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Letter from June 8, 1889 - transcript

Lavinia Coombs

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Midnapore
June 8th 1889

My dear Nellie Whittemore

I am just overwhelmed with "shame & confusion of face" at the discovery that I haven't written to you since those boxes came and the new missionaries and the cookies! I don't know how it has happened, for I was so anxious to send a letter to every one of those who sent me anything-and even now it seems to me I must have written you but my letter book doesn't indicate it. I find that I wrote you a few days before Mr. & Mrs. Stiles' arrived. I knew I hadn't answered that letter but I thought I had written about things you sent. Have I not really! If not what have you thought of me! I most humbly ask your forgiveness, and proceed to do what should have been done and what I thought was done months ago. And now its got to be a whole month before you can get this. Seven months behind hand! Disgraceful! I didn't open the cookies for some time after they came so I think it was about five months after you put them up that they were opened and they were as fresh as ever. It seems the tighter they are closed the better they keep. Clara's were not quite so fresh this time. That was quite a story you told of those two you had kept in a tureen for two years and more and still looked as fresh as ever. I suspect they wouldn't have tasted as well as they looked. The cards you sent are specially acceptable for I was nearly out and now those and others sent are nearly gone again and I'm wishing for more. The dolls were given out at Christmastime-just the things-good size & not too fine. I've got the "Life of Jerry MacAuley" too. It came not long ago and I knew by the writing on the wrapper it was sent by Mary Bachelor, and I wondered how she knew I wanted it: and I wrote at once thanking her for it and telling her to send the bill to Miss DeMerrilte [sic] and she would pay for it from my remittance; but now on rereading your letter over I think I am probably indebted to you, for you say that Miss Bachelor thought she could find it in New York, so I suppose you had told her to find it if she could and send it. It is a very interesting book and I have enjoyed reading it and so have several others. Many thanks for it.

I found my brother's wife's picture among the cards which was a pleasant surprise, but she has grown old since I saw her. I haven't had a letter from them for a long time. I was greatly pleased and encouraged to hear that two of my brother's boys-Daisy's uncles-had been converted in a revival during the winter at Cape Elizabeth. I have prayed for them for a long time. I hope they will not neglect duty and fall back. I haven't heard whether they and Daisy were baptized or not. There are other boys in that family that have now become men grown for whom my faith almost wavers.

In one of your notes you spoke of an excursion to the White Mountains. How many times have I looked longingly at those white peaks that could be seen from our old house and wished I could ever get a closer look view. Little did I think that I should climb the Himalayas before I could climb Mt. Washington. There were three places in the homeland that I had always wanted to see and do yet. The White Mountains, Niagara Falls, and the Yosemite Valley. I believe if I ever go home, it will be by way of California and I'll take in all three on my way across. As a child I always had great delight in high hills, and I remember visiting my brother Eldridge when he lived in Augusta. His house then was on the banks of a wide stream running at the foot of the highest hill I had then seen. That hill filled me with delight and awe, even more I believe than those fearful heights we were climbing all day as went up among the Hills to Darjeeling. One needs to stand at the foot of mountains and look to its top to get an idea of its full grandeur, but we were wriggling

along the sides and around bluffs only to see new heights, 'till we got used to it all and would only shiver when looking down into valleys between. I haven't taken ant trips away this summer except to run out to Mrs. Burkholder's for a week. My journey to Lucknow last October exhausted my resources & more too, and now I've got to make up for it. However I wont regret it. It did me a lot good in soul and body. Our last papers tell of a terrible disaster in Pennsylvania-the bursting of a reservoir and of fearful floods in Maryland and Virginia with an unprecedented loss of life. From eight to ten thousand lives lost! One can hardly imagine such a thing. The storms and winds and rains-everything at home seemed to come on the largest scale. We are told that "you Americans" like to tell of your biggest tress and your biggest lakes and everything the biggest: but I fancy they had just as lief not have the biggest disasters & c. What a terrible thing the famine in China is! That seems to me the worst thing I ever heard of. Such numbers dying from starvation that all the relief that can be sent seems like a single drop. It will end sometime of course but to think of the millions taken, in this way seems horrible! Of course they would all have had to die some time-the fact of their death, isn't such a strange thing but that they should have to die from starvation and in the midst of so much suffering is the hard part.

June 13th

Another chance to write and I'll try and finish it so as to be sure and send it this mail. We have been having vacation for the hot weather since May 16th and are to begin again next Monday. This has been for the zenana teachers and Bible Women. The schools only had half as long for the children are hard to gather again after a long vacation. The Bible School has a vacation of two weeks just now which is to last through next 2 weeks. I went out to Blimpore for a week and Miss Butts plans to go this week for the same length of time. Dr. & Auntie Bachelor have gone to Jellasure for a short visit to Dr. Harry Bachelor's's. Auntie B. was very ill with fever and dysentery a short time ago and Dr. thought a change would be good for her. I do hope Mary will come as soon as possible after she finishes her studies. I often tremble for fear she may not find her mother when she comes. Mrs. Bachelor is subject to attacks of illness and she is getting old. Dr. holds his own wonderfully well. We had it intensely hot this season and the rain held off 'till the farmers were getting very anxious, but they (the rains) have begun now and if there is as much as usual I think the rice crop will be all right. Perhaps you will have heard before you get this of the new Miss Stiles that has come to Midnapore. She was a month old yesterday (the 12th) and is getting somewhat accustomed to her new house. At first she didn't seem contented and lifted up her voice & wept, but she is evidently deciding it is best to submit to the inevitable and is quieter now. Mrs. Stiles is quite smart again and has begun her study of Bengali again that was interrupted for a while. They are both sensible, practical people and I'm glad we have them here. Mr. Stiles is especially alive to every chance for work. He has been starting an A.C.F. in our Church and has been quite successful. We have quite a number but they seem to be afraid of the pledge. I think that pledge is just the thing and if one doesn't want to sign it, it shows a lack in their piety and an unwillingness to do their reasonable duty. The Christian religion does mean so much more than the religion of the gods that I suppose it is not to be wondered at that the nominal Christians many of them do not realize how much heart work is required to be a true Christian. To so many, Religion has simply meant certain rites and ceremonies and outward offerings and acts, so that to become a Christian or to accept the true Christian religion meant to them the leaving their own rites and taking up something a little different-going to meeting, being

baptized, taking communion, eating with Christians, observing the Sabbath and such like. Of course those who have been a long time with us and have been growing up among Christians, and receiving Christian instruction know better, but those that come in from among the heathen do need line upon line and that continuously to make them understand the principles of Christianity. The work is discouraging at times I confess, but the promises-the promise are seen: "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ." One must keep clipping, clipping steadily at it. The hidden influences and powers that are at work will make themselves mightily felt someday. They are being felt now so that old Hindus are roused and trying to stem the oncoming current. They have formed societies for printing and scattering tracts expounding and upholding their own systems, warning their countrymen against the encroachments of Christianity and urging them to withstand all these new influences. They tell barefaced lies about missionaries and their work and there has been quite strong opposition attempted in Southern India, but the work goes on and must. I'm glad the interest at home keeps so good. The young people have the courage and vigor and talent to do a great work if they will only keep at it. This will reach you some time in July when you will probably be planning for a vacation. Wish I could have two or three days at Ocean Park.

I shall hope to hear from you as soon as you get this and that you will tell me I am forgiven for my oversight. I don't want to call it neglect.

With love to you and Rebecca from Vina C.