

CODED LETTERS, CONCEALED LOVE:
The Larger Lives of Harriet Freeman and Edward Everett Hale
by Sara Day

In the summer of 1871, the year she joined the volunteer staff of the South Congregational Church in Boston's South End, young Harriet Freeman was one of her much older minister's party on a church trip to Waterville Valley in New Hampshire's White Mountains... Edward and Hattie shared an outside seat on the stage coach that carried them the last part of the journey from Boston. She recalled that ride twenty years later in a combination of longhand and the shorthand he had taught her to convey their most intimate thoughts: "I remember, you do not, that on the stage ride up I sat next [to] you. It was either rainy or very warm, for we held up an umbrella. I held it, & you held my wrist for a better support. I remember even then that *<that touch of yours, your hand on mine gave my heart pleasure. That love was in my heart then hardly born. How little we knew then of what was before us [or] where the paths of life would lead us.>*" Edward replied that, on the contrary, he remembered that journey well, including feeling the same tug of attraction. He was evidently enchanted by the slim young woman's youthful enthusiasm for the outdoors, for natural history, and for mountain-climbing. [Chapter 3, Panic, Church, and Science, page 51]

Edward's letters to Hattie from Matunuck that summer were among the most romantic and poetic he wrote, and he thought of her constantly. He strove to explain his passion for the surrounding South County countryside, particularly the glaciated freshwater pond immediately behind the Red House, on which the Hales kept several boats. In many of his letters, he described his early morning paddle across the pond in a canoe, imagining Hattie sitting in the prow. He delighted in sharing with her his botanical discoveries, which he examined under his microscope... Returning from his row one morning, he waxed his most poetic: "If I had had you [with me] I would have shewn you the loveliest world of webs in the grass dotted all over with fog beads. I would have shewn you azalea and wild roses and milk weed just peering through the fog on the sides of the pond, I would have shewn you the loveliest mysterious vista between the trees, down on the other pond, and I would have made you guess out the mysterious form of my old Indian, who is a vague strange shaped maple, of different colour from the trees around him... All of which glories I had to take alone." [Chapter 4, Romantic Love, pages 85 and 86]

More than likely, Edward's black mood was due to his imminent separation from Hattie and the ties of convention that made this necessary every summer. Edward had led Hattie to believe that he might be able to join her on a geological field trip to Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park led by Professor George Barton of Boston Tech, part of the geology curriculum she was now following there. Hattie wrote that she was not surprised when Edward bowed out. But she might have been referring to her disappointment when she remarked: "It was very wretched very bitter: & the bitterness came in the thought that you might have helped & did not. I write this now in no anger, as you know but in a little sorrow, that you do not know how to help

me over the hard places...I thought once I could tell you, but I believe it is something that cannot be taught.”

Edward explained later, “with all other difficulties about my going with you, there was the great difficulty *<that it was with you>*...everybody *<in the parish or out of it>* would have known and said that Mr. Hale had gone off *<with Miss Freeman’s party>*. I called it all the time Mr. Barton’s party. But in *<the parish>* circles that would have deceived nobody.” Instead, the Hales had agreed to join their Marquand in-laws on a European vacation, with the prime objective of visiting their newly married children and their son Philip in Paris. [Chapter 8, Separations and Tragedy, pages 175-176]

The letters they wrote each other in June 1892 are among the most revealing about how each of them saw their relationship. There was no doubt about who had set the ground rules, as can be seen in Edward’s letter addressed to Hattie at Butte, Montana (it was forwarded to the next address on her itinerary, in Idaho). She had reminded him of a date which had very special meaning for them both, June 17, the day at Pepperell when they made a serious commitment to each other and when he probably gave her the ring that she mentions several times in her letters. “I have taken great satisfaction in your recalling the date of June 17,” he wrote, continuing, “You were a year out, it was in 1884 and not in 1885. I do not wonder that the years seem fewer than they are. It is on the principle *<that time with you always passes much more quickly than any other time does>*...Seriously speaking that is about the date *<when all reserves were broken between us, so that>* we could trust *<each other entirely each sure that he or she might ask the other everything>* as I am so fond of saying of the highest confidence. Since these reserves were broken, each of us has been, in a way, emancipated *<for a good part of life if not for the whole>*. And I hope we are too sensible, both of us, not to accept half a loaf as better than none...For me, as you can see clearly enough, it is from that era *<that I began to grow insight again>* an experience which as you know, I am not the only person who observes, but which is spoken of by everybody.” [Chapter 8, Separations and Tragedy, pages 178-179]

On Easter Sunday, April 14, Edward wrote a letter to await Hattie’s arrival in Gibraltar. In her thoughtful way, Hattie had written an Easter note for Judith Andrews to give him. “I was not prepared for your note by Mrs. Andrews,” he said. “I had known you would write a line from the ship. (I had not expected the nice long letter you did send). But when she gave me the note and pinned the pansies in I broke down.” During such lengthy separations, letters were essential symbols of their love. “*<I always carry the last one with me in my pocket until the next one comes>*,” wrote Hattie in 1889, “*<then every quiet moment that I am alone I take it and read it again and again...I slip my hand into my pocket and touch it, hold it that I may touch something that you had touched and so be your love>*.” To avoid unnecessary anguish over inevitably lost and delayed letters, they once again numbered their letters and sent a weekly telegram.

Crossing the Atlantic was always a time of anxiety for the one left behind. It was just as well that Edward only heard later about the severe weather the women encountered

soon after they headed out to sea. "Miss Cummings & Carrie were sick, I was not, but I was light-headed. There was so much motion that our trunks & bags went all over the floor & had to be lashed...Some people were thrown down the gangway & injured, but I knew enough to keep my berth." [Chapter 8, Separations and Tragedy, page 196]

Two days later, Edward repeated a proposal that they meet in Albany and then travel down the Hudson to Lake Mohonk, where they could spend a week together rather than in Boston. But before Hattie agreed to meet Edward en route home, she evidently poured out her loneliness from Chicago where she was visiting Judith Andrews's youngest son Clement (Cle), librarian of the John Crerar Library of Science at the University of Chicago. Her *cri de coeur* elicited this heartfelt response from her lover: "As you say in your shorthand, or as you imply, we have <*so good a time when we are together that all separate life*> seems intolerable...When I am all sole alone, I begin to say <*why is she not here, why did I not go to find her, and why are we not together*>...I know it would be better not to say this or think it, but to go to work squaring the circles, or discovering perpetual motion, or doing something else <*if only it would put the*> impossible <*memory out of*> the way...I take a certain grim satisfaction when I see that <*in my loneliness I follow the lines of yours*> or that you in yours follow <*the lines of mine*>...<*how empty life seems without you*>." And again he repeated his hope that she would "feel like stopping at Albany and going down to L.M. with me."

They did manage a week together at Lake Mohonk. The Mohonk Mountain House register shows that they checked in under their own names to adjacent rooms with a connecting balcony on July 25. [Chapter 9, The Toll of Depression, pages 212-214]

Silas Weir Mitchell was now seventy, handsome, white-haired, and charming. According to contemporary accounts, he had a commanding bedside manner and he was a good listener but, like Edward, he opposed woman suffrage and expressed serious doubts about women's colleges. His novels, which Edward and Emily read to each other, are often misogynist, displaying his general antipathy toward women of independent spirit by describing them in one biographer's words "either as repellent or as women who became submissive to their husbands once married." Edward was certainly aware of his niece Charlotte's angry indictment of Mitchell's treatment in her short story "The Yellow Wall-Paper," and may even have influenced its publication in the *New England Magazine*...How could he, therefore, once again recommend that a woman whose independent and adventurous spirit he admired place herself under the control of a man whose understanding of intellectual women was directly opposed to her own ambitions and ideas?

... Hattie traveled into downtown Philadelphia by trolley for regular consultations with Dr. Mitchell, reporting on June 29: "Yes! The Dr. did say on Saturday that any recovery was likely to be sudden. But Monday when I went in, he had heard from Ned [Edwin Atkins] that I was not to be 'permitted to return' while I was as nervous as when I left home & the consequence I am not allowed to leave. I am to be kept here in this heat & not allowed to see my friends." And she made a cry from the heart to Edward: "Do not, for pity's sake, leave me here...The terror of not being allowed to use your free will, & of going when & where you want! You know how I have always opened my home to other people. Mrs.

Andrews, Etta, Hortense, & Hattie all say I can come to them. It is not the Dr. who says I can't go, except as Ned writes to him. [Chapter 10, "For Pity's Sake," pages 242 and 244]

It must have seemed to Hattie that this happy state of affairs would continue for as long as Edward lived but the letter he passed on to her on July 27, 1903 from Matunuck shortly before she and the Hales set off for their month in Intervale together heralded a devastating blow to the pattern of their long relationship. Edward's old friend Senator George Hoar, a leading Unitarian, wrote urging him to accept nomination to become chaplain to the United States Senate. Edward reported that the Hale women were keen for him to accept. He did not tell Hattie that he had already telegraphed his acceptance to Senator Hoar. [Chapter 11, An Adventurous Life, page 296]