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Edited by Isaac Todhunter

Excerpt

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[April, 1814.]

DEAR MORLAND,

In order that you may reap the full benefit of all the philosophy I intend to bestow upon you and have some distinct idea of what I mean, I will tell you the situation in which you are to suppose me addressing you. After spending an idle day, I came into my rooms here about eleven in the evening, and having contrived to lay hands upon Miss Edgeworth's *Patronage* I made myself a fire and some tea and gravely sat down to read it. Having finished one volume of the four, I find it to be about 3 o'clock and not feeling the least inclination to put myself to bed I do not see what I can do better than make up a packet of cogitations and reflections for your edification. If you have ever sat up till early morning reading, you may possibly have some idea of that flow of spirits which one feels a little after midnight, when the propensity to sleep is totally vanished and one finds a kind of—a sort of—I know not what manner of alacrity and fermentation of the animal spirits, which I suppose if one had been asleep would have evaporated in the form of a cloud of nonsensical dreams, without any such benefit to society and to literature as is likely to be derived from my waking contemplations at present. But in order that you may have distinct ideas upon the subject which all metaphysicians make to be of so much importance, (from which observation you may possibly fancy that I am at present

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reading metaphysics) it may not be amiss to set forth what I mean by an *idle day* at Cambridge; seeing that there are as many different modes of idleness as there are of action. I awoke, therefore in the morning, and looking at my watch, found that it was 10 minutes too late to go to Chapel, with which disappointment I was not very much mortified, as I did not think myself after that obliged in conscience to get up immediately. I therefore took unto me Locke's Essay, and read in bed till eleven o'clock—got up and breakfasted—grew out of humour with Locke—went out—called on a great mathematician—driven out by his private pupils coming—called on another great mathematician—found him with a tooth just drawn—Thompson's Chymistry in one hand and spitting blood into a bason in the other—asked me to dine at his rooms' as his mouth did not allow him to go into hall—lounged at the Booksellers—dined at 5—a great quantity of mathematics, puns and nonsense talked—(N.B. He was a Johnian)—Eight o'clock we began to read Tom Jones, four of us reading a chapter alternately—much deep Philosophy solved—and so on; upon various parts of which day's work one might very sagely philosophize—"But what," you cry, "is all this to Miss Edgeworth?" Now, my dear Morland, consider what a very high rank Patience holds among the Christian virtues; consider how very necessary it is to get habits of self-command, of restraint upon the passions and above all that most wicked passion *Curiosity*; and peradventure before I get to the end of this sheet I may tell you something about it, though you are to reflect that I have myself only read the first volume, and that therefore I cannot be supposed to know how many marriages there are at the end, which of course is the first object of solicitude. Nor indeed if I could have given you an outline of the story, would you I suppose at all thank me for it, if ever the book itself should fall into your hands, at least I would at this moment most willingly take a glass of the waters of Lethe, for my evil stars led me to the Edinburgh Review where I found an abstract of the plot whereof it now much repenteth me—Well, but to give you my opinion of what I have seen; though the plan of the tale appears not very original but rather *novelish*, what is of much more im-

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portance, the Characters, and those pleasing parts, the Dialogues, appear supported with Miss Edgeworth's usual style of ability. To be sure it may be said of it that all of it is not equal to the best parts of her former works; but as Johnson said on a similar occasion "There must be some parts which exist for the sake of others—a diadem cannot be one entire diamond—the jewels must be held together by some substance less precious," to which I have often been tempted to add "that it is very well if that substance be gold." The *moral* which this fair lady appears desirous to inculcate is one which always has appeared to be her favourite principle, Decision and Firmness of Character and Self Dependence in opposition to that dependence on others, that System of 'Patronage,' which is the order of the day. By the bye—entertaining not the least doubt, as I certainly do not, of the wisdom and weight of this fair moralist's observations, and feeling all the inclination that any soul can feel to act upon those principles which she has so well illustrated, is it not an infinite nuisance that one is never likely to be put in any situation where one might make the experiment upon one's self and try what latent powers and hidden capabilities the mind possesses? Is it not, in short, enough to put one in a boiling rage to think that one must live the dormouse life of the inhabitant of a college instead of going amongst other two-legged beings in the wide world to see whether we have got any thing superior to instinct about one; any soul—and if we have, to find what colour it is of? Though to be sure I think a person in any situation may, if it contributes to his satisfaction, contrive to lead himself into temptation in order to experiment on the strength of his own mind. For instance here at this place there is no small degree of courage required, if a person get into certain situations in society, to avoid running into expense—not merely for the sake of dissipation; but because it is difficult without incurring certain expenses to keep up that connection with persons of genius, learning, and eminent character, which one would not like when once begun to let drop for impediments of this sort. I suppose you begin to perceive by this time that though I do not myself appear disposed to sleep I have a tolerable knack at reasoning other people into a state of slumber.

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REV. G. MORLAND. 1814.

In fact I have written such a parcel of stuff that, large as this sheet is, I do not know where I must put the tail of my letter

Summi plenâ jam margine libri  
 Scriptus et in tergo necdum finitus.

Moreover I expect that you will write to me again and as soon as may be and then, as I shall have read the whole of this book, if you are not satisfied with this I shall be able to give you a more satisfactory account of it.

Your Local Militia business is certainly what would be called here *an infinite bore*; in truth it is a serious vexation and many are the philosophical theories and sublime, that I could sport for your consolation; only looking forwards to the day when I shall see you another Xenophon, I think that we ought rather to rejoice.

\* \* \* \*

Believe me to be Dear Morland Ever yours w. w.

Ap. 6th.

Babylon is fallen, that mighty city. The Allies entered Paris by capitulation on the 30th. Did I not suppose that you would be laetified by this news before this could reach you I should be inclined to say something more about it and to heap still higher this running over bushel of nonsense. Adieu.

CAMBRIDGE, June 15, 1814.

DEAR MORLAND,

Your cautions against vanity were, I can assure you, by no means unnecessary; the adversary assails me very strongly; I am at the present moment in the greatest perplexity how to return pretty modest answers to half a dozen flaming complimentary letters that I have received. But really you are very inconsistent and whilst you are giving me ghostly advice you have no more mercy than to be one of those to increase my embarrassment. I had a great wish to *stay up* to escape the congratulations of my Lancaster friends who I find are disposed to give me credit for much more than I have a claim to; and actually talk of my fair fame resting on a foundation which &c.—and of being the

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first young man of the age, and of immortal honours, and several other fine phrases which are enough to turn the head of any mortal alive.

Now I wish you would contrive to make them understand that this said prize and many others of equal value must be got every year by some one or other, and that every year some one or other must be first at every college; and that therefore the quantity of fair fames and immortal honours thus acquired will be so great that it will be no small burthen to posterity to give them due credit, and that posterity will very wisely solve the difficulty by not troubling her head with them in the smallest degree, and that even in this generation these fair fames &c. after buzzing for a few months will terminate their ephemeral existence.

I intended to send you a metaphysical letter in answer to your preceding one, but I was prevented first by the bustle of the examination and then by a fortnight of idleness and dissipation which has followed it. It is now I dare say out of my power, for as I only absorbed a quantity of metaphysics for the examination I gave it all out again in answer to the questions, so that I have scarcely a particle remaining. This may appear strange to you but it is perfectly well understood here. For instance, in the examination for A.B after passing a most severe examination in the profoundest parts of Mathematics the men go into a place where they are stuck up in a box, and a man stuck up in a box opposite asks some very simple question such as "Quid est circulus?" and to which a man's mathematical knowledge is so much exhausted that he always answers "Nescio."

I am puzzled to make out what "little society" it is that you have instigated to buy Metaphysical books; and also how Paley's Philosophy finds its way into the list. I fancy you will like the study of the science of the Mind, as it is a subject where when you once set off a reasoning you may pass the bounds of space and time and travel on to all Eternity without coming to any conclusion, or rather may arrive at a dozen contradictory conclusions all equally certain. But if you want to see the science in its triumph over common sense, with all its train of conclusions that *admit no answer and produce no conviction*, read Bishop Berkeley's Principles

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of Human Knowledge and his Dialogues on the existence of Matter, where he proves beyond all contradiction that our belief of the existence of external objects on the evidence of our senses is equally as fallacious as when in a dream we deduce the same conclusion from the same evidence. However after what the Scotch Metaphysicians, Reid, Stewart, &c. have written it must be allowed that Metaphysics is a very entertaining and also a very useful study.

After indulging in a little idleness since the examination I am setting to work again. I find it more than ever necessary to read in order to come as near as may be to the expectations that my friends entertain.

I have just sent my poem to the press and find from the bore of copying, correcting, &c. that a person cannot meddle in any degree with authorship with impunity. I shall come down in a short time laden with verse.

\* \* \* \*  
 Dear M. Yours sincerely W. WHEWELL.

TRIN. COLL. *Aug.* 10th, [1815?]

DEAR MORLAND,

Though our correspondence may not be the most punctual in the world it is very regular in some points. For instance every epistle has for its exordium an apology for not writing sooner and for its peroration a very urgent request for an immediate answer. I have I am afraid more than common occasion to begin according to these established rules, and certainly I have the greatest inclination in the world to conform to them in ending. Till I looked at the date of your letter I was not aware that I had been such a capital delinquent. One evil consequence of this vile practice is that I hardly know what to say in reply to observations which two months ago I could have answered with the most profound wisdom. I no longer know, and you no longer care what I saw at London, or what the Dean of Peterborough said to Mr Lingard. With regard to the first of these points I have only an indistinct recollection of seeing a multitude of houses, each to the best of my remembrance occupied by its respective

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inhabitants, except some of the largest which are in the hands of people to whom you give sixpences and shillings that you may say you have been in St Paul's, Westminster Abbey, etc. In a week I began to be tired of seeing a world where every body but myself seemed to have something to do, where society seemed made up into sets without leaving any vacancy which I could fill, and accordingly I left them, knowing that they would mind their business just as well if I were in my dressing gown at Cambridge. I very soon by the help of philosophy overcame the mortification of finding that I was not, so far as I could discover, a necessary part of the system of things; though as the immense bustle in the streets and the grand aspect of St Paul's seemed for a moment to have been created merely to excite pleasing sensations in my mind, you must allow it would have been very flattering if the wheels of business and of the great clock had stood still when I withdrew my presence. You are quite mistaken in supposing that there is no account of a voyage or travel to London. Besides all the innumerable lists of Guides to, Pictures of, Vade-mecums in, London—a description of a journey to the Metropolis and of introduction into Society there is become an ingredient in a novel as necessary as an amour.

By the bye, there lay upon the bookseller's counter yesterday a book entitled "A view of London," which is one of the gravest pieces of absurdity which I have seen for some time. The author, who calls himself a Beneficed Clergyman in some part of Suffolk, seems to have led one of those happy tranquil ecclesiastical lives, in which a journey of fifty miles is the greatest event that happens between the beginning and end thereof; at least if one may judge from the space he devotes to the undertaking of removing any surprise you may chance to feel at such an improbable adventure. He begins—"Innumerable are the inducements of business and pleasure which may draw the stranger to our far famed Metropolis,—*which* has nearly doubled its population within the last two hundred years." How the latter part of the sentence is connected with the first (except indeed by the word *which* which is a never failing connector) no unbeneficed person I am afraid will ever find out. But I have not the least intention of writing a critique

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REV. R. GWATKIN. 1815.

upon this man, *who* is as loyal and as cautious of giving offence as his bishop could possibly desire, as his book does not contain above 40 pages.

What are you reading now? This is the time of life when you and I ought to be reading something, systematically I mean; I suppose Divinity is your subject—but do you not intend to squeeze something else into your Cyclopædia? It is an observation that I never made or at least never put into words till the other day, that here I have the means of getting at almost every book that ever was written. This is obvious enough, nevertheless it tended to excite some scientific enthusiasm. But some people bid us beware of the Demon of universal knowledge, and I suppose some people are wise. I wish exceedingly you would take to studying some science or other.

\* \* \* \*

Believe me Ever Yours W. WHEWELL.

TRIN. COLL. Aug. 10, 1815.

DEAR GWATKIN,

When I got your epistle I was meditating to send you a very vehement philippic against people who let you hear so little of them that you begin to imagine they must have migrated to some other part of the solar system. I was rejoiced to hear that you had only been describing a trajectory over some parts of the earth; and I am afraid I have procrastinated my essay on procrastination till I have lost the privilege of making it. From what you say I suppose you will account for this by supposing me lying on the sofa all day reading novels in my dressing gown. (N.B. I have a sofa.) But my indolence is not precisely of that character. *Our* vocations are much more numerous than you suppose—N.B. upon “our.” Of the small number of men who are here every body knows every body, and thence it comes that they have a great quantity of time and amusements in common. Depict upon your intellectual retina Wilkinson, Slegg, Powell, Wollaston, Reed, Whewell, shootingswallows, bathing by half dozens, sailing to Chesterton, dancing at country fairs, playing billiards, tuning beakers into musical glasses, making rockets, riding out

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in bodies, and performing a thousand other indescribable and incomprehensible operations, and you will have some idea of the means which are used to keep *ennui* at arm's length—and hitherto with tolerable success.

That wizard Michael Slegg is becoming a man of this world—You may have observed him to be possessed with the desire of universal knowledge, but I dare say you did not expect that this demon of universality (beware of the foul fiend!) would ever put him upon the back of a great cantering horse. But so it was. Some demon whispered “Slegg you ought to ride,” and to ride he accordingly began, to the very great astonishment of every passer by, for his horse, though a very quiet one, happened to have at that moment some singular fancies, in which Slegg to gain the animal's confidence indulged him—such as sidling up against the door of a house, running his head against a house side, walking up narrow passages, and at length, which inconvenienced his rider most of all, trotting—in consequence of which Slegg came to the ground before he got out of the streets of Cambridge. S. however has persevered most manfully and in spite of repeated descents still threatens to become an accomplished cavalier. The other day his beast got the dominion over him and deposed him in such a way as to collect almost all the inhabitants of Barnwell about him, who appeared somewhat disappointed that he was not as they said “all smashed to pieces.” He was however no worse, though he thought it advisable to get himself phlebotomized.

Among all this you will suppose that mathematics do not go on very well—better perhaps than you imagine but certainly not so well as they ought to do. I wish you were at Cambridge—I have not got any body to talk mathematics to—Nobody that would care a fig if I were to tell them that when Force varies as  $\frac{1}{r^7}$ , and Velocity equals that from infinity, a body describes a lemniscate with two loops, when Force varies as  $\frac{1}{r^9}$  a curve with three loops, when Force varies as  $\frac{1}{r^{11}}$  a curve with four loops; and so on. I scarcely ever hear the Senate House mentioned except by

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REV. G. MORLAND. 1815.

Whittaker, who always asks whether I am reading. Wilkinson leaves Cambridge tomorrow and I rather think is going N. to stay for some weeks. Perhaps you may recollect a man of your college who took his degree a year or two back of the name of Thomas Briarly—do you know whether he is yet alive and in England? Since he left Cambridge there has not been anything heard of him. Communicate what intelligence you can concerning him as it is hoped he may yet possibly be in existence. At present I suppose you are “teaching the young idea how to shoot”; are any of the young ideas that you have got likely to make good shots? Will any of them bring down a high wrangler? In Higgin I suppose you will not have a pupil who is bigoted to some theory or notion of his own. And Whitcombe? what manner of mathematician,—or (what is a much more important question) what manner of wrangler will he make? Expound to me concerning these things—I would add if I thought you would pay any attention to it—*very soon*.

Yours truly, W. WHEWELL.

CAMBRIDGE, Dec. 15, 1815.

DEAR MORLAND,

I ought in all conscience sooner to have answered your request for something intelligible on the subject of my last letter, which so far as I can recollect must have been very particular nonsense (not a very uncommon occurrence). I believe it conveyed to you certain yearnings after the whole circle of the sciences, certain ecstatic aspirations after universal knowledge, certain indefinite desires to approximate to something like omniscience. It is most certain that the mind of man is given to such morbid generalizations, but woe betide the wight who either expects that such a spirit will support him through all the details even of one science, or that without the accuracy of detail he may content himself with the amplitude of general views, the magnificence of extensive vacuity. But though not much good would be likely to come of me if I were to remain in such an all-reading, all-learning mood for ever, I am much rejoiced that you seem to