a proposal, in secret, from Charles Rich which she accepted. Her father, when he found out about it was opposed strongly, because Rich was a second son and would be poor. However, as Mary insisted, her father soon gave his consent and a dowry of seven thousand pounds, so they were married. Eventually Rich's older brother died so he became Earl of Warwick.

I have replaced part of the account of this courtship with a short synopsis below.

Proposal from Mr. Hambletone: rejected

[W]hen I was about thirteen or fourteen years of age, [there] came down to me one Mr. Hambletone, son to my Lord Clandeboyes, who was afterwards Earl of Clanbrasell, and would fain have had me for his wife. My father and his had, some years before, concluded a match between us, if we liked when we saw one another, and that I was of years of concent; and now he being returned out of France, was by his father's command to come to my father's, where he received from his a very kind and obliging welcome, looking upon him as his son-in-law, and designing suddenly that we should be married, and gave him leave to make his address, with a command to me to receive him as one designed to be my husband. Mr. Hambletone (possibly to obey his father) did design gaining me by a very handsome address, which he made to me, and if he did not to a very high degree dissemble, I was not displeasing to him, for he professed a great passion for me. The professions he made me of his kindness were very unacceptable to me, and though I had by him very advantageous offers made me, for point of fortune (for his estate, that was settled upon him was counted seven or eight thousand pounds a-year), yet by all his kindness to me nor that I could be brought to endure to think of having him, though my father pressed me extremely to it; my aversion for him was extraordinary, though I could give my father no satisfactory account why it was so.

This continued between us for a long time, my father shewing a very high displeasure at me for it, but though I was in much trouble about it, yet I could never be brought either by fair or foul means to it; so as my father was at last forced to break it off, to my father's unspeakable trouble, and to my unspeakable satisfaction, for hardly in any of the troubles of my life did I feel a more sensible uneasiness than when that business was transacting. Afterwards I apparently saw a good providence of God in not letting me close with it, he was, by the rebellion in Ireland, impoverished so that he lost for a great while his whole estate, the rebels being in possession of it; which I should have liked very ill, for if I had married him it must have been for his estate's sake, not his own, his person being highly disagreeable to me.

Proposal from Charles Rich, later Earl of Warwick, accepted

[A]mongst others there came one Mr. Charles Rich, second son to Robert Earl of Warwicke, who was a very cheerful, and handsome, well-bred, and fashioned person, and being good company was very acceptable to us all, and so became very intimate in our house, visiting us almost every day. [Somewhat later, he] began to think of making an address to me, [my sister Boyle] promising him all the assistance her power with me could give him to gain my affection, though she knew by attempting it she should lose my father's and all my family, that she believed would never be brought to concent to my having any younger brother; my father's kindness making him, as

she well knew, resolved to match me to a great fortune. At last, one day she began to acquaint me with Mr. Rich's, as she said, great passion for me; at which I was at first much surprised, both at his having it for me, and at her telling it to me, knowing how much she hazarded by it, if I should acquaint my father with it. I confess I did not find his declaration of his kindness disagreeable to me, but the consideration of his being but a younger brother made me sadly apprehent my father's displeasure if I should embrace any such offer, and so resolved, at that time, to give her no answer, but seemed to disbelieve his loving me at the rate she informed me he did, though I had for some time taken notice of his loving me, thought I never thought he designed trying to gain me.

After this first declaration of his esteem for me by my sister, he became a most diligent gallant to me, seeking by a most humble and respectful address to gain my heart, applying himself, when there was no other beholders in the room but my sister, to me; but if any other person came in he took no more than ordinary notice of me; but to disguise his design addressed himself much to her; and though his doing so was not well liked in our family, yet there was nothing said to him about their dislike of it; and by this way his design became unsuspected, and thus we lived for some months, in which time, by his more than ordinary humble behavior to me, he did insensibly steal away my heart, and got a greater possession of it than I knew he had. My sister, when he was forced to be absent for fear of observing eyes would so plead for him that it worked, too, very much upon me. When I began to find, myself, that my kindness for him grew and increased so much, that though I had in the time of his private address to me, many great and advantageous offers made me by my father, and that I could not with any patience endure to hear of any of them, I began with some seriousness to consider what I was engaging myself in by my kindness for Mr. Rich, for my father, I knew, would never indure me, and besides I considered my mind was too high, and I was too expensively brought up to bring myself to live contentedly with Mr. Rich's fortune, who wuld never have, when his father was dead, above thirteen or fourteen (at the most) hundred pounds a-year. Upon these considerations I was convinced that it was time for me to give him a flat and final denial; and with this, as I thought, fixed resolution, I have laid me down in my bed to beg my sister never to name him to me more for a husband, and to tell him, from me, that I desired him never more to think of me, for I was resolved not to anger my father; but when I was upon a readiness to open my mouth to utter these words, my great kindness for him stopped it, and made me rise always without doing it, though I frequently resolved it; which convinced to me the great and full possession he had of my heart, which made me begin to give him more hopes of gaining me than before I had done, by any thing but my inducing him to come to me after he had declared to me his design in doing so, which he well knew I would never endure from any other person that had offered themselves to me.

Thus we lived for some considerable time, my duty and my reason having frequent combats within me with my passion, which at last was always victorious, though my

fear of my father's displeasure frighted me from directly owning it to Mr. Rich; till my sister Boyle's taking sick of the measles (and by my lying with when she had them, though I thought at first it might be the small-pox, I got them of her) my kindness being then so great for her, that though of all diseases the small-pox was that I most apprehended, yet from her I did not any thing, and would have continued with her all her illness, had I not by my father's absolute command been separated into another room from her; but it was too late, for I had got from her the infection, and presently fell most dangerously ill of the measles too, and before they came out I was removed into another house, because my sister Dungarvan, in whose house I was, in Long Acre, was expecting daily to be delivered, and was apprehensive of that distembper. Mr. Rich then was much concerned for me, and his being so made him make frequent visits to me, though my sister Boyle was absent from me, and he was most obligingly careful of me; which as it did to a great degree heighten my passion for him, so did it also begin to make my family, and before suspecting friends, to see that they were by a false disguise of his kindness to my sister abused and that he had for me, and I for him a respect which they feared was too far gone.

This made my old Lady Staford, mother to my sister Boyle (who was a cunning old woman, and who had been herself too much and too long versed in amours) begin to conclude the truth, and absolutely to believe that her dauhter was the great actor in this business, and that her being confident with us, would ruin her with my father; and therefore having some power over him, to prevent the inconveniences that would come to her daughter, resolved to acquaint my father with Mr. Rich's visiting me when I had the measles, and of his continuing to do so at the Savoy — whither I was, after my recovery, by my father's order, removed, and where by reason of my being newly recovered of an infectious disease, I was free from any visits. After she had with great rage chid her daughter, and threatened her that she would acquaint my father with it (to keep me, as she said, from ruining myself) she accordingly, in a great heat and do it. My sister presently acquainted both Mr. Rich and me with her mother's resolution, and when she had Mr. Rich alone, told him if he did not that very night prevail with me to declare my kindness for him, and to give him some assuerance of my resolution to have him, I would certainly the next day by my father be secured from his ever speaking to me, and so he would quite lose me. This discourse did make him resolve to do what she counselled him to; and that very night, when I was ill and laid on my bed, she giving him an opportuning of being alone with me, and by her care keeping any body from disturbing us; he had with me about two hours discourse, upon his knees, by my bed-side, wherein he did so handsomely express his passion (he was pleased to say he had for me), and his fear of being by my father's command separated from me, that together with as many promises as any person in the world could make, of his endeavoring to make up to me the smallness of his fortune by the kindness he would have still to me, if I consented to be his wife; that though I can truly say that when he kneeled down by me I swas far from having resolved to own I would have him, yet his discourse so prevailed that I consented to give him, as he

desired, leave to let his father mention it to mine; and promied him that, let him make his father say what he please, I would own it.

Thus we parted, this evening, after I had given away myself to him, and if I had not done so that night, I had been, by my father's separating us, kept from doing it, at least for a long time. ...

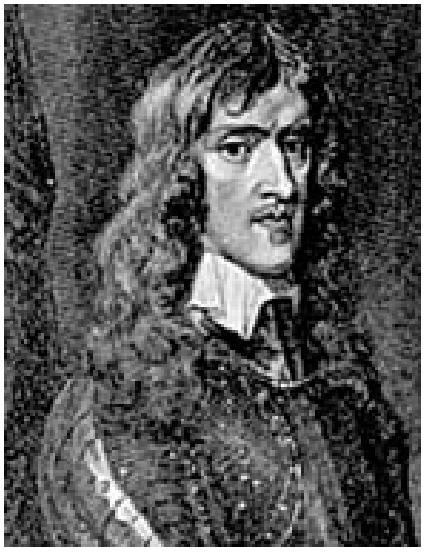
> [Mary Rich's father forbade her the next day to have any visits from young men. Warwick's father visited hers, urging him to favor the suit. Her father sent her brothers to urge her against it and to get her answer]

I made this resolute, but ill and horribly disobedient answer, that I did acknowledge a very great and particular kindness for Mr. Rich, and desired them, with my humble duty to my father, to assuer him that I would not marry him without his consent, but that I was resolved not to marry any other person in the world; and that I hoped my father would be please to consent to my having Mr. Rich, to whom, I was sure, he could have no other objection, but that he was a younger brother; for he was descended from a very great and honorable family, and was in the opinion of all (as well as mine)a very deserving person, and I desired my father would be pleased to consider, I only should suffer by the smallness of his fortune, which I very contentedly chose to do, and should judge myself to be much more happy with his small one, than with the greatest without him.

Autobiography of Mary, Countess of Warwick, ed. T. Crofton Croker, Percy Society, 1848, pp. 2-3, 5-15

Lucy Apsley and Colonel John Hutchinson

Lucy Apsley (1620-1681) and John Hutchinson (1615-1664). Married 1638.



John Hutchinson

Lucy Apsley

Lucy Apsley Hutchinson was a translator and writer. She authored the first complete translation of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura.* She wrote a biography of her husband *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson,* from which the account below is taken.

Colonel John Hutchinson was a Member of Parliament from 1648 to 1653. He fought in the Parliamentary (Roundhead) army in the English Civil war and was a signatory on the death warrant of King Charles I. After the Restoration, he was imprisoned for life, but not executed.

From *Memoirs of the life of colonel Hutchinson, publ. by J. Hutchinson. To which is prefixed The life of mrs. Hutchinson, written by herself* by Lucy Hutchinson

In the same house with him, there was a younger daughter of Sr. Allen Apsley, late lieftenant of the Tower, fabled for the practice of her lute, till the returne of her mother, who was gone into Wiltshire for the accomplishment of a treaty that had bene made some progresse in, about the marriage of her elder daughter, with a gentleman of that country, out of which my lady herself came, and where her brothers Sr. John St. John and Sr. Edward Hungerford, living in greate honor and reputation, had

invited her to a visitt of them. This gentle woman, that was left in the house with Mr. Hutchinson, was a very child, her elder sister being at that time scarcely past it, but a child of such pleasantnesse, and vivacity of spiritt, and ingenuity in the quallity she practis'd, that Mr. Hutchinson tooke pleasure in hearing her practise, and would fall in discourse with her. She having the keyes of her mother's house, some halfe a mile distant, would some times aske Mr. Hutchinson, when she went over to walk along with her: one day when he was there, looking upon an odde by-shelf, in her sister's closett, he found a few Latine bookes; asking whose they were, he was told they were her elder sister's, where upon, enquiring more after her, he began first to be sorrie she was gone, before he had seene her, and gone upon such an account, that he was not likely to see her; then he grew to love to heare mention of her, and the other gentleweomen who had bene her companions, used to talke much to him of her, telling him how reserv'd and studious she was, and other things which they esteem'd no advantage; but it so much inflam'd Mr. Hutchinson's desire of seeing her, that he began to wonder at himselfe, that his heart, which had ever had such an indifferency for the most excellent of woemenkind, should have so strong impulses towards a stranger, he never saw; and certainly it was of the Lord, (though he perceiv'd it not), who had ordein'd him, thro' so many various providences, to be yoak'd with her in whom he found so much satisfaction. There scarcely past any day, but some accident or some discourse still kept alive his desire of seeing this gentlewoman, although the mention of her, for the most part, was enquiries whether she had yett accomplisht the marriage that was in treaty.

One day there was a greate deale of company mett att Mr. Coleman's, the gentle man's house where he tabled, to heare the musick, and a certeine song was sung, which had bene lately sett, and gave occasion to some of the company to mention an answer to it, which was in the house, and upon some of their desires read: a gentleman saying 'twas believ'd that a woman in the neighbourhood had made it, it was presently enquir'd who? whereupon a gentleman, then present, who had made the first song, sayd, there were but two weomen that could be guilty of it, whereof one was a lady then among them, the other Mrs. Apsley. Mr. Hutchinson, fancying something of rationallity in the sonnett, beyond the customary reach of a she-witt, although, to speake truth, it signified very little, addrest himselfe to the gentleman, and told him, he could scarcely believe it was a woman's, whereupon this gentleman, who was a man of good understanding and expression, and inspir'd with some passion for her himselfe, which made him regard all her perfections through a multiplying glasse, told Mr. Hutchinson, that though for civillity to the rest, he entitled another ladie to the song, yet he was confident it was Mrs. Apsley's only, for she had sence above all the rest, and fell into such high prayses of her, as might well have begotten those vehement desires of her acquaintance, which a strange sympathic in nature had before produc'd : another gentleman, that sate by, seconded this commendation, with such additions of prayse, as he would not have given if he had known her.

Mr. Hutchinson hearing all this, sayd to the first gentleman, I cannot be at rest

till this ladie's returne, that I may be acquainted with her; the gentleman replied, "Sir, you must not expect that, for she is of an humour she will not be acquainted with any of mankind, and however this song is stolen forth, she is the nicest creature in the world of suffering her perfections to be knowne, she shuns the converse of men as the plague, she only lives in the enioyment of herself, and has not the humanitie to communicate that happinesse to any of our sex." "Well," sayd Mr. Hutchinson, "but I will be acquainted with her;" and indeed the information of this reserv'd humour, pleas'd him, more then all elce he had heard, and fill'd him now with thoughts, how he should attaine the sight and knowledge of her.

While he was exercis'd in this, many days past not, but a footeboy of my lady her mothers came to young Mrs. Apsley as they were at dinner bringing newes that her mother and sister would in few dayes return; and when they enquir'd of him, whether Mrs. Apsley was married; having before bene instructed to make them believe it, he smiled, and pull'd out some bride laces, which were given at a wedding, in the house where she was, and gave them to the young gentlewoman and the gentleman's daughter of the house, and told them Mrs. Apsley bade him tell no news, but give them those tokens, and carried the matter so, that all the companie believ'd she had been married. Mr. Hutchinson immediately turned pale as ashes, and felt a fainting to seize his spiritts, in that extraordinary manner, that finding himselfe ready to sinke att table, he was faine to pretend something had offended his stomach, and to retire from the table, into the garden, where the gentleman of the house going with him, it was not necessary for him to feigne sicknesse, for the distemper of his mind had infected his body with a cold sweate and such a dispersion of spiritt, that all the courage he could at present recollect was little enough to keep him allive. His host was very troublesome to him, and to be quitt of him he went to his chamber, saying he would lie downe.

Little did any of the company suspect the true cause of his sudden qualme, and they were all soe troubled att it, that the boy then past without further examination. When. Mr. Hutchinson was alone he began to recollect his wisdome and his reason, and to wonder att himselfe, why he should be so concern'd in an unknowne person; he then remember'd the story was told him when he came downe, and began to believe there was some magick in the place, which enchanted men out of their right sences; but it booted him not to be angrie att himselfe, nor to sett wisedome in her reprooving chaire, nor reason in her throne of councell, the sick heart could not be chid nor adviz'd into health; this anxiety of mind affected him so, that it sent him to his bed that afternoone, which indeed he tooke to entertaine his thoughts alone that night, and having fortified himselfe with resolution, he gate up the next day, but yett could not quitt himself of an extra vagant perplexitie of soule, concerning this unknowne gentle woman, which had not bene admirable in another light person, but in him, who was from his childhood so serious and so rationall in all his considerations, it was the effect of a miraculous power of providence, leading him to her that was destin'd to make his future ioy.

While she so ran in his thoughts, meeting the boy againe, he found out, upon a little stricter examination of him, that she was not married, and pleas'd himselfe in the hopes of her speedy returne, when one day, having bene invited by one of the ladies of that neighbourhood, to a noble treatement at Sion Garden, which a courtier, that was her servant, had made for her and whom she would bring, Mr. Hutchinson, Mrs. Apsley, and Mr. Coleman's daughter were of the partie, and having spent the day in severall pleasant divertisements, att evening they were att supper, when a messenger came to tell Mrs. Apsley her mother was come. She would immediately have gone, but Mr. Hutchinson, pretending civillity to conduct her home, made her stay 'till the supper was ended, of which he eate no more, now only longing for that sight, which he had with such perplexity expected. This at length he obteined; but his heart being prepossesst with his owne fancy, was not free to discerne how little there was in her to answer so greate an expectation. She was not ugly, in a carelesse riding-habitt, she had a melancholly negligence both of herselfe and others, as if she neither affected to please others, nor tooke notice of anie thing before her; yet spite of all her indifferency, she was surpriz'd with some unusuall liking in her soule, when she saw this gentleman, who had haire, eies, shape, and countenance enough to begett love in any one at the first, and these sett of with a gracefull and generous mine, which promis'd an extraordinary person; he was at that time, and indeed always very neatly habited, for he wore good and rich clothes, and had variety of them, and had them well suited and every way answerable, in that little thing, shewing both good iudgement and greate generosity, he equally becoming them and they him, which he wore with such unaffectednesse and such neatenesse as doe not often meete in one.

Although he had but an evening sight of her he had so long desir'd, and that at disadvantage enough for her, yett the prevailing sympathie of his soule, made him thinke all his paynes well payd, and this first did whett his desire to a second sight, which he had by accident the next day, and to his ioy found she was wholly disengag'd from that treaty, which he so much fear'd had been accomplisht; he found withall, that though she was modest, she was accostable and willing to entertaine his acquaintance. This soone past into a mutuall friendship betweene them, and though she innocently thought nothing of love, yet was she glad to have acquir'd such a friend, who had wisedome and vertue enough to be trusted with her councells, for she was then much perplext in mind; her mother and friends had a greate desire she should marry, and were displeas'd that she refus'd many offers which they thought advantageous enough; she was obedient, loath to displease them, but more herselfe, in marrying such as she could find no inclination to. The troublesome pretensions of some of the courtiers, had made her willing to trie whether she could bring her heart to her mother's desire, but being by a secret working, which she then understood not, averted, she was troubled to returne, lest some might believe it was a secret liking of them which had caus'd her dislike of others, and being a little disturb'd with these things and melancholly, Mr. Hutchinson, appearing, as he was, a person of vertue and honor, who might be safely and advantageably converst with, she thought

God had sent her a happy reliefe. Mr. Hutchinson, on the other side, having bene told, and seeing how she shun'd all other men, and how civilly she entertain'd him, believ'd that a secret power had wrought a mutuall inclination betweene them, and dayly frequented her mother's house, and had the opertunitie of conversing with her in those pleasant walkes, which, at that sweete season of the spring, invited all the neighbouring inhabitants to secke their ioyes; where, though they were never alone, yet they had every day operlunity for converse with each other, which the rest shar'd not in, while every one minded their owne delights.

They had not six weekes enioy'd this peace, but the young men and weomen, who saw them allow each other that kindnesse which they did not afford commonly to others, first began to grow iealous and envious at it, and after to use all the mallitious practises they could invent to breake the friendship. Among the rest, that gentle man, who at the first had so highly commended her to Mr. Hutchinson, now began to caution him against her, and to disparedge her, with such subtile insinuations, as would have ruin'd any love, lesse constant and honorable then his. The weomen, with wittie spite, represented all her faults to him, which chiefly terminated in the negligence of her dress and habitt, and all womanish ornaments, giving herselfe wholly up to studie and writing. Mr. Hutchinson who had a very sharpe and pleasant witt, retorted all their mallice with such iust reproofes of their idlenesse and vanity, as made them hate her, who, without affecting it, had so engag'd such a person in her protection, as they with all their arts could not catch. He in the meanewhile prosecuted his love, with so much discretion, duty, and honor, that at the length, through many difficulties, he accomplisht his designe.

I shall passe by all the little amorous relations, which if I would take the paynes to relate, would make a true history of a more handsome management of love then the best romances describe: for these are to be forgotten as the vanities of youth, not worthy mention among the greater transactions of his life. There is this only to be recorded, that never was there a passion more ardent and lesse idolatrous; he lov'd her better then his life, with inexpressable tendernesse and kindnesse, had a most high obliging esteeme of her, yet still consider'd honour, religion, and duty, above her, nor ever suffer'd the intrusion of such a dotage as should blind him from marking her imperfections : these he look'd upon with such an indulgent eie, as did not abate his love and esteeme of her, while it augmented his care to blott out all those spotts which might make her appeare lesse worthy of that respect he pay'd her; and thus indeed he soone made her more equall to him then he found her; for she was a very faithfull mirror, reflecting truly, though but dimmely, his owne glories upon him, so long as he was present; but she, that was nothing before his inspection gave her a faire figure, when he was remoov'd, was only fill'd with a darke mist, and never could againe take in any delightfull obiect, nor returne any shining representation. The greatest excellencie she had was the power of apprehending and the virtue of loving his: soe as his shadow, she waited on him every where, till he was taken into that region of light, which admitts of none, and then she vanisht into nothing. Twas

not her face he lov'd, her honor and her vertue were his mistresses, and these (like Pigmalion's) images of his own making, for he polisht and gave forme to what he found with all the roughnesse of the quarrie about it; but meeting with a compliant subiect for his owne wise government, he found as much satisfaction as he gave, and never had occasion to number his marriage among his infelicities.

That day that the friends on both sides met to conclude the marriage, she fell sick of the small pox, which was many wayes a greate triall upon him; first her life was allmost in desperate hazard, and then the disease, for the present, made her the most deformed person that could be seene, for a great while after she recover'd; yett he was nothing troubled at it, but married compenc'd his iustice and constancy, by restoring her, though she was longer then ordinary before she recover'd, as well as before.

One thing is very observable, and worthy imitation in him; although he had as strong and violent affections for her, as ever any man had, yet he declar'd it not to her till he had acquainted first his father, and after never would make any engagement but what his love and honor bound him in, wherein he was more firme and iust then all the promisarie oathes and ties in the world could have made him, notwithstanding many powerful temptations of wealth and beauty, and other interests, that were laid before him; for his father had concluded another treaty, before he knew his son's inclinations were this way fixt, with a party in many things much more advantageable for his famely, and more worthy of his liking: but his father was no lesse honorably indulgent to his son's affection, then the sonne was strict in the observance of his duty, and at length, to the full content of all, the thing was accomplisht, and on the third day of July, in the yeare 1638, he was married to Mrs. Lucy Apsley, the second daughter of Sr. Allen Apsley, late lieftenant of the Tower of London, at St. Andrew's church in Holborne.

Grace Sharington and Anthony Mildmay

Grace Sharington (c. 1552-1620) and Anthony Mildmay (c. 1547-1617). Married 1567.

Grace, Lady Mildmay
Photograph of a painting published in
"The Fanes" by Oswald Barron, *The Ancestor,* vol. 12, 1905, p. 6.
The original painting did not survive World War II.

Grace, Lady Mildmay was a medical practitioner and scholar, and a writer on devotional and medical subjects. As part of one of her devotional writings, she wrote a short autobiography, one of the earliest autobiographies by a woman in English. (Lady Mildmay wrote this out in her own hand; some women's autobiographies from this period were dictated to a secretary.) Sir Anthony Mildmay was a courtier in the court of Queen Elizabeth and at one point ambassador to France. Her autobiography includes the following short account of how her marriage was arranged.

And further I have thought good to call to mind the extraordinary love and favor of this said worthy person [Sir Walter Mildmay] towards myself in my tender youth which love was such that he desired me of my father to marry with his eldest son. His

son, being then more willing to travel to get experience of the world than to marry so soon, was unwilling to give ear thereunto. But his father told him that if he did not marry with me, he should never bring any other woman into his house. Upon which importunity of his father, he was content and entered into communication with him what jointure he would make me and what allowance he would give for our maintenance in our own time. His father answered him again by earnest protestations and vow in the presence of the lady his good mother saying, 'Doest thou distrust me Anthony? Here I speak it before God, if thou marry with this woman I will give thee all I have ans whatsoever else I can procure, shall be thine. And further, if I do it not, thy mother shall be witness against me in heaven,' expressing the same with tears which moved the hearts of himself and his mother to weep also. Whereupon he yielded to his father and the marriage was concluded betwixt him and me upon the trust of his fidelity and good hope that he would never alter his mind nor break his said oath and vow, the consummation of that marriage being the seal of that bond.

My father-in-law gave me this posie[28] in my wedding ring *'maneat inviolat fides'* that is to say, 'Let thy faith remain inviolate' which in the very instant of our marriage I received most religiously, with a full resolution (by the grace of God) to perform the same unto the end of my life. Wherein he bound me unto his son as he had before bound himself upon him on that condition of our marriage.

After which we lived with him almost twenty years, receiving no more maintenance from him but £130 by year bare pension to pay our servant's wagers and apparel ourselves and to defray all other charges whatsoever, which could not by any means suffice in any competency the least part of out necessities.

From Grace, Lady Mildmay's *Autobiography*, edited by Linda Pollock and published in Pollock's, *With Faith and Physic: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman,* Collins and Brown Ltd., 1993.

I quote part of Pollock's account of the marriage in her introductory material, which is much more informative than Lady Mildmay's own account.

In 1567, Grace was married to Anthony Mildmay, the eldest son of Sir Walter Mildmay, and a young man who had come early to Queen Elizabeth's attention. ... Lady Mildmay's future father-in-law, Sir Walter Mildmay, (born c. 1520) was a younger son of a mercer, albeit a wealthy one, who rose rapidly from a clerkship in the court of Augmenations to be knighted by Edward VI in 1547 ... finally becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. ...

Sixteenth century parents, particularly those with property, expected to have some say in their children's choice of marriage partner. A small minority were prepared to force their offspring to comply with their wishes, and some would give into their child's choice even if it was not entirely desirable. ... In the case

[28]A posie, or poesy, is a motto, often, as here, inscribed in a ring.

of the proposed union between Grace and Anthony, there seems to have been little negotiation. It appears that Grace's opinion in this matter was not sought, although there is no record of parental coercion nor of her dissent. Anthony was much more reluctant ... but his wishes were overridden.

The couple was unusually young: Grace was about fifteen and Anthony twenty at the time of their marriage. At this date the average age for peers and commoners would be the mid- to late-twenties for men and early to mid-twenties for women.... Even more peculiarly for an alliance of this type and status in which the transmission of property would be an important element, the financial matters were not properly attended to. There was no marriage settlement. ... [T]he union ws concluded on the basis of flimsy promises: Sir Henry Sharington promised that his daughter would inherit certain lands and Sir Walter Mildmay promised his son, 'I will give thee all that I have.' Neither parent actually fulfilled his promises and Sir Anthony and Lady Grace endured considerable financial strain throughout their marriage as well as being embroiled in expensive litigation to gain control of their inheritance.

We have already seen that Sir Anthony was averse to the proposed alliance and after the wedding he spent little time with his new bride. ... For the first twenty years of his marriage, he was absent from home about half that time. ... Not surprisingly, Sir Anthony's continual voyaging precluded the establishment of strong marital bonds, and there are signs that Lady Grace did not find her marriage entirely satisfactory.

...

Sir Anthony and Lady Grace had only one child, a daughter Mary born about 1582. Having no children in the first fifteen years of marriage was unusual, as was a completed family size of one child.

Margery Brews and John Paston III

Margery Brews (??-1495) and John Paston III (1444-1504). Married 1477.

Margery Brews was the daughter of Elizabeth and Sir Thomas Brews of Topcroft, Norfolk. Nothing is known of her before her engagement, including the year of her birth.

John Paston III was the son of Margaret and Sir John Paston I. (John Paston II was the older brother of III.) In addition to being involved in managing the family estates, he had a military career during the War of the Roses. He was in command at the siege of Caister in 1469; he was wounded at Barnet in 1471; he fought at the battle of Stoke in 1787 and was knighted on the field.

Margery and John had two sons, born in 1478 and 1479.

The seven letters below were written in early to mid-1477 and deal with their upcomimg marriage. The first two are from the bride's mother, Elizabeth Brews, to the groom. The third and fourth are from the bride herself to the groom. The fifth is from the Brews' family clerk, Thomas Kela, to the groom; the order of this unclear. The sixth is from the bride's father to the groom's older brother, John II, then the head of the family, since his father John I, had died in 1466. The seventh is from the groom's mother to the bride's mother, trying (successfully, as it turned out) to get over some kind of obstacle that had arisen.

I have used a modern spelling, though I have not changed the wording. In the first letter from Margery to John III, I also show the original spelling, to give a sense of that.

Letter from Elizabeth Brews to John Paston III

Unto my right worshipful cousin, John Paston, be this letter delivered etc.

Right worshipful cousin I recommend me unto you etc. And I sent my husband a bill of the matter that ye know of, and he wrote another bill to me again touching the same matter; and he would that ye should go unto my mistress your mother, and assay if you might get the whole £20 into your hands, and then he would be more glad to marry with you and will give you £100. And, cousin, that day that she is married, my father will give her 50 marks. But an we accord, I shall give you a greater treasure, that is, a witty gentlewoman, and, if I say it, both good and virtuous; for if I should take money for her, I would not give her for £1000. But, cousin, I trust you so much that I would think her well beset on you, and ye were worth much more.

And, cousin, a little while after that ye were gone, come a man from my cousin Derby and brought me word that such a chance fell that he might not come on the day that was set, as I shall let you understand more plainly, when I speak with you

etc. But, cousin, an it would please you to come again what day that ye will set, I dare undertake that they shall keep the same day; for I would be glad that, an mine husband and ye might accord in this marriage, that it might be my fortune to make an end in this mater between my cousins and you, that each of you might love other in friendly wise etc.

And, cousin, if this bill please not your intent, I pray you that it may be burnt etc.

No more unto you at this time, but Almighty Jesus preserve you etc.

By your cousin, DAME ELIZABETH BREWS

Letter from Elizabeth Brews to John Paston III

Cousin, I recommend me unto you, thanking you heartily for the great cheer that ye made me and all my folks the last time that I was in Norwich. And ye promised me that ye would never break the matter to Margery unto such time as you and I were at a point. But you have made her such advocate for you that I may never have rest night nor day, for calling on me to bring the said matter to effect, etc.

And, cousin, on Friday is Saint Valentine's Day, and every bird chooseth him a make [*mate*], and if it like you to come on Thursday at night, and so purvey you that ye may abide there till Monday, I trust to God that we may so speak to my husband, and I shall pray that we shall bring the matter to a conclusion etc. For, cousin,

> It is but a simple oak
> That is cut down at the first stroke

for ye will be reasonable, I trust to God, which have you ever in his merciful keeping etc.

Letter from Margery Brews to John Paston III

Unto my ryght welebelovyd Voluntyn, John Paston, Squyer, be this bill delyvered, &c.

Ryght reverent and wurschypfull, and my ryght welebeloved Voluntyne, I recomande me unto yowe, ffull hertely desyring to here of yowr welefare, whech I beseche Almyghty God long for to preserve un to Hys plesur, and ȝowr herts desyre. And yf it please ȝowe to here of my welefar, I am not in good heele of body, nor of herte, nor schall be tyll I her ffrom yowe;

For þere wottys no creature what peyn þat I endure,
And for to be deede, I dare it not dyscure.

And my lady my moder hath labored þe mater to my ffadur full delygently, but sche can no mor gete þen ȝe knowe of, for þe whech God knowyth I am full sory.

But yf þat ȝe loffe me, as I tryste verely that ȝe do, ȝe will not leffe me þerefor; for if þat ȝe hade not halfe the lyvelode þat ȝe hafe, for to do the grettest labur þat any woman on lyve myght, I wold not forsake ȝowe.

And yf ȝe commande me to kepe me true wherever I go,
I wyse I will do all my myght ȝowe to love and never no mo.
And yf my freends say, þat I do amys,
Þei schal not me let so for to do,
Myne herte me bydds ever more to love ȝowe
Truly over all erthely thing,
And yf þei be never so wroth,
I tryst it schall be better in tyme commyng.

No more to ȝowe at this tyme, but the Holy Trinite hafe ȝowe in kepyng. And I besech ȝowe þat this bill be not seyn of none erthely creatur safe only your selffe, &c.

And thys letter was indyte at Topcroft, with full hevy herte, &c.

By your own,

MARGERY BREWS.

Right reverend and worshipful and my right well-beloved Valentine, I recommend me unto you full heartily, desiring to hear of your welfare, which I beseech Almighty God long for to preserve you unto his pleasure and your heart's desire. And if it please you to hear of my welfare, I am not in good heal of body nor of heart, nor shall be until I hear from you.

For there wots no creature what pain that I endure,
And for to be dead, I dare it not discure [*discover*]

And my lady my mother hath labored the matter to my father full diligently, but she can no more more get than ye know of, for the which God knoweth I am full sorry.

But if that ye love me, as I trust verily that ye do, ye will not leave me therefor; for if that ye had not have the livelihood that ye have, for to do the greatest labor that any woman alive might, I would not forsake you.

And if ye command me to keep me true wherever I go,
Iwis I will do all my might you to love and never no mo.
And if my friends say I do amiss, they shall not me let so for to do,
Mine heart bids me evermore to love you.
Truly over all earthly thing.
And if they be never so wroth, I trust it shall be better in time coming.

No more to you at this time, but the Holy Trinity have you in keeping. And I beseech you that this bill be not seen of none earthly creature save only of yourself etc. And this letter was indite at Topcroft with full heavy heart, etc.

By your own M.B.

Letter from Margery Brews to John Paston III

Right worshipful and well-beloved Valentine, in my most humble wise I recommend me to you etc. And heartily I thank you for the letter that ye sent me by John Beckerton, whereby I understand and know that ye be purposed to come to Topcroft in short time, and without any erand or matter, but only to have a conclusion of the matter between my father and you. I would be most glad of any creature alive so that the matter might grow to effect. And there as you say, an ye come and find the matter no more toward you than ye did aforetime, ye would no more put my father and my lady my mother to no cost nor business for that cause a good while after, which causes mine heart to be full heavy; and if that ye come and the matter take to none effect, then should be much more sorry and full of heaviness.

And as for myself, I have done and understand in the matter that I can or may, as God knoweth. And I let you plainly understand that my father will no more money part withal in that behalf but £100 and 50 mark, which is right far from the accomplishment of your desire. Wherefore, if that ye could be content with that good, and my poor person, I would be the merriest maiden on ground. And if ye think not yourself so satisfied, or that ye might have much more good, as I have understand by you afore, good, true, and loving Valentine, that ye take no such labor upon you as to come more for that matter, but let it pass, and never more to be spoken of, as I may be your true lover and bedewoman during my life.

No more unto your at this time, but Almighty Jesus perserve you both body and soul etc.

By your Valentine
Margery Brews

Letter from Thomas Kela Brews to John Paston III

Unto my right worshipful master, John Paston, Square, be this bill delivered, etc.

Right worshipful sir, I recommend me unto you, letting you know, as for the young gentlewoman, she oweth you her good heart and love, as I know by the communication that I have had with her for the same.

And, sir, ye know what my master and my lady have proferred with her 200 marks. And I dare say that her chamber and arrayment shall be worth 100 marks. And I heard my lady say that, an the case required, both ye and she should have your board with my lady 3 years after. [*?? The original is "iij yer aftur.*]

And I understand by my lady that she would that ye should labor the matter to my master, for it should be the better.

And I heard my lady say,

That it was a feeble oak
That was cut down at the first stroke

And ye be beholding unto my lady for her good word, for she has never . . . [*?? The original is "preysyd you to mech."*]

Sir, like I promised you, I am your man, and my good will ye shall have in worded and deed etc.

And Jesus have you in His merciful keeping etc.

By your man
THOMAS KELA

Letter from Sir Thomas Brews to John Paston II

Right worshipful and my heartily well-beloved cousin, I recommend me unto you, desiring to hear of your welfare, which I pray God may be as continual good as I would have mine own. And, cousin, the cause of my writing to you at this time is, I feel well by my cousin John, your brother, that ye have understanding of a matter which is in communication touching a marriage with God's grace to be concluded betwen my said cousin your brother and my daughter Margery, which is far commoned [*i.e. has come far*] and not yet concluded, nor not shall nor may be till I have answer from you again of your good will and assent to the said matter, and also of the obligations which that I send you herewith for, cousin, I would be sorry to see either my cousin your brother or my daughter driven to live so mean a life as they should do if the £120 should be paid of their marriage money.

And, cousin, I have taken myself so near in leaving of the said £120 that, whereas I had laid up £100 for the marriage of a younger daughter of mine, I have now lent the said £100 and £20 over that, to my cousin your brother, to be paid again by such easy days as the obligation which I send you herewith specifies. And, cousin, I were right loath to bestow so much on one daughter that the other her sisters should fare the worse; wherefore, cousin, if ye will that this matter shall take effect under such form as my cousin your brother hath written unto you, I pray you put thereto your good will, and some of your cost as I have done of mine more largely than I purpose to do to any twain of her sisters, as God knoweth mine intent, whom I beseech to send you your liefest heart's desire.

Written at Topcroft the 8 day of March etc.

By your cousin, Sir T. Brews, Knight

From Margaret Paston to Dame Elizabeth Brews

Right worshipful and my chief lady and cousin, as heartily as I can recommend me to you. Madam, liketh you to understand that the chief cause of my writing to you at this season is this. I wot well it is not unremembered with you the large communication that diverse times had been had touching the marriage of my cousin Margery your daughter and my son John, of which I have been as glad, and now latewards as sorry, as ever I was for any marriage in mine life. And where or in whom the default of the breach is I can have no perfect knowledge; but, madam, if it be in me or any of mine, I pray you assign a day when my cousin your husband and ye think to be at Norwich towaard Sall, and I will come thither to you, and I think ere you and I depart that the default shall be know where it is, and also that, with your advice and help and mine together, we shall take some way that it shall not break; for if it did, it were none honor to neither parties, and in chief to them in whom the default is, considering that it is so far spoken.

And, madam, I pray you that I may have perfect knowledge by my son Yelverton, bearer hereof, when this meeting shall be, if ye think it expedient, and the sooner the better in eschewing of worse. for, madam, I know well, if it be not concluded in right short time, that as for my son, he intendeth to do right well by my cousin Margery and not so well by himself, and that should be to me, nor I trust to you, no great pleasure if it so fortuned — as God defend, whom I beseech to send you your liefest desires.

Madam, I beseech you that I may be recommended by this bill to my cousin your husband, and to my cousin Margery, to whom I supposed to have given another name by this time. Written at Mautby on Saint Barnaby's Day [*June 11*].

By your MARGARET PASTON

From *The Paston Letters* a famous collection of family documents and letters dating between 1429 and 1489, and an invaluable source of social history of the era. The letters are, in sequence, 790, 791, 415, 416, 792, 773, and 226 in the edition, *Paston Papers and Letters of the Fifteenth Century,* ed. Norman Davis, Oxford University Press, 2004. The modern spelling version for the first and fifth letters were done by myself. The rest are from *The Paston Letters: A Selection in Modern Spelling,* ed. Norman Davis, Oxford University Press 1983.

There is quite a bit more correspondence about the marriage negotiations in *The Paxton Letters* – #304 from John II to his mother; 374 and 378 from John III to his mother; 376 and 378, which are private memoranda made by John III — mostly having to do with the property and the dowry.

"He took her hand and set it to his lips"
From *Otto of the Silver Hand,* Howard Pyle.