A New George Eliot Holograph Letter

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We are grateful to Jonathan Ouvry, copyright holder of all unpublished George Eliot letters, for his permission to reproduce this letter in its entirety.
membrane of Iam, are you pain
so unkind. No letter or any injurce about myself. I am writing rather worse.

I am feeling very hurt of I can't be
remember more than now do
right for the debt of having
again your careness and
your truste friendship. As it is you are a bright
in my memory like

I am very close for a
high place among influences
when I write you with

I am pleased to hear for you
COMMENTARY
By Barbara Hardy

The letter reproduced above was written by George Eliot, then Mary Ann Evans, to Martha Jackson and has been made available to *The George Eliot Review* by its present owner, Matthew Wilson, who inherited it from his mother, Shirley Wilson, who worked in publishing. Amongst her collection of autographs, letters and rare books were letters originally in the possession of the collector Henry Cunliffe, including this one. Large extracts from it were first printed in *The Bookman*, 3 (January 1893), and reprinted by Gordon Haight in the Yale edition of the *George Eliot Letters*, 1954 (I, 188-9).

Martha (or Patty) Jackson, who eventually married Henry Barclay and went to live in South Africa, was one of Mary Ann Evans’s first correspondents and oldest friends, studying with her for two years at the Misses Franklins’ school in Coventry. As a correspondent she is important for several reasons, put forward in Haight’s detailed prefatory note on correspondents in the *George Eliot Letters* (I, xlix).

At first Mary Ann found Martha’s piety, studiousness and sentimentality congenial, and for a while they and their old teacher Maria Lewis used the flower names Ivy, Clematis and
Veronica, because of Martha’s enthusiasm for a book called *The Language of Flowers*. After Mary Ann’s defection from Christianity in 1842, the correspondence was discouraged – though it did not quite stop – by Martha’s mother.

Martha declined to make the letters available to John Cross, when he was writing his biography of George Eliot, on the grounds that he might not do justice to Christian belief. She intended to publish them herself, and write reminiscences of the friendship, but when Haight made inquiries, having traced some manuscript letters in libraries and printed versions in the *Bookman* and *Poet Lore*, no more were found. Since this has turned up, there may be others in private collections.

It is characteristic of the emotional and literary nature of the correspondence, with the interest of the references to the possible marriage we know Mary Ann Evans briefly contemplated in 1845, with an artist and picture-restorer; to the past friendship; and to those present ‘few friends’, the Hennells and Brays of whom Martha disapproved because of their religious heterodoxy.

The following passages from the holograph were omitted from the *Bookman* and the _George Eliot Letters_; in both publications the punctuation, spelling and abbreviations were editorially standardized.

*para. 2, before ‘I would renounce’*
You are one of those few loved ones with the remembrance of whom no pain is mingled. No look or word of yours ever gave me any other feeling than that of pleasure, &

*para. 6, after ‘one item of his’*
I have a few, very few dear friends who to my daily surprize persevere in loving me, or in seeming to do so out of benevolence.

*para. 9 & para. 10, after ‘sap left’*
You tell me so indefinitely everything concerning yourself – I should like you to fill a letter as I have done with a particular account – of your feelings & thinkings & doings – I hope your dear Mamma’s health is better. Sarah, too: does she poetize as usual?
You used to like my recommendations of books. Have you read the Improvisatore translated from the Danish by Mary Howitt?

*para. 11, after ‘you may suppose’*
Good night, dear Martha. Love ever as she will you, Your affectionate

Mary Ann

*last page, vertically along left-hand margin*
Send my best love & heartiest good wishes to Jessie.

*At top of letter, before and around address and date*
I am too tired to read my letter, so your imagination must supply all the words I have left out