

Pictou August 30, 1893
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Dear Margaret,

The intelligence contained in your last letter was truly startling—how strange that you, my dearest friend, should have been so ill, and I not knowing or thinking of it—so far away as not to have even an opportunity of bestowing on you a feeling of sympathy or a prayer—the last I should not say, for whether in health or sickness you shall always have the best I can offer. It is pleasant however when I do hear of your illness, to hear of your recovery also, and I sincerely hope that when you read this, your health will be still farther improved; that you will have as fair a prospect as ever of attaining to threescore years and ten, and of enjoying much happiness, and doing much good in the world.

For my part, I have scarcely any story to tell—though my life does not flow on in perfect smoothness, it may at least be said to tumble along in a pretty monotonous jumble. In health, I have been well; in business, serving manumore with customary assiduity, though whether that be too great or

too small, I am scarcely prepared to say, I hope not for either way; In society, wherever I have met with such a thing, ever endeavouring to be as agreeable as possible, and to add to my stock of knowledge of human nature, I must confess however that among all my lady acquaintances in this country, I have found none exactly equal (in my estimation) to certain friends in Edinburgh, and, considering my predilection for everything belonging to my own country, such an admission is certainly a great stretch of candour. I have however endeavoured to save my patriotism by saying that is in my opinion merely, others being allowed to think as they please. In Scientific pursuits, I have been writing some articles on agricultural Chemistry, for an agricultural paper, studying a little botany, but principally endeavouring to ascertain the arrangement of our coal formation and the distribution of boulder deposits, on which latter subject I may perhaps in the winter send a paper, to some of your Edin^g friends, if they will have it; all these pursuits mother sometimes tells me are 'nonsense' for which nobody will thank me. Generally, I have lately been taking more serious views of life, of the value ~~which~~ of time, the responsibility connected with its employment,

and the duty of employing as much of it as possible, in pursuits really useful and worthy of an intelligent, moral and religious being. Not that I have been letting

Time's benumbing fingers steal young feelings from my heart, as Montgomerie says, or becoming more dull or spiritless; but rather that I have been thinking of and learning more of the true ends of human existence and the uses which should be made of it, to produce as much happiness as possible to ourselves and others.

How many things I should have to say to you, if the Atlantic were not between us, I cannot crop it however thin year; but would it not be an excellent restoration for you to take a voyage over in the steam packet; once on board a steamer, it is only a few days longer to Halifax than to the modern Babylon, which you think of visiting.

I am not quite disposed to give up my opinions respecting the beauty of flowers, because I doubt if the human form was ever intended to equal them in beauty. Flowers have only their beauty to recommend them to us, ladies have other attractions, and, supposing both to be equally worthy of

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Their makes, the flowers have a right to the greater portion of beauty. Accordingly the flowers have certainly got the finer colours, and more complex if not more symmetrical forms. However this is only a mere matter of taste, since it is quite possible to admire and appreciate the beauty of both.

My father and mother are at present well; mother was troubled for a few days with a cold which took possession of a decayed tooth, and caused considerable pain and swelling of the face, this however is all right again.

A brother of Mr Repton the turner, whom you heard spoken of when I was in Edinr, died here a short time ago of cholera. He was a good and respectable man, and has left a family of six or seven children all young. His widow appears to be a steady and religious woman, and with the assistance of her relations here, will I hope be able to bring up her family well.

I have sent by the Terminus an American book, in which you will find some good reading, and also a book of pictures, which you will please give to the young Bells. Sending books from ~~here~~ this country to Britain is, as the Arabs say, carrying sand to the desert. Being of

American manufacture, however they may be interesting on that account; and, as a token of remembrance from a friend, will I have no doubt be valued at least as much as they deserve.

I forgot to tell you that the Whim seeds which you sent, Spring before last, grew well, but were all killed by the winter; so that even it is not hardy enough for our frosts. I saw this summer, in a garden here, a few plants of holly, heaths, broom, and other British evergreens, which a gentleman was attempting to cultivate. He was obliged however in winter to make a shed of boards over them, and fill it up with straw. He thus lost of course all the beauty of their foliage in winter. It is only strong

plants that can be preserved even
 in this way, seedlings being usually too
 tender to be saved even by covering. There
 is therefore little prospect that in this
 country we will ever be able to have
 any other evergreens, except the firs
 and pines. To make up for this however
 we have all kinds of annual plants, hardy
 herbs, and deciduous shrubs and trees,
 which well. I had this summer an
 immense quantity of roses, of five or six
 varieties, besides, Hyacinths, cowslip, Pinks,
 Tulips, Narcissus, Lilies of the valley, &c. &c. in great
 profusion, and have now a variety of
 pretty annuals in bloom. Neither must
 I forget to mention, that father has three
 fine vines trained against the end of
 his barn, and loaded with grapes, which
 I hope will ripen before the frosts commence.
 So that you see in our climate anything will
 grow in summer, nothing in winter.

Remember me to your father & mother
 Maria Mrs Bell and all the rest, that
 I often think of them and wish them all happiness
 I need not say. It would be a melancholy
 thought to think that I should not see you all
 again, so I will think no such thing, but hope
 that I shall before many years so
 Yours affectionately
 J. Dawson

As I have just returned from a little excursion of which I was the first in my name