

1834

Letters from New England – No. 2

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Repository Citation

Minor, Lucian, "Letters from New England – No. 2" (1834). *Faculty Publications*. 1559.
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months a year; surround him with a dense population—80, instead of 19, to the square mile; bring strangers, constantly, in flocks to his neighborhood; place a cheap and comfortable inn but a mile or two off; give him a ready and near market for his garden stuffs, as well as for his grain and tobacco—and ask yourself, if he could, or would, practise our “good old Virginia hospitality?” To us, who enjoy the credit and the pleasure of entertaining a guest, while the drudgery devolves upon our slaves; the larger scale (wastefully large) of our daily rations, too, making the presence of one or more additional months absolutely unfelt;—hospitality is a cheap, easy, and delightful virtue. But put us in place of the yankees, in the foregoing respects, and any man of sense and candor must perceive that we could not excel them. Personal observation and personal experience, make me “a swift witness” to their having, in ample measure, the kindness of soul, which soothes and sweetens human life: a kindness ready to expand, when occasion bids, as well towards the stranger, as towards the object of nearer ties. No where have I seen *equal* evidences of public spirit; of munificent charity; of a generous yielding up of individual advantage to the common good. No where, more, or lovelier, examples of domestic affection and happiness—evinced by tokens, small it is true, but not to be counterfeited or mistaken. And no where have I had entertainers task themselves more to please and profit me, as a guest. Yet, as you know, few can have witnessed more of Virginia hospitality than I have. It would be unpardonable egotism, and more *personal* than I choose to be, even in bestowing just praise; besides “spinning my yarn” too long—to do more than glance at the many kindnesses, which warrant the audacious heresy, of comparing our northern brethren with ourselves, in our most prominent virtue. Gentlemen, some of them of advanced years, and engaged in such pursuits, as make their time valuable both to themselves and the public, have devoted hours to shewing me all that could amuse or interest a stranger, in their vicinities—accompanying me on foot, and driving me in their own vehicles, for miles, to visit scenes of present wonder, or of historic fame: patiently answering my innumerable questions; and explaining, with considerate minuteness, whatever occurred as needing explanation, in the vast and varied round of moral and physical inquiry. In surveying literary, charitable, and political institutions—in trying to ascertain, by careful, and doubtless, troublesome cross-questionings, the structure and practical effects of judicial, and school, and pauper systems—in examining the machinery (human and inanimate) of manufactories—in probing their tendencies upon minds and morals—in ‘stumbling o’er recollections,’ in Boston, on Bunker’s hill, and around Lexington—I found guides, enlighteners, and hosts, such as I can never hope to see surpassed, if equalled, for friendliness and intelligence. A friend of ours from Virginia, who was in the city of Boston with his family when I was, carried a letter of introduction to one of the citizens. “This gentleman, for three days,” said our friend, “gave himself up entirely to us; brought his carriage to the hotel, and carried us in it over the city, and all its beautiful environs; in short, he seemed to think that he could not do enough to amuse and gratify us.” To enjoy such treatment as this, one must, of course, in general, come introduced,

LETTERS FROM NEW ENGLAND.—NO. 2.

Our readers will participate with us in the pleasure of reading the second letter from *New England*, by an accomplished Virginian, whose easy and forcible style is so well employed in depicting the manners and character of a portion of our countrymen, separated from us not more by distance, than by those unhappy prejudices which too often spring up between members of the same family. The acute observation of men and things which these letters evince, will entitle them to be seriously read and considered,—and they will not have been written in vain, if they serve to remove the misconceptions of a single mind. We repeat what we stated in our last number, that although they were originally published in the Fredericksburg Arena, they have since undergone the revision and correction of the author expressly for publication in the Messenger.

Northampton, Mass. July 25, 1834.

Of Yankee hospitality (curl not your lip sardonically—you, or any other Buckskin,)—of Yankee hospitality there is a great deal, *in their way*—i. e. according to the condition and circumstances of society. Not a tittle more can be said of Virginia hospitality. Set one of our large farmers down upon a hundred, instead of a thousand, acres; let him, and his sons, cultivate it themselves; feed the cattle; rub down and feed the horses; milk the cows; cut wood and make fires; let his wife and daughters alone tend the garden; wash, iron, cook, make clothes, make the beds, and clean up the house; let him have but ten acres of wood land, in a climate where snow lies three, and frosts come for seven,

by letter or otherwise. Then—nay, according to my experience, in some instances without any introduction,—the tide of kindness flows as ungrudgingly as that of Virginia hospitality, and far more beneficially to the object: at an expense, too, not only of money, but of time—which here, more emphatically than any where else in America, is money. When travelling on foot, I had no letters to present—no introduction, except of myself. Still, unbought civilities, and more than civilities, usually met me. A farmer, at whose house I obtained comfortable quarters on the first night of my walk, refused all compensation, giving me at the same time a hearty welcome, and an invitation to stay to breakfast. Next day, a man in a jersey wagon, overtook me, and invited me to ride with him. I did so, for an hour, while our roads coincided: and found him intelligent, as well as friendly. Whenever I wanted, along the road, refreshing drinks were given me;—cider, switchell, and water—the two first always unasked for. One *guide-wife*, at whose door I called for a glass of water, made me sit down, treated me abundantly to cider; and, finding that my object was to see the country and learn the ways of its people, laid herself out to impart such items of information as seemed likely to interest me: wishing me ‘great success’ at parting. Many similar instances of kindness occurred. It is true, none of the country people invited me to partake of their meals, except my first host just mentioned—an omission, however, for which I was prepared, because it arose naturally from the condition of things here. One testimonial more you shall have, to New England benevolence, from a third person. A deserter from the British navy—moneyless, shoeless, with only yarn socks on; feet blistered—and actually suffering from a fever and ague—told me that he had walked all the way from Bath, in Maine, to the neighborhood of Hartford, where I overtook him, entirely upon charity; and *had never asked for food or shelter in vain*. A lady that day had given him a clean linen shirt. There was no whining in this poor fellow’s tale of distress: his tone was manly, and his port erect: he seemed, like a true sailor, as frank in accepting relief, as he would be free in giving it.

The result of all my observation is, that the New Englanders have in their hearts as much of the *original material* of hospitality as we have: that, considering the sacrifices it costs them, and the circumstances which modify its application, they *actually use* as much of that material as we do; and that, although their mode of using it is less *amiable* than ours, it is more *rational*, more *salutary*—better for the guest, better for the host, better for society. And most gladly would I see my countrymen and countrywomen exchange the ruinous profusion; which, to earn, or preserve, a vainglorious name, pampers and stupifies themselves and impoverishes their country, for the discriminating and judicious hospitality of New England: retaining only those freer and more captivating traits of their own, which are warranted by our sparser settlements, our ampler fields, and our different social organization.

Yet, while such praise is due to the general civility and kindness of the New Englanders, it must be qualified by saying, that several times, I have experienced discourtesy, which chafed me a good deal: but always from persons who, in their own neighborhoods, would be considered as vulgar. The simplest and most harm-

less question, propounded in my *civilest* manner, has occasionally been answered with a gruffness, that would for half a minute upset my equanimity. For example—“Good morning sir” (to a hulking, rough, carter-looking fellow, one hot morning, when I had walked eight miles before breakfast)—“how far to Enfield?” “Little better ‘an a mile,”—was the answer; in an abrupt, surly, unmodulated tone, uttered without even turning his head as he passed me. Two or three of “mine hosts,” at inns, were churlishly grudging in their responses to my inquiries about the products, usages, and statistics, of their neighborhoods. For these, however, I at once saw a twofold excuse: they were very busy and my questions were very numerous—besides the irritating circumstance, that answers were not always at hand—and to be *posed*, is what flesh and blood cannot bear. And it makes me think no worse than before, either of human nature in general, or of Yankee character in particular, that such slights occurred, nearly in every instance, whilst I was a somewhat shabby looking way-farer on foot; scarcely ever, while travelling in stage, or steamboat. Such distinctions are made, all the world over: in Virginia, as well as elsewhere.

A Southron, not accustomed to wait much upon himself, here feels sensibly the scantiness of the personal service he meets with. Even I—though for years more than half a Yankee in that respect—missed, rather awkwardly, on first coming hither, the superfluous, and often cumbersome attentions of our southern waiters. Besides having frequently to brush my own clothes, I am put to some special trouble in the best hotels, to get my shoes cleaned. In many village inns, sumptuous and comfortable in most respects, this last is a luxury hardly to be hoped for. This scarcity of menial service arises partly from the nice economy, with which the number of hands about a house is graduated to the general, and smallest possible, quantity of necessary labor; and partly, from a growing aversion to such services among the “help” themselves, caused, or greatly heightened, by the increased demand and higher wages for them in the numerous manufactories throughout the country. Almost every where, I am told of their asking higher pay, and growing more fastidious, and intractable, as household servants. “*Servants*” indeed, they will not allow themselves to be called. A “marry-come-up-ish” toss, if not an immediate quitting of the house, is the probable consequence of so terming them. The above, more creditable designation, is that which must be used—at least in their presence. By the by, though the gifted author of “*Hope Leslie*” says that the *singular* plural, “help,” alone, is proper, I find popular usage (“*quem penes arbitrium*”—you know) sanctioning the regular plural form “helps,” whenever reference is made to more than one.

The spirit, and the habits, which oblige one to do so much for himself within doors, produce corresponding effects without. Useful labor is no where disdained in New England, by any class of society. Proprietors, and their sons, though wealthy, frequently work on the farms, and in the gardens, stables, and barns. Two or three days ago, I saw an old gentleman (Squire * * *) a justice of the peace, and for several years a useful member of the Legislature, toiling in his hay harvest. Two of the richest men in this village—possessing habitations among the most elegant in this assemblage of

elegant dwellings--I have seen busy with hoe and rake, in their highly cultivated grounds. The wife of a tavern-keeper, in Rhode Island, worth \$40,000, prepared my breakfast, and waited upon me at it, with a briskness such as I never saw equalled. Similar instances are so frequent and familiar, as to be unnoticed except by strangers. Many of New England's eminent men of former days, were constant manual laborers; not only in boyhood, and in obscurity, but after achieving distinction. Putnam, it is well known, was ploughing when he heard of the bloody fray at Lexington; and left both plough and team in the field, to join and lead in the strife for liberty. Judge Swift, of Connecticut, who wrote a law book* of some merit, and, I believe, a History of Connecticut, was a regular laborer on his farm, whilst he was a successful practiser of the Law. An amusing story is told (which I cannot now stop to repeat) of his being severely drubbed by the famous Matthew Lyon, then his indented servant; while they worked together in the barn. Timothy Pickering, after serving with distinction through the revolution--being aid to General Washington, Representative and Senator in Congress, and Secretary of State--spent the evening of his unusually prolonged and honored life, in the culture of a small farm of 120 or 130 acres, with a suitably modest dwelling, near Salem, Mass.: literally, and through necessity, (for he was always poor) earning his bread by his own daily toil. With Dr. Johnson, I deride the hacknied pedantry of a constant recurrence to ancient Greece and Rome--without, however, being quite ready to "knock any man down who talks to me about the second Punic War." But, in contemplating the stern virtues, that poverty and rural toil fostered in those earlier worthies of New England, and that still animate the "bold yeomanry, a nation's pride," who yet hold out against the advancing tide of wealth, indolence, and luxury--I cannot forbear an exulting comparison of these my countrymen, with the pure and hardy spirits that graced the best days of republican Rome:

Regulum, et Scauros, animæque magnæ
 Prodigum Paulum superante Pæno,
 * * * * *
 Fabricumque,
 Hunc, et incomptis Curium capillis
 Utilem bello, tullit, et Camillum,
 Sævæ paupertas, et avitus apto
 Cum lare fundus.

In the household economy of these thrifty and industrious people, it were endless to specify all the things worthy of our imitation. Their use of cold bread conduces to good in a threefold way: a less quantity satisfies the appetite, and it is in itself more digestible than warm bread; thus doubly promoting health: while there is a sensible saving of flour. The more frugal scale upon which their ordinary meals are set forth, is another point in which for the sake of economy, health, and clearness of mind, we might do well to copy them. By burning seasoned wood, kept ready for the saw in a snug house built on purpose, and by the simple expedient of having the doors shut and all chinks carefully closed, they secure warm rooms with half the fuel that would otherwise be necessary. I cannot, however, forgive their bringing no buttermilk to table. The natives seem wholly ignorant, how pleasant and wholesome a

food it is for man; and give it to their pigs. The hay-harvest lasts from four to six weeks; it has been going on ever since the 1st of July. Of course, the hay cut at such different periods must vary greatly in ripeness; and here they confirm me in a long standing belief, which I have striven in vain to impress upon some Virginia hay farmers--that the hay, cut before the seeds are nearly ripe, is always best. The earlier part of the mowing, (where the crop is about equally forward) is most juicy, sweet and tender. The corn is now in tassel, having attained nearly its full height: the height of about five feet, on rich land! It is a sort differing from ours: small in grain and ear, as well as in stalk; and very yellow grained. It ripens in less time than ours; adapting itself to the shorter summers of this latitude. It is planted very thick: three or four stalks in a hill, and the hills but three feet apart.

With many vegetables and fruits, the season is five or six weeks later here than in Virginia. Thus, garden peas are still, every day, on the tables: I had cherries in Boston last week, of kinds which ripened with us early in June; and it is but a fortnight, since strawberries, both red and white, were given me in Connecticut--by the way, it was *at breakfast*.

On the margin of this village, is a curious agricultural exhibition. It is a large tract of flat land upon Connecticut river, of great fertility and value (one hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars an acre,) containing altogether several thousand acres. With one or two trifling exceptions, it has no houses or dividing fences upon it, though partitioned among perhaps two hundred proprietors. Hardly an opulent, or *middling* wealthy man in Northampton, but owns a lot of five, ten, twenty, or fifty acres, in this teeming expanse. The lots are all in crops, of one kind or other; and being mostly of regular shapes (oblongs, or other four sided figures,) the various aspects they present, accordingly as the crop happens to be deep green, light green, or yellow--mown, or unmown--afford a singular and rich treat, to an eye that can at once survey the whole. Most opportunely, Mount Holyoke (the great lion of western Massachusetts, to scenery-hunters,) furnishes the very stand, whence not only this lovely plain is seen, but the river, its valley, and the adjacent country, for twenty or thirty miles around. Nearly a thousand feet below you, and not quite a mile from the foot of the mountain, the low ground, fantastically chequered into lots so variously sized and colored--dwindling too, by the distance, into miniatures of themselves--reminds you of a gay bed-quilt. A lady of our party (we ascended the mountain this afternoon, and staid till after sunset,) aptly compared it to a Yankee *comfort*; the elms and fruit trees dotted over the surface, and shrunk and softened in the distance, representing the tufts of wool which besprinkle that appropriately named article of furniture. The whole landscape, seen from Mount Holyoke, it would be presumptuous in me to try to describe. I have said, twenty or thirty miles around: but in one direction, we see, in clear weather, the East and West Rocks, near New Haven--about seventy miles off. Fourteen villages are within view. The whole scene is panoramic: it is as vivid and distinct as reality; but rich, soft and mellow, as a picture. We descended; and as we recrossed the river by twilight, the red gleams from the western sky, reflected in

* On Evidence, and Bills of Exchange and Promissory Notes.

long lines from the dimpling water, forced upon more than one mind that fine passage in a late work of fiction, where the remark, that "no man can judge of the happiness of another," is illustrated by the reflection of moon-beams from a lake. But I am growing lack-a-daisical: and must conclude.

I set off in the stage for Albany, at two o'clock in the morning. Good night.