

"We New Englanders . . ."

Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett to Louise Imogen Guiney

By WILLIAM L. LUCEY, S. J.

IN 1915, six years after the death of Sarah Orne Jewett, Louise Imogen Guiney told one of her many correspondents that she knew "dear Sarah Jewett" well. When and how the acquaintance which developed into a friendship began is not known. Sarah Orne Jewett was twelve years older than her friend, but both travelled along paths which would bring them together. There was Miss Jewett's genuine interest in "fellow workers in our great craft." She would be quick to notice the appearance of a promising New Englander writer; by 1894, the date of the first of these letters, Louise Guiney had authored her seventh volume. There were also mutual friends in Boston's literary circles, like Alice Brown and Annie Fields, who would provide any needed introduction. There was in addition Miss Jewett's attraction for the character of the Irish Catholic, and this attraction would quickly transform acquaintance with Louise Guiney into friendship,—a friendship which would underscore how narrow was the gap between descendants of seventeenth century Puritans and daughters of Irish immigrants. In any case, by 1894 Miss Jewett and Miss Guiney were friends.

Miss Guiney was postmistress in Auburndale at the date of the first letter. Cleveland had appointed her January, 1894, and she remained in the office until July 5, 1897, the date her resignation was effective. She would have quit the work before then had financial conditions permitted; the post, she told her friends, had strengthened her character but had ruined her intellect. From Miss Jewett's letters we learn that she was looking for a new position as early as 1895. Herbert Putnam did find a place for Louise Guiney in the Boston Public Library and she worked in the Catalogue Department from January 22, 1899 to December 27, 1900. There "in our great Boston Public Library" she found the atmosphere more congenial and her "daily chore" to her liking.¹ A year later Miss Guiney went to England where she spent most of the remaining twenty years of her life. They continued to correspond after her departure for England; Miss Jewett told Mrs. Fields she had received a book of essays by Edmund Gosse from Louise as a Christmas gift in 1904. Apparently no letters written after Miss Guiney sailed for England have survived.

These letters of Sarah Orne Jewett are in the collection of hundreds of letters, manuscripts, notebooks, scrapbooks and books of Louise Imogen Guiney which her cousin and literary executor, Grace Guiney of Oxford, England, recently donated to the Dinand Library of Holy Cross College. Words inserted above the line by Miss Jewett have been lowered and bracketed; deleted words have been bracketed and italicized or, when illegible, a deletion has been indicated.

I

South Berwick, Maine 6 Novr

1894

My dear friend

I threw down my pen an hour ago and took up your Roadside Harp and the one having seemed to be rusty it did my heart good to find the other in tune.² And after I had read again those [poems] I know and care about best and most, and had made those lovely discoveries which one can always make in true "poetry books" — of new things that seem old and old things that seem new and the poem that one likes so much that she believes she never can have read it before! — I began to wonder if I had ever really told you how much I thank you for your work! We New Englanders are apt [for] to wait for Christmas — a lucky Christmas at that! — before we dare to speak out, but to me the chance appears today. I believe so thoroughly in your lovely gift and in your skill and depth of feeling in the use of it. I am so proud of your background of scholarship and ever-growing knowledge of "the best that has been thought and said in the world" that I feel every year surer of what you may [do] the next year and the next. It is the lack of this same background of scholarship and knowledge of literature that has worked much woe to the gifts of our writers — no matter how clear and swift the stream if it doesn't come from the great fountains. [three words deleted] The heavens may flow into it on its way and every field and pasture give it a rill, but the mountain springs are those that never fail. One must know the world's best knowledge of itself, its gathered waters of truth, else the stream grows shallow—but why do I write this to you? The rusty pen has found its way into my hand again!

If I can only make it say what is in my heart or if I could only make you feel how heartily I would throw all pens away if you were here and give you my hand instead, I should be so glad! We are fellow workers in our great craft these many years now, and I like to do you honor and to bless you on your way; I thank you with warm affection for your beautiful work in verse and prose. I am so glad to hear that Mrs. Fields is to have some little visits from you and that you are to go to the concerts together, for I know she will like it so much. Please give my best regards to your mother and believe me always

Yours most sincerely
Sarah O. Jewett

I must not forget to say how much I like the Little English Gallery. It was a charming idea to put the essays together and into their green cover. How uncommonly good Miss Alice Brown's story was in the October Atlantic. I liked it *very* much, and we must talk about it when *we* see *us* again!

II

5 December
1895

South Berwick, Maine

My dear Louise

Could you meet me on the afternoon of Thursday next week at the Public Library of Boston at anytime between two o'clock and five o'clock to go over it a little — but especially to see Mr. Putnam the Librarian who wishes very much to know you, and who has some especial reasons for this which it might be well to consider. If you will send me a line, here, I can meet you at the staircase. It will be a pleasure to look forward to and I am ever your most affectionately

S. O. Jewett

III

148 Charles Street
Monday —
[1896]

Dear Louise

I had a talk with Mr. Putnam of the Public Library yesterday and he asked me to say something to you about the matter of your taking a position in the Catalogue Department in course of time.³ He seems to think that he told us that you had better make formal application when we [word deleted] saw him last year, but I do not remember that it was so; I thought that we were to wait and hear from him someday!

But however that may be, I think that he wishes you to go through this form now, and you can go to the Library to see him or write and ask him for directions. He wished me to say that you would go in for a time to *Grade B* which is on a [lowest] basis of eleven dollars a week & rising from that — but presently, finding you ready for intelligent work in literary matters! you would go into *Grade A* at increased rates. The work is from 9 to 5 o'clock with 24 days vacation beside [word deleted] public holidays.

I think that this is all he wished me to say. For myself I think, as I said last year, and as Mrs. Fields thinks & says too that once belonging to the corps of the Library you would stand a chance of finding some [more responsible &] particular piece of work and making it your own. It must be looked after directly, now — I should say — to please Mr. Putnam who wishes to put his wheels in motion! I was afraid that he thought I had been remiss but I certainly did not understand!

It seems very long since we have seen you — I have been coming to town and going home again as fast as I could run, but after a week at South Berwick now, I hope to be here for a longer stretch—

Your most sincerely

Sarah O. Jewett

We were much interested a week ago Saturday at seeing Mr. Day & a mandarin sitting together at the Symphony concert!

IV

28 December 1896
South Berwick.
Maine.

Dear Louise

I thank you so much for my Book and for your most kind and dear remembrance. When I see you I shall tell you how much I like it, the book, I mean now; if it were your own I should read it first and write afterward. Which is what I mean to do with this exquisite little handful of (rose) leaves which comes from Alice Brown.⁴ I wish you would tell her if you see her or if you write. I can wait to take the right hour (which one cannot always do with a book that deserves justice) for I have forgotten her Pinckney Street number and so I must wait to thank her also when I get back, presently, to town.

There are many things I should like to talk about with you and with her — one is that this autumn I was off for a weeks driving and I went to the Shaker houses at Canterbury. I had just been reading Sainte Beuve's *Port Royal* and I hardly knew the difference between *Mère Angelique* and *Eldress Joanna Kaime* with her white hood and stately old head. New England was going to do without somethings and thought they were left behind, but human nature is too strong. So we have monasteries but we call them Shaker families! Oh there is much to tell about that day to which you would both listen and wish you had been with me.

I hope that I shall see you soon — Yours affectionately,

Sarah O. Jewett

I hope that my Pointed Firs will remind you of some shoreward pleasures.

V

South Berwick, Maine 23rd May
[1897]

My dear Louise

You have given me a great pleasure both by your kindness and by this most interesting book of which I have been a most careful reader.⁵ I find in your way of writing and of choosing your way through the poor poet's work that nameless perfection and sympathy which one so rarely finds in an English book of this sort — rarely enough in the few volumes of its rank in French. When I stand and look at this new proof of your exquisite literary gifts and exact scholarship I grow more impatient than ever to sweep away every thing else out of your path — as if with the hemlock broom of my native parish!

These have been sad spring days to me with but few pleasures. You will

have known of my dear younger sister's death, a heavy loss to the three of us; my sister Mary and my orphan nephew [and I] who are left alone to bear it as best as we may. I have wished to tell you what help I found in a kind visit from Father Gorman and how glad I was to find that he knew you. — I must tell you more of this —

—Dear friend I was interrupted in this note yesterday and now I am (Sunday) finishing it at Intervale in the White Mountains where I came to spend Sunday with an old friend. Mount Washington is white with snow and the valley in its bloom of green. I wish that you were here to see it with me! I hope that you are quite strong again? I saw Alice Brown for a few minutes one day in a doctor's office in town and I was disappointed in hurrying out by another way to miss saying good by to her. I have not read her new book yet but its day is soon — I look forward to it with great pleasure. I have had illness as well as sorrow to fight against lately. Somehow these poems of Mangan's have touched me more than I could have believed — I ought to care more for what you said about him when I took the book into my hand.

Believe that I am ever your affectionate and unforgetting friend

Sarah O. Jewett

VI

34 Beacon Street

Thursday

[Jan. 5, 1899]

My dear Louise

I am late in thanking you for your dear Christmas wish and reminder, but I did not get it, nor keep my little Christmas as to presents until a few days ago when I came to town after a bad fling of illness which kept me low for a fortnight, and hindered all my proceedings. I love your word of old French and I love to have your remembrance. Mrs. Fields and I had *such* a happy visit to you that Sunday afternoon. I am so glad to have seen your dear mother. I felt near to her before, but all the nearer now. I wish that you would give my love to her.

I am deeply interested in your going to the Library, and I know well how you are sure to serve your City among her books, and bring your learning where it will surely count.⁶ I suppose that you will find dull enough 'jobs' now and then that will tax your patience except that you cannot do things without a keen wish to do them well and without giving your own touch of distinction. (Forgive an old friend for speaking plain!) But I have longed to have a chance to beg you to be careful about doing other things—while you are 'breaking in' at least. You will find your little journey tiring and you will get exercise in your walk to the station — but don't bother with gymnasiums or that sort of thing or seeing people much. My wise father used to remind me that we have only just so much 'steam' and if you let it

off in one way you didn't have it in another. I think that we have passed the moment when we believed that "exercise" gave delicate people added vigor; too often it uses up without profit what vigor they have! All this by way of saying that I love a long walk and I love a *gym* — but in their proper place. I don't [sic] believe that you need the stimulant of them or the safety valve of them — so much as you will need the time for quiet and building up — I have had the same problems to solve with uncertain health, and Carlyle's great saying that the only happiness a man ought to ask for is happiness enough to *get his work done!*

I am staying for a few days with an old friend and going to 148 Charles Street on Monday. I hope that we shall be seeing you some day. Mrs. Fields is better, but she is always a little delicate [word deleted] while this cold & changing weather lasts. Oh yes, we all have to "save ourselves for our work," don't we? — but I know you will take my preaching as affectionately as I give it.

Yours always with much love

S. O. J.

VII

South Berwick Maine

12 May

Dear friend and poet —

Perhaps you will remember my speaking to you of my friend Dr. Ella Dexter whom I like so much and who was taking care of my eyes all winter? I happened to find out that she is longing to find some place near town where she can go for the night when she likes — by way of getting the change she needs.⁷ It is so far to get to the edge of the country on her bicycle and she wants to be riding more than she possibly gets time for, from the point of 68 Marlborough St. I thought that you might know of some one in your town or neighbourhood — possibly Lee's might be the place — where she could have a room and come and go — no matter how simple a place if she could be sure of her bed and her breakfast and keep her bicycle! I am taking it upon me to ask if you will send her a word if you can think of any word to send. I have always thought that you would like each other — and that you might take much pleasure together when there was TIME! She would like the nearness to Riverside and all that — you know? Goodbye with a wish fit for this May weather —

Yours affectionately

Sarah O. Jewett

FOOTNOTES

¹ *Letters of Louis Imogen Guiney*, edited by Grace Guiney (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926), II, 7, letter to Dora Sigerson, Autumn, 1899.

² The last two sentences of the letter's postscript were written on the margins of the first page.

A Roadside Harp A Book of Verses, published in 1893 by Houghton, Mifflin &

Company, was dedicated to Dora Sigerson (Mrs. Clement Shorter) of Dublin, Ireland. Louis told Dora that Miss Jewett was "one of our best-known American writers, and a most lovely and lovable woman." *A Little English Gallery* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894) is a volume in the American Essayist Series and is dedicated to Edmund Gosse. "Heartease" is the title of the short story by Alice Brown in the October, 1894, issue of the *Atlantic*.

³ This letter is dated by the preceding one since it was written the year following their appointment in the Boston Public Library to see Mr. Putnam.

148 Charles Street was the address of the Boston home of Annie Fields, widow of James T. Fields, the publisher. Mrs. Fields willed Louise Guiney a half-share for life in the annual interest derived from the sale of this house. (A. L. S., Feb. 11, 1915 of LIG to R. Norton, in the Guiney Collection in Dinand Library.)

Frederick Holland Day, mentioned in the postscript, was, in Miss Guiney's words, "An old friend of mine, an ex-publisher [Copeland and Day], a great bibliophile, and a most distinguished amateur in photography and kindred arts."

⁴ Four books by Alice Brown were published in 1896, among them *The Road to Castaly* which was dedicated to Louise Guiney. It would seem, however, from Miss Jewett's remark that Louise had sent her *The Rose of Hope*.

The Shaker Village mentioned in this letter was located in Canterbury, New Hampshire, a small farming town about twelve miles north-east of Concord. Miss Jewett described a visit to the Canterbury Shakers in a letter to Annie Fields dated "Thursday night, 1897." (*Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, edited by Annie Fields, p. 134). Both letters, it seems, refer to the same visit, and if this is so the date of the letter to Annie Fields should read 1896.

The Country of the Pointed Firs, mentioned in the postscript, has been described by Carlos Baker as Miss Jewett's masterpiece.

⁵ This letter is dated by Miss Jewett's reference to Miss Guiney's book on Mangan which appeared in May, 1897 (*James Clarence Mangan His Selected Poems, with a Study* by the editor Louise Imogen Guiney, published by Lamson Wolfe & Co. of Boston and New York and by John Lane of London).

The Reverend James P. Gorman was pastor of St. Michael's parish in South Berwick.

In April of this year Louise Guiney broke under a sharp attack of meningitis from overwork, and this illness persuaded her to resign at the first opportunity from the Auburndale post.

⁶ The date of this letter has been added by Grace Guiney, presumably from the envelope which is now lacking. The reference by Miss Jewett to Louise's work in the Boston Public Library corroborates the date; she started to work there in January, 1899.

⁷ This letter was written while Miss Guiney was living in Auburndale and hence before the summer of 1899, for in the summer of this year she moved to Boston living at first at 240 Newbury Street in the vacant residence of a friend. In the fall she moved to Pinckney Street where she was a neighbor of Alice Brown.

A MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY HONORED

The John Henry Newman Honorary Society of the National Newman Club Federation presented its 1959 Newman Award to Rt. Rev. Msgr. John W. Keogh, A.M., L.H.D. Rev. James O'Brien, chairman of the Board of the Society, when introducing Msgr. Keogh, said, "This award has always been given to a layman. Without establishing a precedent, it is granted to you, Monsignor, who organized the Newman Club, was founder of the Federation and of its Honorary Society, who has been nominated this January a Right Reverend Monsignor with the title of domestic prelate, and who has recently celebrated the Golden Jubilee of your priesthood." Most. Rev. Leo Binz, D.D., moderator of the Youth Department of the NCWC bestowed the award with his congratulations.

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