

NEW SERIES

• Price 1 dollar

• VOL. XXI No. 2

VERMONT *Quarterly*

A MAGAZINE OF HISTORY



April 1953

The PROCEEDINGS of the
VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



LETTERS FROM THE PAST

In the last Quarterly we said farewell to Andrew and Mathilda Roberts of Walden, Vt., with the publication of the final letters they exchanged while Andrew was in the California gold fields. Now we turn to letters and a journal written by two young Vermont missionaries a century ago. The letters and journal came to us through the kindness of Mr. C. R. Ranney of Springfield, Vt. His notes are indicated by the signature, C.R.R. Editor.

THE LETTERS AND JOURNAL OF TWO VERMONT MISSIONARIES

Introductory Note by Mr. Ranney

THE present generation cannot appreciate the convenience of an attic. Modern houses do not afford such a luxury. The old-fashioned attic was a place where all those things which are now put into the trash can and set out for the rubbish man to collect used to be stored away and forgotten until the family moved or some equal disaster struck. On rainy days when the children of the family could not play out of doors, they used to climb to the attic and play with the treasures stored there. It was in such an attic that I played in my boyhood.

After my mother's death, my father decided to sell the house, and it became my duty to assist my father in cleaning and sorting the accumulation in the attic of thirty or forty years. While we were thus engaged my father remarked, "Here are some papers that the Vermont Historical Society might like." I immediately became interested and began looking at them. They were a bundle of letters and a diary written from Indian territory by my paternal grandfather and grandmother during the years from 1844 to 1861, while they were serving as missionaries under the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions.

When I discovered what these papers were, I claimed them for my own and decided I would, at least, read them before turning them over to the Society. As I found time I began deciphering them. The paper was old and yellow and the ink was faded with age. As opportunity offered, I copied them, typing them by my one-finger method. Much of the material was of no special interest except to those of immediate family; however, some of the material seemed of more or less general historical value. The writer has endeavored here to sort out such material as will give the reader some idea of the nature of the

life lived, and the conditions under which missionaries of that period worked.'

In 1658, Thomas Ranney arrived in this country from Scotland and obtained a grant of a house lot in the settlement on the Great River which later became Middletown, Conn. Three generations later Thomas' great grandson Ephraim found the settlements in Connecticut too crowded and joined the tide of emigration up the valley. In 1761, the Governor of New Hampshire granted this Ephraim Ranney lot #7 in the township which later became Westminster in the State of Vermont. In 1771, one of Ephraim's sons Elijah went over the hills to the west part of the same township, cleared land, and built a log cabin home. Soon came Lexington and Concord. Ephraim and three sons including Elijah enlisted and served through the war. After the war Elijah returned to his log cabin where with his son Joseph they improved the land and built a more substantial house. On this farm in 1815 Timothy Emerson Ranney was born: the seventh of the sixteen children of Joseph Ranney.

This line of pioneers were God-fearing Puritans and very active in establishing churches in the communities in which they settled, Joseph Ranney being one of the first deacons of the West Parish church of Westminster. It is evident that Timothy was reared in a devoutly religious atmosphere. Along with his religious training the importance of education was stressed. Between seasons of farm work he gained sufficient elementary schooling to enter Phillips Exeter Academy from which he graduated and went on to Middlebury College. In those days anyone obtaining a college degree was expected to enter one of the professions. Timothy had early decided upon the ministry. Immediately after finishing at Middlebury in 1839 he took a course at Andover Theological Seminary. It was while here that he made up his mind to become a missionary. In the language of that day, "He was called to carry the gospel to the heathen." At about this time he met Charlotte Taylor, a young lady who had an unusual education for a woman of that time. She was teaching school in Ashby, Mass. Being deeply religious, she was impressed by the need of "carrying the Gospel to the heathen." It was natural that these two missionary spirits should be mutually attracted.

As Mr. Ranney had borrowed money to cover the expense of his education, he felt it his duty to clear himself of his indebtedness before starting for heathen lands. He contracted with the church in Barnet, Vt., to act as their pastor for one year in order to earn enough to pay his debts. During this year, he corresponded with Charlotte

Taylor, making plans for their marriage and future work in the mission field together. This correspondence was formal and hardly of the nature that would be called love letters to-day. These early letters do, however, show the earnestness with which these young people looked forward to their career.

The letter bearing the earliest date and evidently the first that Timothy ever wrote to Charlotte is quoted here in full. What young man to-day would address the lady of his choice in this formal manner? C.R.R.

I

My Dear Miss Charlotte:— Westminster West, Vt. Oct. 4, 1842

I have now taken my pen to fulfill an engagement which I made with you when I was at Ashby. I trust you will allow me to express myself without any reserve as I did when I saw you last. I feel much hesitation when commencing a correspondence of so much importance as the present. I hope it is not done without the approbation of the Heavenly Father to whom I am accustomed to look for direction in every undertaking. In the smallest affairs his blessing is necessary for success and I would desire to begin and conduct all our communications with a feeling that their success depends entirely upon Him.

I have often tried to imagine what would be your feelings for the week past that I might better understand how to communicate my own, but every effort of this kind has only involved me in greater difficulty. At times I seem to see you at the Throne of Grace imploring the aid of "Him who seeth in secret and who rewardeth openly." Perhaps you like myself have spent many hours meditating upon our future course. Perhaps you have been in company but your thoughts have not been there. I would gladly think myself worthy of one anxious thought but more gladly would I think the cause of my Savior worthy of many anxious thoughts.

Perhaps you have asked the advice of friends and they have not been ready to sympathize with you. Perhaps they can see no reason why you should desire to carry the Gospel to the destitute in heathen lands. It may be that they have brought forward a thousand objections which you know not how to answer. Perhaps my imaginings have been all in vain. Friends may have been favorably disposed but your own feelings may be at a variance with my own.

Will you have the kindness to inform me if any of my imaginings be true, if you have difficulties let them be known to me, that I may be able to understand them, and if possible to remove them?

If you have mentioned the subject of our last conversation to your parents or friends, please let me know the result of your communications with them.

I have thought of addressing a letter to your parents and will do so now (with your permission) if you will give me their address. I might fill out this letter with words and phrases often used to express the attachment of one individual for another, but I know you have too much good sense to be carried away with stereotype phrases which often express but little more than that he who uses them has read in love ditties till he is nearly or quite sick with love. I will assure you of my sincere affection for you which is as strong a statement as the extent of our acquaintance will permit me to make.

I have much more that I might say but for the present shall be satisfied with,

Subscribing myself, Yours Truly, Timothy Emerson Ranney
[Following this initial effort there are letters dated at about two-week intervals. A few quotations are chosen to illustrate the character of the whole correspondence. C.R.R.]

2.

My Dear Charlotte:— Westminster West, Vt. Oct. 18, 1842.

I have this moment finished a letter addressed to your parents and have now undertaken to answer yours of the eleventh instant which was received last week. . . I was glad to hear that you had mentioned the object of our communication to your friends and I was still more pleased not to hear from your friends serious objections to the accomplishment of that which at present seems to me most desirable. . .

If want of preparation can be a great objection to your going among the heathen as a companion of the missionary, then may all say the same or I have been misinformed. Not that I doubt that you sincerely feel what you express, for who does not feel it? The "Great Apostle of the Gentiles" when reflecting upon it asks "Who is sufficient for these things?" . . .

You wish to know what acquirements would be most useful. As respects this I must think your own judgement with what advice you can obtain from the mothers about you will be much more serviceable than anything I might say. To quote from Rev. Mr. Meigs "A good knowledge of domestic affairs is more important than anything else." Some knowledge of medicine such as may be obtained by being with the sick may be of good service. There may be much need of learning to take care of one's own health. Health of

body as well as of mind is of highest importance to enable anyone to make an effort for the good of others. While I am making these remarks allow me to add one more thing, and that is that it would be pleasant as it seems to me to be able to sing. "Music can sooth the savage mind" it is said. . .

Be sure you are and have been remembered in my petitions to The Throne of Grace. It is my ardent prayer to God that He will guide you in the way of all truth and point out the way of duty and will open to you a door of usefulness.

Accept this from Timothy Emerson Ranney.

3.

My Dear Charlotte:—

Barnet, Vt. Jan. 17, 1843.

. . . When I was at Ashby I made a remark regarding the time when I shall be able to enter on my field of labor as a missionary. I was then hoping to be able to go in the spring. Now I find that it will not be possible to clear my debts as the times are and get ready to go under one year from this time. Accordingly I have entered into an engagement to preach at this place and at McIndoes Falls three miles from this place till one year from this month.

I am seated in my room to-night for the first time. I have not had a place that I could call my sanctuary since I left Andover till this evening. I do not feel that this is to be exactly a sanctuary for adjoining this room is the Vermont Antiquarian Society Library and the only entrance to it is through my room. . .

My landlord is one of the queerest men living, a thorough going antiquarian, a man of much good sense and more that is odd and unseemly, but what is worse than all and more to be deplored, he makes no pretensions of piety. His wife is a member of the church in this place and a woman of whom all speak well. . .

Pray for me that the life giving energies of The Holy Spirit may be granted to me that "I may teach transgressors His way and that sinners may be converted to God." . .

There is here a small church I do not yet know how large. There are some things about it that look favorable but as a general thing they look dead, I was about to say twice dead and plucked up by the roots. I must defer giving a full account of things here till another time when I will have learned more of them. . .

Believe me to be yours truly, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

4.

My Dear Charlotte:—

Barnet, Vt. June 27, 1843.

. . . I am fully aware of the truth of the expression in your last letter

that there will be many errors to be overlooked. It will not belong to me alone to overlook errors. Others too will have the same task to perform in at least an equal degree. I think I can adopt the language of another and say in the fullness of my heart "I have seen an end to all perfection." I can think of nothing that pertains to this world that I can call perfect. . .

I was a little surprised to hear that the advocates of the speedy coming of our Lord and Savior were to hold camp meeting in order to promote their views at this late hour. During the past winter there was much said on the subject in some towns in this vicinity. Recently the excitement has all died away and I hear none who are so foolish as to advocate the doctrine. The time has already passed in which they expected the appearance of Christ on earth. The effect so far as I know instead of making men infidels as some predicted it would has led them to study the Bible for themselves and listen to such preachers as have studied the Bible in the original tongues. Religious congregations so far as I have heard have increased especially such as listen to the pure Gospel. I preached last Sabbath to a congregation in St. Johnsbury by way of exchange. The congregation was said to be the largest that ever convened in that house on the Sabbath. This was not owing to the fact altogether that they had a new minister for but few could have known but that they were to have their own pastor. . .

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

5.

My Dear Charlotte:—

McIndoes Falls, Vt. Aug. 22, 1843.

. . . This church petitioned the "Vermont Missionary Society," when I came here, for aid from that society. After a visit from the secretary, when he came here and set before them the wants of other churches and asked the society to make an effort to raise what they were expecting to pay me for the first half year without aid, the society made an effort according to his suggestions and succeeded so well as to conclude not to ask for any aid from the society while I remain. . .

I am pleased with the people of Barnet and have some melancholy feelings in view of leaving them but they have the Gospel in their own language and can read it and can in a good degree understand it. They have good faithful preaching within ten miles each way north, east, south and west, and of their own denomination. Besides this there are in town two Scotch Presbyterian Churches, one efficient Baptist church and one at least if not two Methodist churches. These (except one Presbyterian church which is destitute of preach-

ing) have preaching every Sabbath. With all this in their favor I cannot see how it is my duty to stay with them when I can go to those who have no way of knowing a way of salvation through a crucified Savior.

Even if this little church should not have a settled pastor I see nothing to prevent their being supplied with preaching for want of preachers if I go. There are others out of employ who will never go to the heathen even if they turn aside to their farm and their merchandise. Such is the reasoning I am accustomed to use with this people when they urge me to relinquish the idea of going away. . .

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

6.

My Dear Charlotte:—

McIndoes Falls, Vt. Sept. 5, 1843.

This is the day of the annual election of officers of this State and I have been out with other citizens to deposit my vote for those who shall rule over us the coming year. The vote in this town is what is called a Whig vote as they elected a Whig to represent them in legislature this year. Every thing in connection with the voting went off pleasantly so far as I know. I am not a party politician. The people here do not know on which side I am nor do I well know myself. I went and voted as I thought every honest citizen should do. The government of this country is intrusted to the hands of the people and the better part of the people should never stay away because the wicked are opposed to their voting.

I look forward to another year and trust if it please God to spare my life and to accept me as a servant of His, I shall be permitted before another autumn shall arrive to be stationed in some corner of His vineyard where I may cultivate it and prepare it for His inheritance, so that it shall bring forth fruit abundantly to His praise and glory.

When I look upon myself I seem altogether unworthy of such employment. I hope through the grace given me I may be accepted as Laborer in the vineyard of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. No amount of toil and suffering can compensate for what He has done for us. I would think myself happy if called even to suffer in His service for after all I think I could say that "His burden is light."

I am ever yours, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

7.

My Dear Charlotte:—

McIndoes Falls, Vt. Sept. 19, 1843.

You ask my opinion as to your studies this fall. You mentioned in

addition to your study of Butler's Analogue and Physiology, the study of Latin. I think you have made a good selection in regard to the first two, in regard to the third (Latin) I am not so sure. If you have studied it before it is well perhaps to pursue it, if you have not it is doubtful whether you will get a sufficient knowledge of it to derive any advantage from it. I should be exceedingly glad to have you acquainted with it so as to be able to read it with me if we should ever have any leisure hours for that purpose.

I am pleased that you have taken Butler and should be happy to hear your opinion of his logic after you have perused it a while. The study of Physiology also I esteem altogether worthy of your notice. If you obtain some knowledge of it and of Anatomy I think it will be an invaluable acquirement. It seems to me that some knowledge of Physiology is essentially necessary to those who have the training of young children.

Subscribing myself, Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

8.

My Dear Charlotte:— McIndoes Falls, Vt. Oct. 3, 1843.

It seems to me that my letters are very monotonous, as much so as my preaching, which I fear will accomplish nothing on that account. I often regret that I have taken no more pains with my letters to have them more acceptable to yourself and more worthy of myself. I have generally written what first occurred to mind without stopping to mature my thoughts. Whatever disadvantage there may have been in such a course to either of us, there is this advantage to you; you have been enabled to see the first promptings of my heart.

Dr. Porter made the remark that "If a minister was at a loss for a subject to present to his people he may be assured he has mistaken his calling." For a while after I came here that remark troubled me much. Now the tide has turned and I seem to want to preach on so many subjects I am confused and hardly know which I ought to take first.

I begin to count the number of sermons I shall be called upon to preach to this people before leaving them, which I should dread to do only that it will allow me to enter other portions of the great vineyard to labor for my Master.

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

9.

My Dear Charlotte:— McIndoes Falls, Vt. Oct. 17, 1843.

I have been out this evening to attend a meeting of the teachers in

our Sabbath School. I could not well help thinking that if I should get among the heathen it would be precious indeed to be able to meet that number of pious and praying Christians, It is good to meet with those who meet to worship God. I feel indeed that Christian fellowship is sweet. I wonder that any Christian should look upon it as a task to attend the religious prayer meeting. I often ask myself do such ever expect to be happy in Heaven. Men seem to have some vague notions of the employments of Heaven as if they should be happy there of course while they cannot endure the company of holy men here on earth. They seem to forget that they must be more holy in Heaven where all seem to be anxious to go without knowing the 'why' or 'wherefore.'

As the time draws nigh when I shall leave this people, I look back continually to see what I have accomplished and it seems as if I had done nothing for the Master whom I serve. Perhaps I had cherished too high expectations of usefulness. It seems to me as if I had yet reaped comparatively no fruits of my labors with this people. I yet hope that I have not sown the seed in vain but that it will some time spring up and bear fruit to eternal life. Whatever the result though Paul should plant and Apollos water, unless God give the increase, there will be no hope but that the seed will fall by the wayside or in some equally barren earth of the desert. Notwithstanding that I can see no great effect of my labors here I have become greatly attached to this people and shall cherish grateful remembrance of them.

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

10.

My Dear Charlotte:—

McIndoes Falls, Vt. Oct. 31, 1843.

Since I wrote last I have received two letters from the Rev. D. Green in behalf of the prudential committee of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions informing me that they have designated my place of labor to be at the Sandwich Islands. These letters also inform me that the committee were about to send out four other missionaries with their wives who are to sail from Boston on the first Monday (the fourth) of December next and that the committee would like to have me accompany them. On the receipt of the first letter I immediately wrote to Mr. Green informing him of my circumstances and I named you as the one who was to accompany me whenever I should go. Mr. Green in his last letter says, "There may quite possibly be other opportunities for making the

voyage in the course of the winter or spring." If there should be I should wish to improve it.

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

11.

My Dear Charlotte:—

McIndoes Falls, Vt. Nov. 14, 1843.

There is to be a meeting of the church next Thursday to which I am looking forward with much interest and anxiety. Oh that the Lord will condescend to meet with us then! I fear that my prayers are all selfish that it will be to my advantage to have a revival occur under my preaching. Such a thought I know is a sinful one. May the Lord take from me every feeling which would dishonor Him or desire my own honor in preference!

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

