

SOME LETTERS OF WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY

EDITED BY DANIEL GREGORY MASON

[Mr. Mason, now Assistant Professor of Music at Columbia University, became a close friend of Moody in undergraduate days at Harvard, and to the end of Moody's life this intimacy was maintained. From Mr. Mason's interesting collection the *Atlantic* is enabled to print two groups of the young poet's most characteristic letters. — THE EDITORS.]

To Josephine Preston Peabody

CHICAGO UNIVERSITY, Sept. 22, 1895.

MY DEAR MISS PEABODY:—

I have put off sending you the verses with the naïve thought of using them for a link between the old Cambridge life and this new one. Scoff at my superstition, but do not too scornfully entreat the pathetic little versicle of a bond-bearer, shivering with the double knowledge of the portentous mission and his own objective comicality. Cambridge — mellow and autumnal — begins already to take on really mythic colors — to loom symbolic, under the stress of this relentless prairie light and vast featureless horizon. I begin to believe that your charge against me of theatricality was just — that all my life there in the east was a sort of tragic-farce, more or less consciously composed, so rudely awake and in earnest is everything here. . . .

I do not know what this place is going to do for me, but am sure of its potency — its alchemical power to change and transmute. It is appallingly ugly for one thing — so ugly that the double curtain of night and sleep does not screen the aching sense. For another thing it is absorbing — crude juice of

life — intellectual and social protoplasm. Far aloft hovers phantom Poetry, no longer my delicate familiar. But I dream of another coming of hers, a new companionship more valorous and simple-hearted. . . .

To Daniel Gregory Mason

[CHICAGO, October 2, 1895.]

Your letter came yesterday, with cheek on the smooth cheek of another — a friendlier pair nor a tunefuller ever stretched wing together. Riding to town on some sort of transfigured chariot that whilom was a railway car, I perused them. Rest of morning spent shopping in the New Jerusalem, walking on golden pavements, and interwarbling on the theme of shirts and socks with whatever seraphic creatures had found it good that day to put on the habit and estate of shop-girls for the glory of God and the furtherance of his kingdom. Returning, the lake allured me — one topaz. Re-reading of letters. Throbbing of the topaz heart: opening and shutting of the sunlight: bursting to bloom of some sudden impalpable enveloping flower of the air, with the scent thereof. The twentieth century dates from yesterday, and we are its chosen; if not as signs set in the heavens of its glory, at least as morning birds that carolled to it, mindless of the seductive and quite palpable worm.

More later — brutally busy.

W—

To Daniel Gregory Mason

[CHICAGO, October 23, 1895.]

DEAR DAN: —

I have so far made but miserly return for that bully long letter you wrote in the purpureal flush of reconciliation and nascent duality — or let me say, and try to think, trinity — with the Bard. If you knew the beast Chicago, the pawing and glaring of it, you would not find me hard to forgive. . . .

For my own part I have been having a highly exciting time. I have two classes — one of forty, the other of twenty — nearly two-thirds of whom are girls. Picture my felicity when I inform you that far from the frowsy, bedraggled, anemic, simpering creatures I anticipated, half of them at least are stars. I regret that popular usage should have dechromatized the term, for I mean stars of the most authentic stellarity and the most convincing twinkle. Lecturing before them is like a singing progress from Boötes to the Lyre, with wayfaring worlds to lift the chorus. At the beginning I made an honest man's effort to talk about the qualities of style and the methods of description, but I am a weak vessel. Now I droll blissfully about God in his world, with occasional wadings into spumy Styx and excursions into the empyrean. My work has been heavier so far than I fondly hoped it would be, and I can see little chance ahead for sleeping on Latmos. I experience aching diastoles,¹ however, and that is the great thing to my thinking. To be a poet is a much better thing than to write poetry — out here at least, watched by these wide horizons, beckoned to by these swift streamers of victorious sunset. After the fall term my

¹ A word we had borrowed from physiology — the dilatation of the heart in beating — and used as a name for moods of spiritual elation. — D. G. M.

work will be lighter, then I shall try a night out, on a bed of lunary.

I have just had a letter from —, air rarified, sky greyish, with half hints of opal and dove's breast, a confused twittering from the hedges, not unpleasing. Tenuous, but tense, like a harp string in the treble.

W. V. M.

To Josephine Preston Peabody

[Autumn, 1895.]

Tell you about it? Doth the wind know its wound, wherefore it groaneth? It is only an affliction of the stars, at least this recent bundle of pangs; they are of those that eat the hearts of crazy-headed comets zigzagging across the Zodiac. Doubtless the incontinent closing of the moon-flower dailies left me more defenseless against these malign astral inroads, but the root of the matter is some sort of cosmic apoplexy or ear-ache of which I happen to be the centre. Τὸ Πᾶν has the falling-sickness or the everlasting doldrums, and selects me to ache through — that is all. If I were not precociously aware of the devices of his Celestial Completeness I should suppose quite simply that Chicago was boring me to death, that my work was meaningless drudgery, that the crowd of spiteful assiduous nothings that keep me from It (ah, the vague, sweet-shrouding, mute, arch vocable!) were tantalizing me into stupid rage, and stinging my eye-balls into blindness of the light. When in moments of weakness I transfer the blame for my inward dissatisfaction and disarray to outward things, I am on the point of trundling my little instructorial droning-gear into Lake Michigan, and stepping out west or south on the Open Road, a free man by the grace of God, and a tramp by Rachel's intercession. But of course I know that I should only be changing garments, and that I should wake up

some fine night and find my hay-stack bristling with just such goblin dissension as now swarms over my counterpane. However, it is easy to stand dissension. Anything is better than that awful hush settling down on everything, as if Τὸ Παρ had suddenly discovered himself to be stuffed with sawdust, and lost interest in his own ends and appetites. And that silence your brave words have scared back. I really begin to think you are Wise, and to stand in awe of you. That is a more convincing presentment of the 'transcendent identity,' that which shows it casting its own brain on one side as a worn-out accessory, holding its own heart in its hands to burn, like the angel in Dante's dream. I pay you the compliment of believing that you would be capable of that, and I find it illustrious, and with your gracious permission propose to set it for a sign, right at a cross-roads where I sometimes skulk belated, peering fearful-eyed for Hecate.

The truth of the matter is, I suppose, that I am dissatisfied to the point of desperation with the kind of life that is possible out here. I used to have days in the east when a hedge of lilac over a Brattle Street fence, or a strenuous young head caught against a windy sweep of sunset on Harvard bridge, filled me with poignant perceptions of a freer life of sense and spirit, — and I was frequently vaguely unhappy over it. But, after all, one had n't far to go before finding some refinement of feeling, some delicate arabesque of convention, to help make up for the lack of liberty; but here there is even less liberty (because less thought) and there is nothing — or next to nothing — to compensate. If my lines were cast in other places, — even other places in this gigantic ink-blot of a town — I could make shift to enjoy my breath. I should make a very happy and efficient peanut-vender on

Clark or Randolph Street, because the rush and noise of the blood in the city's pulse would continually solicit and engage me. The life of a motor-man is not without exhilarating and even romantic features, and an imaginative boot-black is lord of unskirted realms. But out here, where there is no city life to gaze at, nothing to relieve the gaseous tedium of a mushroom intellectuality, no straining wickedness or valiant wrestling with hunger to break the spectacle of Gospel-peddling comfort, — the imagination doth boggle at it! . . .

To Josephine Preston Peabody

[Probably Autumn, 1895.]

. . . Mr. Ruskin would not be happy in Chicago — God is a very considerable personage — So is Mr. Rockefeller — So am I, but for a different reason — Towers of Babel are out of fashion — Ride a Rambler — Four fifths of William Blake would not be accepted for publication by the Harvard Advocate — Life at a penny plain is d—d dear — Eat H.O. — The poet in a golden clime was born, but moved away early — A man may yearn over his little brothers and sisters and still be a good Laodicean — Art is not long, but it takes a good while to make it short — There will be no opera or steel engraving in the twentieth century — An angle-worm makes no better bait because it has fed on Cæsar — Wood fires are dangerous — So is life at a penny plain, but for a different reason — Towers of Babel, though out of fashion, are well received in Chicago — There were no birds in the Tower of Babel — God is a very considerable personage — So is Olga Nethersole — So are you, but for a different reason — I am owner of the spheres, and grow land-poor — Literature is a fake and Nordau is its prophet — God bless McKinley — Love is not Time's fool: he was turned off for lack

of wit — Eve was born before Ann Radcliffe, so the world goes darkling — Tom's a cold — I am old-rose, quoth 'a — God's pittykins 'ield ye, zany, for thy apple-greenness! 'T would gi' the Sing-an-Sich a colic to set eyes on 'e — Natheless Monet was a good painter, and color-blind — W. V. M.

To Daniel Gregory Mason

Dec. 1, 1895.

MY DEAR DAN: —

Day after crowded day I have looked at your delightful long letter, and said, in the sweet babble of the Little Cricket Thing,¹ that I would answer it sooner or later, when I was not as busy as hell. Then the speaking lines about your reclining on the Padereuskian bosom, arrived, with their tantalizing suggestion of dim-lighted rooms, transcendentalized rum toddy, and an auroral head uttering gold vaticination. I was jaundiced with jealousy for a week, thinking of the fulness of your service before the great altars, and the wretched scantlings of effort I was permitted to give, standing afar off. To tell the truth, I have n't the faintest splinter of sympathy for the dolorousness of your condition, as set forth in your letter. To be a runner of scales and to work at canon and fugue by the job, strikes me as the most enviable estate of man. Every scale you run, every fugue you hammer out, is laying up treasure in heaven — not by way of communal walls and pavements only, but especially for the house which your own winged self-ship shall inhabit. I have as much respect for you as for a disgruntled peach seed, which should cry out against the lack of social opportunities in an underground community. And besides the ultimate satisfaction, there is the daily delight

¹ He refers to the parody by a Harvard friend, of some lines in his song, 'My Love is Gone into the East.' — D. G. M.

of pottering over your tools, trying their edge, polishing their surfaces, feeling their delectable ponderableness. No, you must go for comfort to somebody who does n't have a sense of radiant *bien-être* in fitting a new pen into a holder. . . .

I am looking forward to some bully good talks at Christmas, and some good music at your expense, and a bottle of wine wherein we may drink to the meek brows of Her and It. Meanwhile, write. WILL.

To Mary L. Mason

CHICAGO, Dec. 12, 1895.

MY DEAR MRS. MASON: —

You are wofully ignorant of the sweet uses of memory if you can picture me forgetting your delightful invitation to spend a fraction of my Christmas week at your home. . . .

Whisper it not in Gath, but I hunger and thirst after the East with a carnal longing. I thought I had relegated all you subtlety-spinning New Englanders to the limbo of the effete, where you were tolerantly allowed to exist and confuse economic relations only because you are, after all, rather nice. But of late, in the still watches, your niceness grows luminous and summoning. I still disapprove of you, but I want to see you very bad.

Expectantly,

WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY.

To Josephine Preston Peabody

CHICAGO, Dec. 15 [16?], 1895.

Just a word to tell you something of the immense good your letter did me. After I sent off the poem ['Jetsam'], the inevitable revulsion set in: I lost faith in it, and then, being in a state of nerves, took the easy step of losing faith in myself and the future. Still I kept hoping against hope that you would find a stray line to like and praise. When the days passed, and

your silence pronounced gentle but final condemnation, I sat down and read the lines over. They had fallen dead ink. The paper dropped to the floor; I sat, elbows on desk and head in hands, and thought. I had felt the thing, I had put my best breath into the lines, and here they were, not only dead past hope, but graceless, repulsive, without the dignity or pathos of death. What then?

For a long time I did not have heart squarely to face the issue — Life without that hope and solace, that pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night, — could I live it out so, in some sort of grey content? Outside my window the moon came out over the turbulent brute groping of the brown surge, walking in light as when she tormented the lowered eyes of Job, tempting him from Jehovah. She called me out with her, miles along the coast, and as I stumbled along in the vague light, gradually the mere effort I had made to say something of her wonder, began to seem its own justification. When I came back the pages I gathered from the floor were farther than ever from adequacy, but somehow I cared for them, as one cares for a dead thing one picks up in the hedges, thinking of its brave fight for life. Then your letter came, and I read, stupidly at first, not understanding, your words of generous praise. I knew you were artist enough not to utter them merely for friendship's sake, and when I understood them, they filled me with joy which would have been out of all proportion to the matter at stake except that for me it was one of those mysterious pivotal small things on which the future turns silent and large. So you had actually liked it all, and were glad it had been done? Then it was not dead after all; my eyes had been seared? I read it through in the flush of pleasure and found it good, — absurdly, ravish-

ingly good! So I took a deep breath and sat down to write it over, with the sharp light of remembered disillusion on its weaknesses, and the memories of my night walk to beckon me on. I shall crave judgment on the result at Christmas, for I purpose to make a descent on Boston then, ravenous with a three-months' abstinence from subtlety-spinning. . . . I have . . . written to — again. He has owed me a letter since September, but God knows who has the rights of this wretchedness, and of all our funny little Pantheon the absurd little god who gets the least of my service is the one labelled 'Personal Dignity.' I cannot think of any personal sacrifice I would not make to convince him of my friendship, or rather to establish once more the conditions which make friendship possible. I hope this does n't sound superior; it is not so meant.

W. V. M.

To Daniel Gregory Mason

Dec. 15, 1895.

1. Shall reach New York . . . Dec. 19.
2. Shall reach Boston . . . Dec. 26.
3. Must leave Boston . . . Dec. 31.
4. Shall leave Boston . . . God knows.

All except last date subject to change without notice.

W. V. M.

To Mrs. C. H. Toy

[CHICAGO] *Jan. 6, 1896.*

MY DEAR MRS. TOY:—

. . . It seemed very good to see a Cambridge face again, especially against this background of phantasmagoric ugliness. I long for something beautiful to look at with a really agonized and fleshly longing. My eye is horny with smoke and the outlines of grain elevators. But I must not enlarge upon my 'state,' since day is at hand. Looking up through the murk and the swaying shadow of seaweed I can just catch a hint of vanishing bubbles and

green shattered needles of light. Two months more and I shall lift my encompassed head above the waters. Then off with the diving gear and ho for the groves of banyan and of cocoa-nut, and the little Injuns that grow between! . . .

To Daniel Gregory Mason

Sunday, Jan. 19, 1896.

DEAR DAN: —

The news you send about your wrist is quite heart-breaking. I have not written sooner because I could not find it in my breast to speak comfort, feeling there only rebellion and disgust at the world-order and its ghastly lack of breeding. How did you precipitate it? I can only fall back on thoughts of Schumann and his lame finger or whatever it was that spoiled him for concert gymnastics, and made him a minstrel in the court celestial. At any rate that question of composing away from the piano is settled, with a right parental emphasis from the slipper of Mis-chance. . . . I will spare you the usual admonition about the rigidity of your upper lip, in spite of the natural longing I feel to use the heirloom.

I have been brutally busy since getting back, on Uncle Horace's book,¹ so that all my schemes of spiritual conquest are done up in moth-balls for the time being. . . . One o'clock midnight, and the morrow flames responsibility. Hire a typewriter — marry one if necessary — and we will annihilate space. I have a creature to tell you about — but a Creature! W. V. M.

To Daniel Gregory Mason

CHICAGO, Feb. 16, 1896.

DEAR DAN: —

I have just heard from your sister-in-law of your enforced furlough. I am not going to help you curse your luck,

¹ Some editorial work he had undertaken for Mr. Horace Scudder. — D. G. M.

knowing your native capabilities in that direction to be perfectly adequate, but my Methodist training urges me to give you an epistolary hand-grasp, the purport of which is 'Keep your sand.' I could say other things, not utterly pharasaical. I could say what I have often said to myself, — with a rather reedy tremolo perhaps, but swelling sometimes into a respectable diapason: 'The dark cellar ripens the wine.' And meanwhile, after one's eyes get used to the dirty light, and one's feet to the mildew, a cellar has its compensations. I have found beetles of the most interesting proclivities, mice altogether comradely and persuadable, and forgotten potatoes that sprouted toward the crack of sunshine with a wan maiden grace not seen above. I don't want to pose as resourceful, but I have seen what I have seen.

The metaphor is however happily inexact in your case, with Milton to retire to and Cambridge humming melodiously on the horizon. If you can only throttle your Daemon, or make him forego his leonine admonition, 'Accomplish,' and roar you as any sucking dove the sweet vocable 'Be,' — you ought to live. I have got mine trained to that, pardee! and his voice grows not untunable. I pick up shreds of comfort out of this or that one of God's ash-barrels.

Yesterday I was skating on a patch of ice in the park, under a poverty-stricken sky flying a pitiful rag of sunset. Some little muckers were guying a slim raw-boned Irish girl of fifteen, who circled and darted under their banter with complete unconcern. She was in the fledgling stage, all legs and arms, tall and adorably awkward, with a huge hat full of rusty feathers, thin skirts tucked up above spindling ankles, and a gay aplomb and swing in the body that was ravishing. We caught hands in midflight, and

skated for an hour, almost alone and quite silent, while the rag of sunset rotted to pieces. I have had few sensations in life that I would exchange for the warmth of her hand through the ragged glove, and the pathetic curve of the half-formed breast where the back of my wrist touched her body. I came away mystically shaken and elate. It is thus the angels converse. She was something absolutely authentic, new, and inexpressible, something which only nature could mix for the heart's intoxication, a compound of ragamuffin, pal, mistress, nun, sister, harlequin, outcast, and bird of God, — with something else bafflingly suffused, something ridiculous and frail and savage and tender. With a world offering such rencontres, such aery strifes and adventures, who would not live a thousand years stone dumb? I would, for one — until my mood changes and I come to think on the shut lid and granite lip of him who has done with sunsets and skating, and has turned away his face from all manner of Irish. I am supported by a conviction that at an auction on the steps of the great white Throne, I should bring more in the first mood than the second — by several harps and a stray dulcimer.

I thoroughly envy you your stay at Milton — wrist, Daemon, and all. You must send me a lengthy account of the state of things in Cambridge. . . . If the wrist forbids writing, employ a typewriter of the most fashionable tint — I will pay all expenses and stand the breakage. I stipulate that you shall avoid blondes however; they are fragile.

WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY.

To Daniel Gregory Mason

CHICAGO, April 11, 1896.

MY DEAR DAN: —

Yesterday morning mint appeared in the market windows, and this morn-

ing the lake is a swoon of silver and blue; — argal, I must write you a letter. I have felt for the past two weeks as if I had fallen heir to something, owing to the fact that spring turns out to be a month earlier here than in the east, and she comes over the prairies with the naïve confidence and sweet quick surrender that she has learned from the prairie girls. For the first time since your rustication I have ceased to envy you your domiciliation among the blue hills of Milton, for my side of the bubble has swung sunward and what care I if it be made of kitchen soap? I walk about in an amber clot of sensuousness, and feel the sap mount, like a tree. I thought — and often gloomily asseverated — that I had got over this purring rapture at the general situation, legitimately the gift of the primitive or the jagged. Well, I did not give Nature credit for the virtue that is in her.

My work, alas, still continues to be hard. *I use up all my vital energies before the evening loaf comes on, and then have force only for passive delights. I stick a good round straw into a cask of Spenser or Hardy, and suck myself to sleep — to dream of orchards and 'golden-tongued Romance with serene lute.' The hard bright sun of a western morning, with theme classes superimposed, reduces the golden tongue to phantom thinness of song, and banishes the lute into the limbo of the ridiculous, but I plod on eveningwards with mole-like assiduity. I have come to realize the wonderful resources of passive enjoyment better than I ever did before — perhaps perversely, perhaps according to a mere instinct of self-preservation against the hurry and remorseless effectiveness of life out here. Whatever the cause, I have found out how good a thing it is to be a silly sheep and batten on the moor, to stand in cool shallows and let the water

go by and the minnows dart and the brook moss stretch its delicate fingers. Also I seem to be coming, half through disappointed effort and half through this same effortlessness, to discern more clearly what is worthy in human motive and admirable in human achievement. It is not that I love Shakespere less, but that I love Ophelia more.

W. V. M.

To Daniel Gregory Mason

May, 24, 1896.

DEAR DAN:—

Thanks for your painstaking and very perceptive criticism. I cannot bring myself yet to accept all your strictures unconditionally, but I find them all suggestively and wisely hortatory, pointing the way where the real pitfalls lie for me; and I know that by the time I come to put the verses in permanent form I shall have accepted most of them literally. Still, while I am still unpersuaded, let me distinguish. The vague syntax of st. II is undoubtedly mere slovenliness: the stanza shall go the way of the ungirt loin. Also st. VII is as you say turgid, and must go, even though it drag with it the next stanza, which you like. As regards the suspension of the sense in sts. IV-VI I cannot agree. It seems to me that the breathlessness and holding-alooft is justified by the emphasis with which the concluding thought is thus given, and still more by the fact that it sets the essential thought off in a rounded form. It has a constructive value, also, as contrasting with the simple declaratory forms of statement which precede and follow it. I fancy it corresponds in my mind somewhat to an 'organ-point' in yours. The adjectives are too many, I know; but I am a little cold-blanketed and worried over your specific objections to phrase. 'Paltry roof' is paltry, I freely admit; 'wind-control' and 'moonward melo-

dist' are rococo as hell. But the other three to which you take exception I am sure are good poetry. . . . I think—pardon the egotism of the utterance (you would if you knew what tears of failure have gone to water the obstreperous little plant)—I think you are not tolerant enough of the instinct for conquest in language, the attempt to push out its boundaries, to win for it continually some new swiftness, some rare compression, to distill from it a more opaline drop. Is n't it possible, too, to be pedantic in the demand for simplicity? It's a cry which, if I notice aright, nature has a jaunty way of disregarding. Command a rosebush in the stress of June to purge itself; coerce a convolvulus out of the paths of catachresis. Amen! W. V. M.

Please be good-natured and talk back. Or no, don't. Spare the arm.

To Daniel Gregory Mason

[CHICAGO, June 23, 1896.]

DEAR DAN:—

The report which you make of your lack of progress in health casts a gloom over my days. I am about starting for Wisconsin for a week's bicycling, and the monstrous egoism of bodily vigor which I feel, possesses my soul with shame. The thing for you to do is to come to Chicago: it is the greatest health resort going—*mirabile dictu*. We live on bicycling, base-ball, breezes, beer, and buncombe, and keep right chipper mostly. Can't you come out for a while? We have an extra bedroom, and if you can stand bachelor shiftlessness after the golden calm of Milton housekeeping, we could put you up 'snugly.' The quotation marks are only a warning as to the point of view. Expense need be no deterrent. Walking is good all the way, and hand-outs rich and plentiful. Think of it seriously. We will send you back *mens*

sana surely, and *sano corpore* if we have luck. Allons!

I have grown quite meek over the verses, as I thought I should. I accept your strictures on the suspended construction, with only the lingering spiteful affirmation that two persons to whom I read the poem seemed to find far less difficulty in following the syntax than you assert as normal. The alternative explanations of the discrepancy in judgment are both too disagreeable to pursue. At worst it is only one more failure; success only looms a little haughtier, a little more disdainful of conquest. Esperance and set on!

I have had an enormous little adventure since I wrote last. Another Girl of course. This time a Westerner *par excellence* — a Californian, dating mentally from the age of Rousseau and Chateaubriand, with geysers and cloud bursts of romanticism, not to say sentimentality; dating spiritually from the Age of Gold, or some remoter purity, some Promethean dawn, some first-foam-birth in hyperborean seas. She likes Gibson's drawings, adores *Munsey's*, and sings 'Don't be Cross, Dear' with awful unction. After this you will not believe me when I say that she gave me the most unbearable shiver of rapture at the recognition of essential girlhood that I for a long time remember. Well, have you ever slept under the same roof with such a person, in the country, and wakened at that moment before dawn when in the 'spectral uncompounded light' the spirit is least capable of defense, when it feels only a membrane separating it from the shock of joy and woe as they stream from the passionate day-spring, and have you felt the sense of that common shelter like a caress, heard through walls and doors the rise and fall of her breast as an ineffable rhythm swaying the sun? If you have you can realize the gone feeling that possessed

me when she said (interpreting my own gloomy guess) that my kind was not her kind, that my language was not her language, and that her soul could only be studious to avoid mine, as the bird flying southward in spring avoids the hunter. I bowed assent and came home. I now nurse memories and grow elegiac. Come to Chicago!

W. V. M.

To Robert Morris Lovett

CHICAGO, July 14, '96.

... T—— turned up bright and early for his fifteen dollars, and continues to pay us little friendly visits from time to time. He now has his eye on the Civil Service. The Civil Service has not yet got its eye on him, but may in the fullness of time. . . .

It has been unspeakably hot — life a tragedy and a tongue-lolling — flat 7 a place of penance, teaching a Dantesque farce. Pray for us, thou godless happy Loafer.

Please give my kindest regards to Ida. I have for many weeks had it in my mind to try to phrase my gratitude for her very bully tolerance of our loudnesses and other iniquities this winter. Some day I shall, believe me; I speak with the arrogance of the professional rhetorician in daily need of defence against an inner conviction that he is the dumbest of God's creatures.

W. V. M.

To Josephine Preston Peabody

CHICAGO, July 17, 1896.

... I find that the West cries out as with one voice for the feathers and fur-belowes of feeling that you Cambridge mode-makers consigned to the garret decades ago. They're a little bedraggled at times, but we wear them with an air! Rousseau would weep over us — Chateaubriand would call us brother. I wonder if Rousseau and Chateaubriand were as ridiculous after all

as they seem from the serene middle of Harvard Square?

All this is of course (I mean this sentimentalizing and toy-sea-sailing) by way of 'compelling incident.' That is the most illuminating and fruitful phrase you ever gave me. Every hour that I pilfer from tedium I thank the lips that framed it. Alas! the better ways of gilding the grey days slip from me. Apollo has gone a-hunting and I was n't asked. I have hung my harp on a willow, where it gathers rust and caterpillars with a zeal it lacked in a better cause. I am gone stark dumb. I rap myself and get a sound of cracked clay. A white rage seizes me at times, against the pottering drudgery that has fastened its lichen teeth on me and is softening down my 'crisp cut name and date.' I echo poor Keats's cry, 'O for ten years that I may steep myself in poetry' — with the modest substitution of weeks for years, and a willingness to compromise on as many days if Providence will only undertake to get this shiny taste of themes and literary drool out of my mouth, and let me taste the waters of life where they are near the well-head. To go a-brook-following — O happiness, O thou bright Denied!

W. V. M.

To Daniel Gregory Mason

[CHICAGO, July 20, 1896.]

DEAR DAN: —

The confident tone of your last letter puts me in conceit with life again. En-

visage the theme job with the comic or the tragic mask, as you please, but not with the features sweet Nature gave you — on your life. I am known in the Chicago themery as the Man in the Iron Mask, and you may wager I live up to the title. The chance of luring you out here in August tempts me to lie goldenly about the musical prospects. Now that I have the strength I hasten feebly to falter that they are damn poor. Not that Chicago is not 'musical' — it is amazingly and egregiously so. Calliope is the one Muse we recognize, and she has a front spare bedroom and unlimited pie. But the place is overrun with music teachers — chiefly foreign — whereof I find recorded the names of unbelievable thousands. The University does not yet boast a Department of Music, though one hears rumors of millions ripe to drop at the summons of One Elect. If you feel the star quite distinct above your brows, you might practice crooking your little finger with the proper imperial persuasion.

You don't tell me anything about people. I have become a frowsy gossip, and cannot live without my pill of personalities sweetly compounded. To punish you for the neglect I enclose a reaction on a recent notable Experience. Hire an amanuensis for seven hours and talk out a sufficing bundle of pages on the mystical differences between This and That, and send the bill along with the bundle. WILL.

(To be concluded.)

THE LIE

BY MARY ANTIN

I

THE first thing about his American teachers that struck David Rudinsky was the fact that they were women, and the second was that they did not get angry if somebody asked questions. This phenomenon subverted his previous experience. When he went to *heder* (Hebrew school), in Russia, his teachers were always men, and they did not like to be interrupted with questions that were not in the lesson. Everything was different in America, and David liked the difference.

The American teachers, on their part, also made comparisons. They said David was not like other children. It was not merely that his mind worked like lightning; those neglected Russian waifs were almost always quick to learn, perhaps because they had to make up for lost time. The quality of his interest, more than the rapidity of his progress, excited comment. Miss Ralston, David's teacher in the sixth grade, which he reached in his second year at school, said of him that he never let go of a lesson till he had got the soul of the matter. 'I don't think grammar is grammar to him,' she said, 'or fractions mere arithmetic. I'm not satisfied with the way I teach these things since I've had David. I feel that if he were on the platform instead of me, geography and grammar would be spliced to the core of the universe.'

One difficulty David's teachers encountered, and that was his extreme reserve. In private conversation it was

hard to get anything out of him except 'yes, ma'am' and 'no, ma'am,' or, 'I don't understand, please.' In the classroom he did not seem to be aware of the existence of anybody besides Teacher and himself. He asked questions as fast as he could formulate them, and Teacher had to exercise much tact in order to satisfy him without slighting the rest of her pupils. To advances of a personal sort he did not respond, as if friendship were not among the things he hungered for.

It was Miss Ralston who found the way to David's heart. Perhaps she was interested in such things; they sometimes are, in the public schools. After the Christmas holidays, the children were given as a subject for composition, 'How I spent the Vacation.' David wrote in a froth of enthusiasm about whole days spent in the public library. He covered twelve pages with an account of the books he had read. The list included many juvenile classics in American history and biography; and from his comments it was plain that the little alien worshiped the heroes of war.

When Miss Ralston had read David's composition, she knew what to do. She was one of those persons who always know what to do, and do it. She asked David to stay after school, and read to him, from a blue book with gilt lettering, 'Paul Revere's Ride' and 'Independence Bell.' That hour neither of them ever forgot. To David it seemed as if all the heroes he had dreamed of crowded around him, so real did his teacher's reading make them. He