



Acton, May 30, 1842

Dear Margaret,

When I last wrote to you, I expected that my next letter would have been sent by the Isabella; but that old ship has finished her last voyage, and my parcels must wait for another conveyance. She became entangled in fields of ice, after entering the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and having drifted in this situation for some time, was wrecked on the North point of Cape Breton. The crew and passengers succeeded in landing safely, and most of the cargo would probably also have been saved, had not the settlers on the coast (Irishmen & Highlanders) broken open and ~~plundered~~ plundered everything they could obtain from the wreck. Mr. ^{Creary} finding that he could save little of his goods, came here as soon as possible, and handed me your letter for which I most sincerely thank you.

He said that he was much indebted to your family for their hospitality to him. He gave me at least a hint of the intelligence to which you refer. It affords me much pleasure, because I trust that it will be an event productive of happiness to those most interested. There is something melancholy in it too, for it is a beginning of change in your household, and makes me think of the possibility of my revisiting Edinburgh, and finding all things different from what they were. As a set off to this however, your mother used to

say that she must have some of her daughters
 to take care of her in her old age; and you
 being promoted to that office, may not have flour
 away for some time to come. I hope that as soon
 as the approaching change is passed you will write
 me a full and particular account of it. In
 the meantime I shall say no more upon this
 subject, till I obtain more accurate information.
 Your mother's remark on Bush is exactly what
 I expected. It is good, however to see all the sides
 of a question. I am happy that you were pleased
 with the magazines. I intended to continue one of
 them, but could find no opportunity. I may send
 a few more if I can find any one who will carry them.
 I thank you for the seeds enclosed in your letter.
 We have here few of the evergreens which adorn your
 gardens & fields in winter, and I should feel very
 much pleased if I could naturalise the horn or
 whin in Nova Scotia. I am afraid however that our
 winter frosts are too severe every for the hardy whin.
 When the horn is cultivated here it requires to be covered
 with straw and matting all winter; so that it might just
 as well, as far as winter is concerned, be a deciduous plant.
 I shall however bestow upon these seeds as careful culture
 as possible, both for your sake and for our own.
 I sowed the whin peas at our farm, on the Queen's
 birth day, and having taken my gun with me,
 was so fortunate as to obtain, the same evening, three
 of our most beautiful birds, which I have stuffed
 and placed upon a pretty little mop tree, which I hope
 you one day find a place on your drawing room table;

and with which I intend to send an account of the lives & habits of the birds which I have placed upon it, so that you may know their history & characters as well as see their forms and colours.

You mention my lectures, they are but occasional contributions to the common stock of our little society; and with respect to aspiring to authorship, that is an undertaking involving much labour and consideration, and one for which I am not now prepared; especially as I know nothing ~~respectably~~ which I could publish anything worth reading. ~~Do not fear~~ ^{but} that if anything so important should happen you ~~would~~ be the very first person to hear of it (what a very clumsy written sentence ^{it would be a good exercise in composition to put it right}).

I have been lately engaged in a trade which may amuse you. An American ship lately brought here several tons of West Indian Conch shells, such as those on your Mother's mantel piece. A boat-load (about 200 tons) was brought to my father's wharf for sale, but the boys crowded into it in such numbers that more were stolen than sold. This induced the owner to offer them in a lot, and father thinking that they would make good lime for his farm, purchased the cargo, and they were thrown into his store. People were so anxious however to obtain them for ornaments, that we were obliged to sell many of them. I believe that in two or three days we retailed four or five hundred shells at a penny each. We have still some thousands, most of them however much broken. I do not know whether these shells are scarce

in Britain

but if it would be worth while, I could send
you a barrel full of pretty good ones. I wish
you could see the pile of them, about enough to fill
a dozen of large carts, and all of the kind and nearly
the same size. They were originally gathered in one
of the west India Islands, to be shipped to the United
States, and ground or crushed for manure to land.

I am sorry to hear of the death of Mr. Gray. There
was much that was good about him notwithstanding
all his evil deeds.

And now that my paper is almost written
over I should like to tell you how often I think
of you and my other kind friends in Edinburgh.
Just how much letter I should like to be walking
and talking with you in the meadows, or the Hermitage
or any where, than writing you a letter, and
now proving it is that that large puddle the
Atlantic should prevent me from visiting you
whenever I like; and how happy I am to hear
that you are all well, and a hundred other such things
but all that crowd of thoughts and feelings which
fills the happy misery of thinking of those we love
when they are far ^{distant} ~~about~~ rushes upon my mind
and it is impossible to write them. With sincere
wishes for the health and happiness of you and all
your relations, I therefore for the present bid you
most affectionately farewell.

J. W. Dawson

I may add that we are all well. My father & mother
send their kindest respects.

This letter I am afraid is scarcely legible but if you know
how many times I have been interrupted while writing you would
excuse it.