

MY DEAR SISTER –

I believe it is near a month since my last letter to you, but I should not have left you so long without intelligence if my wife had not written to Kirkham in the interval. Since then, however, William's recovery has experienced a check from which he is only just recovered, for he caught from John a sore throat, so trifling with John that the doctor gave him no medicine, but with William it gave fever, which lasted for four or five days, and has been followed by a cough, which at first gave us great alarm, but seems to be on the wane now, and has never been thought important by the doctor. It begins to be a work of difficulty now to find amusement for him; and he is jealous of whatever takes one's attention from him. His mother yesterday, for the second time since his illness, went out a little in the carriage, and I trust will now continue to take a little air and exercise daily – she is much in want of it. I have also been pretty diligent in my attendance, but the necessary care of the ménage has taken me occasionally out, and in the last week we have had some visiting in which I have joined, so that I have suffered nothing from the confinement. The season, which you seem to dread, has been here as unusually mild as with you it has been the reverse, rather too mild to be healthy, and we are all wishing for a bright, clear frost. But perhaps when it comes we may find it too sharp – we are all difficult to please.

The death of our old friend and relation² was indeed not unlikely to take place suddenly, and his situation appeared to me so critical when I called on him on my way through Blackburn, that he was the only one of my friends whom I feared I should not again behold. All who knew him will regret his loss, but by his family it will be severely felt. I rejoice in the reconciliation which has been too long delayed, for all parties suffer in general estimation in quarrels between near relations. In this case our late friend behaved, I think, throughout irreproachably, and though perhaps he had received the most offence, was the most ready to forget and forgive, and would have gone far above the half-way to meet returning good-will. It is a pity he had not the satisfaction to see this event take place, but he saw and knew it was in train. It will contribute, however, at this time to mitigate the affliction of my aunt.³ Your account of your own family grieves me exceedingly.

Poor Cicely! her confinement to the house has been indeed a long one. You seem, however, all upon the recruiting list, and I trust we may mutually congratulate one another. Mine and my wife's best love and wishes to all the dear invalids. I conclude you will be returned from your southern tour before this reaches you, and I hope you will all have derived benefit from it, and that travelling may agree as well with you as it has done with me. How is Cornelius? I fear no one will need consolation more than he will for this loss of poor H. Feilden, who was deservedly a great favourite with him. I wish I had any to offer. Give my most affectionate love to him, and also to my sisters and their families in Church and Preston Streets.⁴ They, it seems, have not been without their invalids.

You will wonder how my wife gets to rights in her present arduous situation, and without a female domestic whom she can understand, or who can understand her. True enough, she often feels the inconvenience. Unfortunately the one we took from England was of so little use, or rather so great a burden, that we never think of her without a feeling of joy that we have got rid of her. We have often thought of our little Betty in our late troubles, but when we have asked ourselves the question how she would have done for us here, it appeared clear to us that she could not have improved our situation much. She would have been frightened out of her wits ten times a day by the jargon which would have assailed her ears continually. We often feel surprised that George contrives to make himself understood and to understand. I don't know whether the surprise will be lessened when I tell you what a large portion of French he can occasionally mix with his English.

The other day, whilst at dinner, we heard there was a long parley in the lobby, at the end of which we distinguished the words "Oh! it's Monsieur Langton you want, is it?"

My wife's anxiety has left her no spirits to fag at an uninteresting labour. Her studies have therefore been cut short, and have not yet been renewed. Mine and the younger children's have been also more or less checked by our situation. Skinner's have, perhaps, been benefited, for we have often not been able to admit him into our room, and

¹ Comprising pages 73 - 92

² Henry Feilden of Witton, died 1815

³ His mother's sister, Mrs. Joseph Feilden

⁴ Sisters-in-law.

he has been reduced to his books for amusement. He is, however, at all times sufficiently laborious, and I trust will attain his object in coming hither.

I promised in my last to give you some little account of the people here. The Stricklands you know by name already. He is a cheerful, happy, and pleasant man, well informed and very observant, from whom I have gathered more than I could by a year's residence, with my habits. He has been very useful to us, and seems to have pleasure in being useful. His wife is one of the most self-important beings I ever came in contact with, and if she were on the pinnacle of prosperity would be insufferable. As it is, one can bear to look at her without being altogether dazzled. They have a nice family, the youngest and only boy of about John's age, the eldest of four daughters is about fourteen. Thus Anne would have had some nice company, but that illness in their family, as well as in ours, has kept us a good deal asunder.

The Stricklands are inmates in the family of Baron de Brachel, who is half a countryman, his mother having been the daughter of a Scotch exile of the name of Kinloch. He is a good-natured country squire, and on my first arrival I experienced many kind attentions from him, which were very welcome. His habits and mine, however, are not likely to bring us much together, nor to furnish many topics of conversation. His wife and daughters do not speak English, and are not, therefore, main spokes in my wife's wheel. But they are very kind and civil, and I rank them amongst my more particular friends.

My host, or landlord, is a very agreeable, polite, and pleasant man. His wife (now at Geneva amusing herself, for Yverdon is too dull for her) is a Frenchwoman, who talks so fast, and so incessantly, that I dread a conference with her, and would prefer a fit of the colic at any time. She has a daughter about fourteen or fifteen, a nice looking girl. Anne has been invited to walk with her, but our fear of the mother has kept us aloof. However, on their return from Geneva we think of cultivating the acquaintance of the young lady for Anne's sake.

The first house in which we visited after our settlement here, was at Madame du Peyrou's, who has a good house on the banks of the lake about a mile from Yverdon. This lady was formerly in very affluent circumstances, and lived in very great style. Her husband had property to a great extent in the West Indies, or South America – Demerara, I believe – but the diminution in its value, and the failure of the French and other funds, have much reduced her. She lives, however, in the best style of Yverdon, and is an extremely well-bred, agreeable, lively old woman. She speaks well and much, and sets Strickland to right in his blunders in a very pleasant way. He talks away without any fear or hesitation, putting in English words where he does not know the French, translating literally, and occasioning no little risibility sometimes, for which he does not care three pins. I have said a good deal of this good lady, as we shall probably be better acquainted with her, for we have ascertained that it will be very agreeable to her to take my family into her house, on the footing the Stricklands are with the Baron. And I am so fully satisfied with marketing and ordering dinner, in which my wife cannot assist me, that I shall be glad to get rid of the charge. Our object is, however, to bring the children, and especially Anne, into good society, of which Madame du Peyrou sees a deal, and she has spare room in her house sufficient to accommodate all my family and dependants without incommoding herself. The terms remain to be arranged – the principle is agreed on – and I have little doubt we shall in the month of May next quit the town for our country seat at Champitet. The old lady herself generally spends the winter at Neufchatel (her native place), where she is at present.

Skinner and I have of late begun to visit, and our list presents from the 17th January to the 3rd February only five blank evenings, of which two are Sundays, on which day we have intimated our intention of not going into society. The manner and wise of these parties is as follows: you assemble at six to half-past six, walk about, talk, have tea and very nice cakes handed about, or, if the party is not too numerous, sit down about a long table to this meal.

Then the lady of the house arranges the parties, who sit down to whist till nine or half-past nine. We shall not ruin ourselves with play; the first rubber, indeed, counts eight points, but the point is only three halfpence. The numbers are generally from twenty-five to forty, and would be rather more agreeable if one could cut out as with you, but one is tied for the evening to the same set, and indeed in great measure for the season, a sort of etiquette being observed in determining who, and who, are to go together. Were you to see the whole in a magic camera obscura you would see little to suppose that the scene was not in England, and indeed upon innumerable occasions I have heard it observed by one or other of our party with surprise, "Why, this is just the same as in England."

Besides the persons I have noticed, there are some others more particularly interesting to us from their speaking English. One of our first callers was a Miss Bourgeois, who understands the language well, though she speaks as yet with some difficulty. She has been very attentive to us, and only our sick family has prevented our seeing her more frequently. There is a Colonel de Vos, formerly Lieutenant-Colonel in the 60th Regiment, who married a Quebec lady. He speaks English tolerably, and she may be considered as an Englishwoman. There are also three sisters of English descent, by the mother, who are married in this place, one to Huber the Ant-historian, who himself speaks

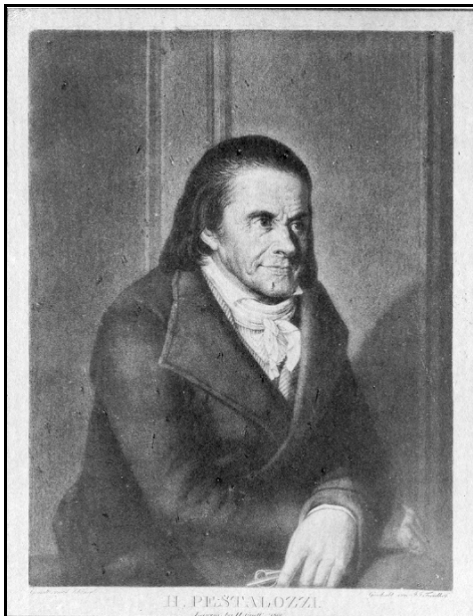
English, I am told-his wife speaks it fluently. Another sister married to Baron de Guimpre, a French emigrant, has almost lost her English by learning German. She, however, has done her best to keep up a conversation with my wife. The eldest sister, Madame Bourgeois, – no relation of the former, – speaks, as she says, “very bad,” but she speaks it. An old maid, Mdlle. Burnaud, understands it very well, as she says, but will not speak it. She has, however, lent us many English books for the amusement of William.

Before mentioning a valuable acquaintance of Skinner’s, I must go a little into history and politics, which are warm here at present, though a little subsiding. This canton was a conquest of Bern, and was always treated as a conquest during the ferment of the French Revolution. This was felt most galling, and petitions and remonstrances were preferred to the Senate of Bern, which would carry matters with a high hand, and laid the petitioners and remonstrancers by the heels. These, through their friends, sought the protection of the French Government, and the Directory proclaimed these oppressed persons to be under its protection. Seeing themselves thus backed, and being, perhaps, instigated underhand, the Vaudois asserted their independence, expelled the Bern Bailiffs, and prepared for resistance. Upon Bern’s sending troops against them, the French troops entered into the Pays de Vaud for their protection. As Bern did not give way, they proceeded from defensive to offensive measures, entered the canton of Bern, and finally took the town, which foolishly resisted. The consequence was the plunder of Bern, the carrying off to Paris the immense treasure of the State, and enormous contributions. After various changes, too long to be here enumerated, the Pays de Vaud was constituted an independent canton, and had a constitution given it by Buonaparte, by which the power was thrown into the hands of what are here called the Democratic party. On the abdication of Buonaparte in 1814 the government of the canton, having lost its protector, feared to fall into the hands of Bern again, which had shown a great desire to recover this country. Whilst this affair stood, as it were, in suspense, Buonaparte returned; the Democrats were now in high spirits, and the others down in the mouth. Bitterness and violence rose high in the minds of all, and when the Swiss Confederacy joined the allies against Buonaparte, the Vaudois were not to be trusted. Their troops were sent for the most part into garrison, in the eastern part of Switzerland, by the orders of the Diet. The agitation of men’s minds during these periods was excessive, and though now all seems quiet, a great deal of rancour lurks at the bottom.

At the head of the government of this district is a M. du Thon. With a son of this gentleman, Albert du Thon, Skinner made acquaintance about ten days ago. Albert has had an excellent education, is very well informed, speaks the language better than most people here, and has fortunately the same desire to improve himself in English, of which he knows a little, which Skinner has to improve his French. They have agreed to meet every day, and when the weather does not allow of walking they read and converse together in their rooms.

Just when Skinner was beginning to congratulate himself on this arrangement, he found himself baited on all sides by the aristocrats, who form nine-tenths of our acquaintances here, and if he would give way to their suggestions, hints, and insinuations, he must give up his acquaintance at once with Albert. He was at first very huffy and indignant, felt then rather uncomfortable, and I think would have slackened in his friendship with Albert if we had not encouraged him. We have a good deal of laugh and talk amongst ourselves about this affair, which has led me to give it you at some length.

One of my great cronies is old Pestalozzi, one of the best of human beings, but who is of no use as a language master, for he speaks French worse than I do, and his German is highly provincial. The Institute founded by him, by its success in some branches, and the justness of the principles on which it is founded, and which are not so much the result of learning or experience as of a fine discriminating feeling, has excited attention all over the Continent.

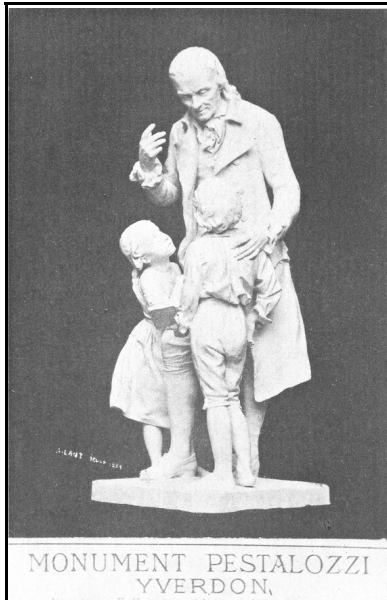


PESTALOZZI

Nothing but the noise about Bell⁵ and Lancaster⁶ could have prevented his name reaching into our country, where it has scarce ever been heard. I do not wish to depreciate those plans, which, as far as their object goes, viz., to instruct the many in reading, writing, etc., at as small a cost as possible, and well, have had all the success they could desire. But I think it is highly probable that if no assistance had been afforded from without, if subscriptions and donations and public meetings had not pushed the thing into prurience, it might never have been known but at Madras and in the Borough. Fortunately for the children of the poor it found powerful and wealthy protectors.

The case was far different here. Induced by a benevolent heart, Pestalozzi undertook in 1798, at the age of fifty-three, the care and management of an orphan house, which had been erected in one of the little cantons, where the ravages of French and Austrians, and the resistance of the inhabitants en masse to the former, had reduced the country to the highest state of misery.

As the women had joined in the ranks, numerous families of children were left totally unprotected, and beggary, vice, and the worst habits increased the horrors of this once happy and innocent little people.



Tout pour les autres, pour lui rien

Pestalozzi, with a single female servant to superintend the domestic concerns, undertook this unpromising office. The difficulties he had to encounter were far greater and than, I could well describe, if I had, room. He lived, eat, and slept in the midst of eighty of these little unfortunate beings. He never quitted them, but by his kindness and unremitting attentions he gained such an influence over them, that not only order, regularity, and good behaviour were prevalent, but also, before the end of the year, these poor children had made such progress in their reading, writing, and arithmetic as excited general astonishment, and the more so as he had not had a single assistant. Before the end of the year, however, the scourge of war fell again upon this unhappy district. Pestalozzi's little flock was dispersed, and the orphan house converted into a military magazine or hospital by the Austrians. His success with these boys now determined him, however, to prosecute this experiment further, and he opened a school in another part of Switzerland, where one of the cantonal governments gave him the use of a building. Hither he took many of his first scholars at his own charge, who afterwards repaid his generosity by proving his most valuable assistants.

The general attention, however, had been roused. His school had been visited, and his method approved by many competent judges, upon whose report several men of ability came to offer their assistance in his new establishment. Some of these had been impressed with such an idea of the importance of this method, that they left lucrative permanent situations to become fellow-labourers with one who, instead of being able to reward them,

was, in the general opinion, sacrificing his little fortune to his benevolence and philanthropy. The building which had been lent him was soon after wanted for other purposes, and he had new quarters to seek. The establishment was now become numerous, for the terms on which he took boarders were so low as to tempt even the economical Swiss, and, for want of an appropriate dwelling, was obliged to separate for some time. Soon after this the town of Yverdon, having the castle, in which the Bern Bailiff had formerly resided, on their hands (a large and suitable building), offered it to Pestalozzi in the hope of benefiting their town by the strangers whom the Institute might draw thither. Here then Pestalozzi settled in 1805, and has not since been disturbed. The use of this building without rent is, I believe, the only support the Institution ever received, but as an innovation it has experienced not only detraction, sneers, and ridicule, but even active opposition. In spite of all which, and of the poverty of its founder, it has drawn the eyes of Europe upon it, and has sent out young men into Russia, Spain, and several countries of Germany to found similar institutions at the call of the government of those countries.

There are at present three men of talent and great respectability sent from a German university to study the method, besides several others on similar errands. No one who has given himself the time to study the method has failed to give it his approbation. A transient view, indeed, may cause an unfavourable impression, for nothing is done to catch the eye. The method has been adopted with varied success in different branches of instruction. In some

⁵ Andrew Bell, 1753-1832, founder of the Madras system of education.

⁶ Joseph Lancaster, 1778-1838, founder of the Lancasterian system of education.



THE CASTLE AT YVERDUN

branches the true application of the principle is yet to be discovered, whilst in others, the result has fully proved its excellence and truth.

I daresay I shall have raised your curiosity by this little history, and I regret my inability to satisfy it by worthily displaying the principles on which the plan proceeds. But it would be unfair not to do my best some time or other. In the meanwhile there is, I believe, an account published, or to be published, in England by a Mr. Sings, who resided for some months with Pestalozzi, studying the method.

I have been so runaway with that I have scarcely room to send my most affectionate regards to you and all yours, as well as all our other friends, in which my wife's are included. It is three days since I began my letter, during which time William has continued to gain strength, and his cough is better. – Adieu,

THO. LANGTON.