

[1842-1846]

Emily Dickinson's twelfth year brought the first interruption to the close companionship in her home, when Austin was sent away to school for a single term. His father's first letter to him said: "I sent you there to improve," and one infers that family and neighbor associations were becoming distractions not good for his studies.

The record of enrollments at Amherst Academy in the forties gives a bewildering impression of casualness in the matter of school attendance, and may reflect a similar condition elsewhere. Emily herself was in and out of school, for reasons of health, several times during her adolescent years. Some of her friends were girls sent to Amherst from other towns, to live with relatives or board in the homes of schoolmates while in residence for a term or two. Only one among the group of five who were her special friends during these years was Amherst bred.

The letters of this earliest surviving group were written to her brother and to two school friends. Her mind was developing rapidly, but she was still in the immediate world of childhood when she wrote the letters with which the series begins.

To Austin Dickinson

18 April 1842

My dear Brother

As Father was going to Northampton and thought of coming over to see you I thought I would improve the opportunity and write you a few lines—We miss you very much indeed you cannot think how odd it seems without you there was always such a Hurrah wherever you was I miss My bedfellow very much for it is rare that I can get any now for Aunt Elisabeth is afraid to sleep alone and Vinnie has to sleep with her but I have the privilege of looking under the bed every night which I improve as you may suppose the Hens get along nicely the chickens grow very fast I am afraid they will be so large that you cannot perceive them with the naked Eye when you get home the yellow hen is coming off with a brood of chickens we found a hens nest with four Eggs in it I took out three and brought them in the next day I went to see if there had been any laid and there had not been any laid and the one that was there had gone so I suppose a skonk had been there or else a hen In the shape of a skonk and I dont know which—the Hens lay finely William gets two a day at his house we 5 or 6 a day here there Is one Creeper that lays on the ground the nests are so high that they cannot reach them from the ground I Expect we shall have to make some ladders for them to get up on William found the hen and Rooster after you went away that you could not find we received your letter Friday morning and very glad we were to get it you must write oftener to us the temperance dinner went off very well the other day all the Folks Except Lavinia and I there were over a Hundred there the students thought the dinner too cheap the tickets were a half a dollar a piece and so they are going to have a supper tomorrow Evening which I suppose will be very genteel Mr Jones has found in looking at his policy that his insurance is 8 thousand dollars instead of 6 which makes him feel a great deal better than he did at first Mr Wilson and his wife took tea here the other night they are going to move wednesday—they have made out to get one of

the Mt Pleasant Buildings to its place of destination which is a matter of great rejoicing to the public it was really was Enough to make ones Eyes ache and I am glad it has got out of sight and hearing too— there are going to be great fixing up I expect in those buildings we are all very well and hope you are the same— we have very pleasant weather now Mr Whipple has come and we expect Miss Humphrey tomorrow— Aunt Montague— has been saying you would cry before the week was out Cousin Zebina had a fit the other day and bit his tongue into— as you say it is a rainy day and I can think of— Nothing more to say— I shall Expect an answer to my letter soon Charles Richardson has got back and is in Mr Pitkins store Sabra is not running after him at all she had not seen him when I last saw her which was Saturday I suppose she would send her *respects to you if she knew I was going to write to you— I must now close—* all send a great deal of love to you and hope you are getting along well and— Enjoy your self—

Your affectionate Sister Emily—

MANUSCRIPT: HCL (L 53). Ink. Unpublished. Addressed on the fold: Wm Austin Dickinson/Easthampton/Mass. On the date line she wrote "Amherst," and her aunt Elizabeth Dickinson added: "Mass. April 18th 1842."

A few days before his thirteenth birthday, Austin was sent to Williston Seminary, newly opened as an endowed institution at Easthampton, to attend the spring term. His father wrote to him a few days after his enrollment, and followed his letter with a visit, carrying Emily's letter with him. Sabra was the daughter of A. P. Howe, landlord of the Amherst House.

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To Jane Humphrey

My dear Jane

12 May 1842

I have been looking for a letter from you this long time but not receiving any I plucked up all the remaining courage that I had left and determined to make one more effort to write you a few lines—I want to see you very much for I have got a great deal to tell you about school matters—and besides you are one of my dear friends. Sabra has had a beautiful ring given to her by Charles you know who as

well as I do – the Examination at Easthampton is today – and Austin is coming home tonight. Father is sick with the Rheumatism and can not go but Mother has gone with somebody else – it is very unpleasant today – it showers most all the time – your sister is very well indeed – I believe she has gone to South hadley this afternoon – I miss you more and more every day, in my study in play at home indeed every where I miss my beloved Jane – I wish you would write to me – I should think more of it than of a mine of gold – when you write me I wish you would write me a great long letter and tell me all the news that you know of – all your friends send a great deal of love to you Austin and William Washburn send their respects to you – this Afternoon is Wednesday and so of course there was Speaking and Composition – there was one young man who read a Composition the Subject was think twice before you speak – he was describing the reasons why any one should do so – one was – if a young gentleman – offered a young lady his arm and he had a dog who had no tail and he boarded at the tavern think twice before you speak. Another is if a young gentleman knows a young lady who he thinks nature has formed to perfection let him remember that roses conceal thorns he is the silliest creature that ever lived I think. I told him that I thought he had better think twice before he spoke – what good times we used to have jumping into bed when you slept with me. I do wish you would come to Amherst and make me a great long visit – how do you get along in Latin. I am in the class that you used to be in in Latin – besides Latin I study History and Botany I like the school very much indeed – your Sister sends a great deal of love to all your folks and to every one she knows there – My Plants grow beautifully – you know that elegant old Rooster that Austin thought so much of – the others fight him and killed him – answer this letter as soon as you can – I can think of nothing more to say now yours affectionately

Emily

MANUSCRIPT: Rosenbach 1170/17 (1). Ink. Dated: Amherst May 12 1842. Addressed on the fold: Miss Jane Humphrey/Southwick/Mass. Postmarked: Amherst Ms May 12. Written in pencil, in a different hand, is the draft of the beginning of a letter – possibly Jane's reply: "My very dear Friend/I Know you are thinking of m[e] (if thinking of me at all) as a very neg[ligent] . . ."

To recipient unknown

Dear Master

about 1858

I am ill, but grieving more that you are ill, I make my stronger hand work long eno' to tell you. I thought perhaps you were in Heaven, and when you spoke again, it seemed quite sweet, and wonderful, and surprised me so — I wish that you were well.

I would that all I love, should be weak no more. The Violets are by my side, the Robin very near, and "Spring" — they say, Who is she — going by the door —

Indeed it is God's house — and these are gates of Heaven, and to and fro, the angels go, with their sweet postillions — I wish that I were great, like Mr. Michael Angelo, and could paint for you. You ask me what my flowers said — then they were disobedient — I gave them messages. They said what the lips in the West, say, when the sun goes down, and so says the Dawn.

Listen again, Master. I did not tell you that today had been the Sabbath Day.

Each Sabbath on the Sea, makes me count the Sabbaths, till we meet on shore — and (will the) whether the hills will look as blue as the sailors say. I cannot talk any more (stay any longer) tonight (now), for this pain denies me.

How strong when weak to recollect, and easy, quite, to love. Will you tell me, please to tell me, soon as you are well.

MANUSCRIPT: AC. Ink.

PUBLICATION: *Home* 431–432.

This draft was left among ED's own papers, and no one knows whether a fair copy was made or sent to the person addressed. That it was meant as a reply to one from him is shown by the allusion to his question. She may have had the Reverend Charles Wadsworth in mind as "Master."

Master

To recipient unknown

Master.

If you saw a bullet hit a Bird – and he told you he was'nt shot – you might weep at his courtesy, but you would certainly doubt his word.

One drop more from the gash that stains your Daisy's bosom – then would you *believe*? Thomas' faith in Anatomy, was stronger than his faith in faith. God made me – [Sir] Master – I didn't be – myself. I dont know how it was done. He built the heart in me – Bye and bye it outgrew me – and like the little mother – with the big child – I got tired holding him. I heard of a thing called "Redemption" – which rested men and women. You remember I asked you for it – you gave me something else. I forgot the Redemption [in the Redeemed – I didn't tell you for a long time, but I knew you had altered me – I] and was tired – no more – [so dear did this stranger become that were it, or my breath – the Alternative – I had tossed the fellow away with a smile.] I am older – tonight, Master – but the love is the same – so are the moon and the crescent. If it had been God's will that I might breathe where you breathed – and find the place – myself – at night – if I (can) never forget that I am not with you – and that sorrow and frost are nearer than I – if I wish with a might I cannot repress – that mine were the Queen's place – the love of the Plantagenet is my only apology – To come nearer than presbyteries – and nearer than the new Coat – that the Tailor made – the prank of the Heart at play on the Heart – in holy Holiday – is forbidden me – You make me say it over – I fear you laugh – when I do not see – [but] "Chillon" is not funny. Have you the Heart in your breast – Sir – is it set like mine – a little to the left – has it the misgiving – if it wake in the night – perchance – itself to it – a timbrel is it – itself to it a tune?

Master
about 1861

"if" del
cross

These things are [reverent] holy, Sir, I touch them [reverently] hallowed, but persons who pray—dare remark [our] "Father"! You say I do not tell you all—Daisy confessed—and denied not.

Vesuvius dont talk—Etna—dont—[Thy] one of them—said a syllable—a thousand years ago, and Pompeii heard it, and hid forever—She could'nt look the world in the face, afterward—I suppose—Bashful Pompeii! "Tell you of the want"—you know what a leech is, dont you—and [remember that] Daisy's arm is small—and you have felt the horizon hav'nt you—and did the sea—never come so close as to make you dance?

I dont know what you can do for it—thank you—Master—but if I had the Beard on my cheek—like you—and you—had Daisy's petals—and you cared so for me—what would become of you? Could you forget me in fight, or flight—or the foreign land? Could'nt Carlo, and you and I walk in the meadows an hour—and nobody care but the Bobolink—and *his*—a *silver* scruple? I used to think when I died—I could see you—so I died as fast as I could—but the "Corporation" are going Heaven too so [Eternity] wont be sequestered—now [at all]—Say I may wait for you—say I need go with no stranger to the to me—untried [country] fold—I waited a long time—Master—but I can wait more—wait till my hazel hair is dappled—and you carry the cane—then I can look at my watch—and if the Day is too far declined—we can take the chances [of] for Heaven—What would you do with me if I came "in white?" Have you the little chest to put the Alive—in?

< I want to see you more—Sir—than all I wish for in this world—and the wish—altered a little—will be my only one—for the skies. >

Could you come to New England—[this summer—could] would you come to Amherst—Would you like to come—Master?

[Would it do harm—yet we both fear God—] Would Daisy disappoint you—no—she would'nt—Sir—it were comfort forever—just to look in your face, while you looked in mine—then I could play in the woods till Dark—till you take me where Sundown cannot find us—and the true keep coming—till the town is full. [Will you tell me if you will?]

I did'nt think to tell you, you did'nt come to me "in white," nor ever told me why,

No Rose, yet felt myself a'bloom,
No Bird—yet rode in Ether.

Master 3

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To recipient unknown

early 1862?

Oh, did I offend it – [Did'nt it want me to tell it the truth] Daisy
– Daisy – offend it – who bends her smaller life to his (it's) meeker
(lower) every day – who only asks – a task – [who] something to do
for love of it – some little way she cannot guess to make that master
glad –

A love so big it scares her, rushing among her small heart – push-
ing aside the blood and leaving her faint (all) and white in the gust's
arm –

Daisy – who never flinched thro' that awful parting, but held her
life so tight he should not see the wound – who would have sheltered
him in her childish bosom (Heart) – only it was'nt big eno' for a Guest
so large – *this* Daisy – grieve her Lord – and yet it (she) often blun-
dered – Perhaps she grieved (grazed) his taste – perhaps her odd –
Backwoodsman [life] ways [troubled] teased his finer nature (sense).
Daisy [fea] knows all that – but must she go unpardoned – teach her,
preceptor grace – teach her majesty – Slow (Dull) at patrician things
– Even the wren upon her nest learns (knows) more than Daisy
dares –

Low at the knee that bore her once unto [royal] wordless rest
[now] Daisy [stoops a] kneels a culprit – tell her her [offence] fault –
Master – if it is [not so] small eno' to cancel with her life, [Daisy]
she is satisfied – but punish [do not] dont banish her – shut her in
prison, Sir – only pledge that you will forgive – sometime – before the
grave, and Daisy will not mind – She will awake in [his] your likeness.

Wonder stings me more than the Bee – who did never sting me –
but made gay music with his might wherever I [may] [should] did
go – Wonder wastes my pound, you said I had no size to spare –

You send the water over the Dam in my brown eyes –

I've got a cough as big as a thimble – but I dont care for that –
I've got a Tomahawk in my side but that dont hurt me much. [If you]
Her master stabs her more –

Wont he come to her — or will he let her seek him, never mind-
ing [whatever] so long wandering [out] if to him at last.

Oh how the sailor strains, when his boat is filling — Oh how the
dying tug, till the angel comes. Master — open your life wide, and
take me in forever, I will never be tired — I will never be noisy when
you want to be still. I will be [glad] [as the] your best little girl —
nobody else will see me, but you — but that is enough — I shall not want
any more — and all that Heaven only will disappoint me — will be be-
cause it's not so dear

MANUSCRIPT: AC. Penciled rough draft.

PUBLICATION: *Home* 430–431.

The alternative suggested changes are placed in parentheses; words
crossed out, in brackets. Like the earlier “Master” letters (nos. 187 and
233) this draft was among ED’s papers at the time of her death. Whether
a fair copy was made and sent, or intended to be sent, is not known.
Accurate dating is impossible. The letter may have been written earlier, but
the characteristics of the handwriting make the present assignment reason-
able.

248a

[*Charles Wadsworth to ED*]

My Dear Miss Dickenson

I am distressed beyond measure at your note, received this mo-
ment, — I can only imagine the affliction which has befallen, or is now
befalling you.

Believe me, be what it may, you have all my sympathy, and my
constant, earnest prayers.

I am very, very anxious to learn more definitely of your trial — and
though I have no right to intrude upon your sorrow yet I beg you to
write me, though it be but a word

To T. W. Higginson

16 August 1870

Dear friend

I will be at Home and glad.
I think you said the 15th. The incredible never surprises us because it is the incredible.

E. Dickinson

MANUSCRIPT: BPL (Higg 62). Ink. Envelope addressed: Mr Higginson.

PUBLICATION: *L* (1894) 314; *LL* 275; *L* (1931) 284.

This note was delivered evidently by hand at the Amherst House, in response to one Higginson sent ED on his arrival, asking if he might call. She had expected him on the previous day, Monday. The following letter (BPL) Higginson wrote his wife that evening, dating it: Amherst/Tuesday 10 P.M.:

342a

I shan't sit up tonight to write you all about E.D. dearest but if you had read Mrs. Stoddard's novels you could understand a house where each member runs his or her own selves. Yet I only saw her.

A large county lawyer's house, brown brick, with great trees & a garden — I sent up my card. A parlor dark & cool & stiffish, a few books & engravings & an open piano — Malbone & O D [Out Door] Papers among other books.

A step like a pattering child's in entry & in glided a little plain

woman with two smooth bands of reddish hair & a face a little like Belle Dove's; not plainer — with no good feature — in a very plain & exquisitely clean white pique & a blue net worsted shawl. She came to me with two day lilies which she put in a sort of childlike way into my hand & said "These are my introduction" in a soft frightened breathless childlike voice — & added under her breath Forgive me if I am frightened; I never see strangers & hardly know what I say — but she talked soon & thenceforward continuously — & deferentially — sometimes stopping to ask me to talk instead of her — but readily recommencing. Manner between Angie Tilton & Mr. Alcott — but thoroughly ingenuous & simple which they are not & saying many things which you would have thought foolish & I wise — & some things you wd. hv. liked. I add a few over the page.

This is a lovely place, at least the view Hills everywhere, hardly mountains. I saw Dr. Stearns the Pres't of College — but the janitor cd. not be found to show me into the building I may try again tomorrow. I called on Mrs. Banfield & saw her five children — She looks much like H. H. *when ill* & was very cordial & friendly. Goodnight darling I am very sleepy & do good to write you this much. Thine am I

I got here at 2 & leave at 9. E.D. dreamed all night of *you* (not me) & next day got my letter proposing to come here!! She only knew of you through a mention in my notice of Charlotte Hawes.

"Women talk: men are silent: that is why I dread women.

"My father only reads on Sunday — he reads *lonely* & *rigorous* books."

"If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way."

"How do most people live without any thoughts. There are many people in the world (you must have noticed them in the street) How do they live. How do they get strength to put on their clothes in the morning"

"When I lost the use of my Eyes it was a comfort to think there were so few real *books* that I could easily find some one to read me all of them"

"Truth is such a *rare* thing it is delightful to tell it."

"I find ecstasy in living — the mere sense of living is joy enough"

I asked if she never felt want of employment, never going off the place & never seeing any visitor "I never thought of conceiving that I could ever have the slightest approach to such a want in all future time" (& added) "I feel that I have not expressed myself strongly enough."

She makes all the bread for her father only likes hers & says "& people must have puddings" this *very* dreamily, as if they were comets — so she makes them.

[That evening Higginson made this entry in his diary (HCL):]

To Amherst, arrived there at 2 Saw Prest Stearns, Mrs. Banfield & Miss Dickinson (twice) a remarkable experience, quite equalling my expectation. A pleasant country town, unspeakably quiet in the summer aftn.

[Next day he wrote his wife again, enclosing further notes (BPL), on ED. He dated the letter: Wednesday noon]:

342b

I am stopping for dinner at White River Junction, dearest, & in a few hours shall be at Littleton thence to go to Bethlehem. This morning at 9 I left Amherst & sent you a letter last night. I shall mail this at L. putting with it another sheet about E.D. that is in my valise.

She said to me at parting "Gratitude is the only secret that cannot reveal itself."

I talked with Prest Stearns of Amherst about her — & found him a very pleasant companion in the cars. Before leaving today, I got in to the Museums & enjoyed them much; saw a meteoric stone almost as long as my arm & weighing 436 lbs! a big slice of some other planet. It fell in Colorado. The collection of bird tracks of extinct birds in stone is very wonderful & unique & other good things. I saw Mr. Dickinson this morning a little — thin dry & speechless — I saw what her life has been. Dr. S. says her sister is proud of her.

I wd. have stolen a *totty* meteor, dear but they were under glass. Mrs. Bullard I have just met in this train with spouse & son — I shall ride up with her.

Some pretty glimpses of mts. but all is dry and burnt I never saw the river at Brattleboro so low.

Did I say I staid at Sargents' in Boston & she still hopes for Newport.

This picture of Mrs Browning's tomb is from E.D. "Timothy Titcomb" [Dr. Holland] gave it to her.

I think I will mail this here as I hv. found time to write so much. I miss you little woman & wish you were here but you'd hate travelling.
Ever

E D again

"Could you tell me what home is"

"I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled."

"I never knew how to tell time by the clock till I was 15. My father thought he had taught me but I did not understand & I was afraid to say I did not & afraid to ask any one else lest he should know."

Her father was not severe I should think but remote. He did not wish them to read anything but the Bible. One day her brother brought home Kavanagh hid it under the piano cover & made signs to her & they read it: her father at last found it & was displeased. Perhaps it was before this that a student of his was amazed that they had never heard of Mrs. [Lydia Maria] Child & used to bring them books & hide in a bush by the door. They were then little things in short dresses with their feet on the rungs of the chair. After the first book she thought in ecstasy "This then is a book! And there are more of them!"

"Is it oblivion or absorption when things pass from our minds?"

Major Hunt interested her more than any man she ever saw. She remembered two things he said - that her great dog "understood gravitation" & when he said he should come again "in a year. If I say a shorter time it will be longer."

When I said I would come again *some time* she said "Say in a long time, that will be nearer. *Some time* is nothing."

After long disuse of her eyes she read Shakespeare & thought why is any other book needed.

I never was with any one who drained my nerve power so much. Without touching her, she drew from me. I am glad not to live near her. She often thought me *tired* & seemed very thoughtful of others.

[The postscript of a letter Higginson wrote his sisters (HCL) on Sunday, 21 August, adds:]

Of course I hv. enjoyed my trip very very much. In Amherst I had a nice aftn & evng with my singular poetic correspondent & the remarkable cabinets of the College.

[Recalling the interview twenty years later, Higginson wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* LXVIII (October 1891) 453:]

The impression undoubtedly made on me was that of an excess of tension, and of an abnormal life. Perhaps in time I could have got beyond that somewhat overstrained relation which not my will, but her needs, had forced upon us. Certainly I should have been most glad to bring it down to the level of simple truth and every-day comradeship; but it was not altogether easy. She was much too enigmatical a being for me to solve in an hour's interview, and an instinct told me that the slightest attempt at direct cross-examination would make her withdraw into her shell; I could only sit still and watch, as one does in the woods; I must name my bird without a gun, as recommended by Emerson.

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To Mrs. J. G. Holland

early October 1870

I guess I wont send that note now, for the mind is such a new place, last night feels obsolete.

Perhaps you thought dear Sister, I wanted to elope with you and feared a vicious Father.

It was not quite that.

The Papers thought the Doctor was mostly in New York. Who then would read for you? Mr Chapman, doubtless, or Mr Buckingham! The Doctor's sweet reply makes me infamous.

Life is the finest secret.

So long as that remains, we must all whisper.

With that sublime exception I had no clandestineness.

It was lovely to see you and I hope it may happen again. These beloved accidents must become more frequent.

We are by September and yet my flowers are bold as June. Amherst has gone to Eden.

To shut our eyes is Travel.