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Kathleen Adams

Martha Barclay to Isaac Evans

Martha Barclay (née Jackson) was a school-fellow of George Eliot's in Coventry in the 1830's. It was Martha who initiated the choice of flower names for herself and her friend — Ivy (constancy) for herself and Clematis (mental beauty) for George Eliot. Letters from George Eliot to Martha have been published in Volume 1 of *The George Eliot Letters* edited by Gordon S. Haight (1954), but Martha had been pressed by John Cross to allow him to publish them in his biography. This she refused because she felt she could not trust George Eliot's widower to select satisfactorily. She planned to publish her own reminiscences but never did, possibly because Charles Lewes, G. H. Lewes's son and George Eliot's literary executor, would not give permission for her to use her precious letters.

The following letter from Martha to George Eliot's brother Isaac Evans, now belongs to the George Eliot Fellowship:

Cheshunt, Herts.

January 31st. 82

My dear Mr. Evans,

I was much obliged to you for writing so promptly and kindly in reply to my enquiries as to the date of your sister Mary Ann's birthday, while thanking you for your note allow me to express my sincere sympathy with you in the great loss you have sustained by the death of your dear wife. I never saw her but remember very well hearing of your engagement and marriage. Old times have come very forceably before me recently — for I have been putting together a few school recollections — especially as regards your sister, and having as I think I told you some very precious letters, received during a correspondence with her which lasted for a few years after she left Griff. I have felt induced to draw up a little memorial of those happy days introducing the letters I have preserved which contain nothing but what can give pleasure to those who knew and loved her at that time.

Before publishing however Mr. Barclay was advised to apply to Mrs. Cross's Executor Mr. C. L. Lewes to know if there would be any objection to my making this use of the letters.

Mr. Barclay wrote at once to Mr. Lewis [sic] — his reply I enclose for you to see. I was not ignorant of the fact that Mr. Cross was writing a Biography. I knew also that in some way he had become aware that I had letters in my possession but not wishing in any way to be associated with the Life, literary or otherwise of 'George Eliot' I could not consent to let him have them, nor could I very well explain to him my reasons for refusing them. I am sure you will understand the repugnance I should feel to see the beautiful sentiments expressed in the letters coloured or warped as they might be by the comments of those friends who could only sympathise with the *after views* we so deplore — Had you been near I should have consulted you from the first and shown you not only the letters but all I have said in the memoir of our school and early days — even now if you would like to see them I shall be happy to send the manuscripts for your perusal and I think you will agree with me that if they are published it should be in a distinct form — Mr. Lewes in his second letter forbids this. It has struck me, that if you see the matter in the same light as myself, a few words from you to Mr. Cross might reverse Mr. Lewis [sic] prohibition. I do not know what you will say to my thus troubling you but you seem to me the only one whose feelings I ought to consult.

With kind regards
Yours sincerely

Martha H. Barclay