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A New George Eliot Holograph Letter

(previously published in part)

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from putting on such a water
 amount than that as he
 would have with me?
 I did meditate an answer
 amount but I have determined
 whether writing or not. I have
 will left to defer it at
 least for the present -
 My health is not of the
 strongest - dreadful head
 aches come now & then to
 me as well as to the rest
 of my kind, but little
 help is my chief disease
 & my most calamitous
 disease the exhalation
 Work while it is day:

I am too tired to read my
 letter, or your immemorial
 cannot forget the hills. Oh! I
 all the words I have left out -
 My dear Martin. 18
 To prove to you
 that you will find me a
 much pleasure as you affe-
 ctionate heart could wish. I
 will tell you that my health
 for it induces me to answer
 it at midnight - but however
 I should bring some hindrance
 disappreciable or appreciable.
 I think you would be better
 satisfied if you could read
 my heart's record. A year
 You are one of those few
 loved ones with the re-

George Eliot

membrane of action as pain
is unimpeded. No loshor and
of your love have me any
the feeling than that of
pleasure, & I would be
wonder more than one de
light for the sake of having
again your company and
your sweet friendship -
As it is you are a bright
presence in my memory like
Katharine & Catharine &
I assure you give you a
high place among influences
which I range you with
justice. Thank you.

my dear Martha for your
inquiries about myself -
I am writing rather weakly
for of translating a treat-
ise of 1500 pages there is
no speedy end - but as the
own travels from one place
to another, I get from one
section to another so I
suppose I shall come to
Piscataway at last.

What should you say
to my becoming a wife?
Should you think it a
duty to select the name
of the next man that
you might have given

while our bodies live but
two months - say the
experience of a week. Of
a day may make me
free in wisdom or in
sorrow, as well as in
joy. Perhaps you would
find some symptom of
age creeping over me - if
you were with me now
& you would accuse me
of being too old for
five & twenty, which is
a sufficiently venerable
age to appear in the cele-
bration of young ladies' biva-
les. But I can laugh &

love - & fall into a fit
of enthusiasm still to
them is ~~the~~ some of the
wonderful part left.

You tell me to indige-
nitely every thing concerning
yourself - I should like
you to fill a letter as I
have done - with a par-
ticular account of your
feelings & thoughts &
doubt - Hope your dear
Mamma's health is
better - Sarah too does
she hold up as usual?
I'm glad to receive
any recommendations,

I wish - have you -
 read the Improvements
 translated from the Danish
 of May Novitz?
 I dined last week
 with Harriet Martineau
 at Mr. Marchant's of
 Abingdon. She is a
 charming person - quite
 one of those great spirits
 whom one does not see
 rate the low for having
 seen - full of successions
 & its marvels as you may
 suppose. Good night.
 Dear Martha has ever
 as she wish you. Your affectionate
 Mary Ann

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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