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LETTERS FROM THE PAST

In 1839, Timothy E. Ranney, after graduating from Middlebury College, decided to become a missionary. He had met Charlotte Taylor, at that time teaching in Ashby, Mass. Both were deeply religious, and both came to be secure in their belief that they "were called to carry the Gospel to the heathen." In their first letters, beginning in the Quarterly of April 1853, we found them preparing for marriage and for service as "Laborers" "in the vineyard of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ." Aside from their very human appeal, based on the eternal verities of the human heart, the letters are a direct and intelligent appraisal of a period and a purpose hitherto seldom studied and only dimly known. The notations are by Mr. C. R. Ranney. Editor.

PART II

12.

My Dear Charlotte:— McIndoes Falls, Vt. Dec. 12, 1843.

Time in its rapid flight has brought me to another favored evening when I am permitted to resume my pen to direct anew thoughts to you. Those have been favored hours when I have been permitted to turn aside from the perplexities of life and hold converse with an absent and dear friend.

I have but three Sabbaths more to close my engagement here, and then I expect to close my labors with this people. I do not feel any less anxiety that the Holy Spirit should own and bless my labors than as if I were to spend my life with them.

You say in your last that while examining your feelings in relation to the work in which we are to engage ere long "I sometimes find some misgivings." Then you inquire "Is it ever so with you?" In relation to this point I would say that I always feel that I am altogether unworthy to engage in such a work. It has always appeared to me to be a work so noble as to be altogether beyond my capacities to engage in it in a becoming way. "What am I or my father's house?" that I should be sent on this great errand? It seems to me to be a work which angels might covet, to carry the intelligence of a Savior's death and to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the heathen. And yet I seem to hear a voice saying, "Woe is me if I preach not the

Gospel." I am ready to say, "Lo here am I, send me." I trust I am ready to spend and be spent in this great and glorious work if God will accept of my feeble services. He has a right to demand those services, for all that I have is a free gift from Him. My friends and home I possess because He gave them to me. Shall I not be willing then to yield them to His bidding? If I cling to them in preference to doing the work of His ministry, have I not reason to fear He will punish me for it? When I stood up in the great assembly and covenanted, I made no reserve. I did not say that I would enter His service if He would permit me to remain with my friends in the land of my nativity. I covenanted to be obedient to His requirements whatever they might be. All subsequent reflection has taught me that covenant would be violated were I to wish to stay at home when He required me to go abroad.

The question is simply this, am I called to go? It is to this question that I have given much attention and to which I continue to give much. I do not wish to be found like Jonah fleeing to Tarshish when I should be preaching at Nineveh. You well know the fate that befell him because he sought to flee from duty. I acknowledge there would be many things more pleasing in remaining with this people than in going to another. It would not, however, be pleasing to the Christian to be found out of the path of duty and wandering in the path of disobedience to his God. It is not the love of the souls of men alone or principally which should actuate our conduct. There is a higher principle on which the Christian loves to act. The love of God constraineth him. It is love to Christ and His cause which should make us desire to do His will.

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

[Mr. Ranney finished his contract at Barnet and McIndoes Falls January 1, 1844. He then went to his father's farm at Westminster West, Vermont, to await his assignment from the A.B.C.F.M. During the time he spent there he preached nearly every Sunday in some one of the churches in the neighboring towns. The following extracts are taken from letters written during this time. C. R. R.]

13.

My Dear Charlotte:—

Dummerston, Vt. Feb. 27, 1844.

I am now at Rev. Mr. Barbour's occupying his study which is a very pleasant one and supplied with a tolerable library. "The New York Observer" of last Saturday is now at my side and from it I

learn that the ship "Globe" containing the Rev. Messrs Whittlesey and Hunt with their wives, missionaries to the Sandwich Islands, put into one of the ports of the Azores on the twenty-fourth of December last, twenty days from Boston, leaking and having lost sails, bulwarks, etc. This ship is the ship in which it was proposed to us to sail. We may congratulate ourselves with having been detained a while. Whether the brethren will proceed, be obliged to wait or return, the account does not state. I should hardly suppose they would venture to proceed on so long a journey in a leaky ship. If they do not, we may yet have their company to the Sandwich Islands.

I have not yet obtained any intelligence from the Rooms of our destination, but hope every day that I shall the next. I am to spend the next Sabbath in Townshend and the next in Halifax and where the next I have not yet decided. Have had an urgent solicitation to go to Westmoreland, N. H., to be with Bro. Ash. There are other places where I have been invited to spend some time but have made no engagements, for I hope to hear something from Mr. Green before that time should arrive. . . .

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

14.

My Dear Charlotte:—

Westminster West, Vt. Mar. 19, 1844.

Yours of the fifth was duly received and read with similar emotions as I suppose you had when penning it. The intelligence which you communicated respecting the death of your beloved sister was not altogether unexpected. We cannot well refrain from tears at parting with her, yet why should we weep? Could she speak from the cold grave, doubtless she would say, "Weep not for me." If Jesus was more precious to her than others, then has she gone to be with Him who was dearer to her than all besides, and who would not leave that society which is less delightful for that which is more so? The society of Christians is desirable, but that of Christ is infinitely more so. What we feel as loss is unspeakable gain for those who die in the Lord. We need not then mourn for her, and why should we be so selfish as to mourn because Christ has taken from us that which belongs to Himself?

If I could say anything which would manifest the sympathy which I feel for those who mourn, gladly would I do it. Sympathy I must have since I have often been called to mourn the death of those who were near and dear to me. At such times I trust I have found One that could sympathize with me better than any other, and at such times I

have found the greatest consolation in communing with Him. I have found that He wept because of the death of one He loved, and I too weep and draw consolation from Him. This I am glad to think you know how to do. . . .

I received a letter this morning from Mr. Green in which he makes the inquiry whether I will be ready to start for the Pawnee country by the first of May if the committee should decide that it is best for me to go there. I have just completed an answer to his letter in which I answered his question in the affirmative. I expect to hear from him again soon. I am yet in as much darkness in relation to our destination as ever.

As ever yours, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

15.

My Dear Charlotte:— Westminster West, Vt. Mar. 26, 1844.

I had another letter by this day's mail from Mr. Green in which he states that the committee wish me to go to the Pawnees. I suppose that we shall be called upon to bid adieu to friends in about one month from this to take up our abode among the red men of the western prairies. I had looked upon the Sandwich Islands as the place where we were to spend our remaining days and had read with lively interest all that I could obtain respecting them. From the last letter of Mr. Green's it would seem that there is no prospect of our being sent to those far off islands for a long time to come if at all. The present state of funds is such that the committee would not feel warranted in sending a reinforcement there soon. For my part I should by far prefer to go to the Pawnee country than to wait an uncertain length of time and run the risk of not going at all to the heathen. It is my desire to be permitted to carry to some darkened mind the news of a Savior's death, and I am anxious to be engaged in the one employment which I hope is to be the business of my life. It seems to me that there is nothing worth living for but to disseminate a knowledge of the Savior's righteousness. It is His righteousness alone that will avail anything for any created and fallen being, but it can avail nothing without belief. How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher?

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

16.

My Dear Charlotte:— Westminster West, Vt. April 17, 1844.

I am now at my father's and seated to write to you. I know that it

is not long since I saw you, at least my judgement tells me so, though my feelings would indicate a different fact. . . .

The Deacons have appointed a committee to make the arrangements for my ordination. This committee are to have a meeting this evening at Mr. David Hitchcock's. I expect the ordination will take place two weeks from this day. Father Field is to give the charge, which he said last night he had completed.

I have spoken for a horse and wagon to go to Ashby next week Friday or Saturday as I proposed when I saw you. I think it is best for us to come up here on Monday before the day of ordination, so as to have one day to rest between riding so far and the meeting on that day, which will probably be long and tedious, though I hope solemn and interesting.

As to making arrangements for the ceremonies at Ashby, I must leave them mostly with you. If it is agreeable to you, I should like to be joined with yourself in matrimony before returning to Westminster. . . .

Yours as ever, Timothy Emerson Ranney.

[On April 26, 1844, Mr. Ranney went to Ashby where he and Charlotte Taylor were married the following day. On April 28, he returned to Westminster West with his bride. On May 1, he was ordained in the Westminster West church. Before the end of the month the young couple set out on their long journey to the Indian country. From a letter written on the journey we can compare the transportation methods of 1844 with those of to-day. Railroads had not been built, but quite an elaborate system of canals followed the large river valleys. After reaching Albany by stage coach, they were able to travel by water all the way to Council Bluffs in what is now the state of Iowa.]

The following letter was postmarked Louisville, Ky., June 14, 1844, and received in Westminster on June 24th of the same year. C.R.R.]

17.

My Dear Parents:—

On board the line boat "City of Buffalo," May 20, 1844.

I think I promised you when I was with you that I would furnish you with something in the shape of a journal of my voyage to my destined field of labor. I begin this journal when starting from Albany because I wrote to you to-day giving some account of what passed before arriving in that city. We started from Albany between twelve and one o'clock P.M. We have a pleasant company and think we shall

become quite attached to them before we arrive at the end of our journey. The names and residences of them so far as I have ascertained are Mr. Hewlett and wife of Brooklyn, N.Y., on their way to Syracuse; Timothy Morgan, with wife and child, the latter about two years old; Mrs. Barker of the Baptist Shawnee Mission, who also has a child about eighteen months old. Two gentlemen with their wives, one of whom has a child about eleven months old; their names and residences I have not yet learned. Mr. and Mrs. Morgan are on their way to the territory of Iowa.

We have to-day passed through eighteen locks on the canal. Our room is small, but the air is so damp that we dare not have the rooms open at all.

May 21, 1844.

Arose this morning at four o'clock and walked the deck awhile. Found it very bleak and cold. It rained hard most of the night and now seems to be clearing off. Soon after I went on deck we crossed the Mohawk River, the canal running over the water. We soon came to Schenectady, thirty miles from Albany; here I mailed a letter to you. The wind blew most of the day so hard that we could not stay on deck but were obliged to shut ourselves up in the cabin, where I had an opportunity to read some books which I put in my bag when I came from Boston. This afternoon we had quite a hearty laugh in the cabin. Mr. Hewlett, who is somewhat of an eccentric man, left the boat sometime before dinner without saying anything to his wife and had not returned till about three o'clock. When we were passing under a bridge, some one was heard to jump onto the deck from the bridge. Mrs. Hewlett, supposing it to be her husband, immediately concealed herself so that when he entered the cabin he did not see her there. He went to the after cabin to inquire for her there. Not finding her there, he soon returned apparently under some concern about the safety of his wife. This afforded some mirth, but we were more pleased when she was discovered concealed behind a door, for she went through the process of correcting her husband severely for his error.

We found that we could walk a little ways which we did cheerfully though the wind blew too hard to be very comfortable. We gathered some specimens of flowers, some of which neither of us had seen before. We were this afternoon joined by another passenger who is going to be with us to Buffalo. He joined us at Port Jackson, which is the next considerable village after leaving Schenectady. Port Jackson is forty-six miles from Albany. The next place was Schoharie

Creek, which we passed just as it grew dark—this is fifty-three miles from Albany.

May 22, 1844.

This morning was a perfect contrast with yesterday morning. The morning was cold and frosty, but after the sun had been risen a while, it was clear and there was a prospect of a fine day. We got off and walked about two miles in the forenoon and gathered more flowers, some new ones which we did not find yesterday. About noon to-day we came in sight of a village called Little Falls. We sat on the deck and looked at the beautiful boat and more beautiful scenery till called to dinner.

After eating a hasty meal and coming on deck again, we found that the scenery had improved since we went below. We soon had an opportunity of getting off, and learning that we were to pass several locks we wandered from the road onto the mountain to take a view of the village and surrounding scenery. We found that we were on an elevation which I should take to be some two hundred feet above the canal. From this position we could view the chasm below, on one side the canal filled with boats, on another the village and falls of the Mohawk which altogether presented one of the grandest sights I ever witnessed. On coming down from the mountain we gathered a large bouquet of beautiful flowers. We found we were behind the boat, but with a few minutes of hard walking we overtook it again. We find this way of traveling very slow, and instead of being in Buffalo next Sabbath, as I expected and as the agent in Albany told me I should, it is more probable that we shall be there one week from next Sabbath.

May 25, 1844.

Yesterday and day before I did not find it convenient to write. We were much troubled with excessive heat and the incessant squalling of children. To-day we are not much better off and in addition are much vexed with mosquitoes, which we found very abundant last evening and this morning.

We have been joined by passengers of various descriptions since I wrote last and have been deserted by several whom I mentioned before. Mr. and Mrs. Hewlett left yesterday at Syracuse where we delayed some two hours or so. We passed yesterday the water works of Salina, N.Y. We found to-day that it would be necessary to leave the boat and company which we now enjoy in order to have a Sabbath. The captain says that he will get to Rochester by time to go to church and will remain till after church. I do not consider that as keeping the Sabbath and shall leave the boat "City of Buffalo" (Capt. Sam

Bellinger) at Palmyra, hoping to have a quiet Sabbath by this means.

Sabbath, May 26, 1844.

We found ourselves this morning comfortably situated at a public house kept by B. Newton in the pleasant village of Palmyra. We left the boat last night about nine o'clock. This morning called on the Rev. Mr. Fisher, the Presbyterian minister in this village, and in the forenoon heard him preach from the fifth commandment and in the afternoon listened to a discourse by a young man by the name of Huggins. In the evening I preached from Rom. XII, 1. Had an interesting and attentive congregation. We were invited to take lodgings with some of the benevolent people, but preferred not to change our rooms from the tavern because of the trouble attendant upon moving our things.

May 27, 1844.

Waited some time this morning for a boat to come along. Took passage at last about eleven o'clock on the boat "Ashland" (Capt. Waite). On board this boat also we were so fortunate as to meet with a very agreeable company, some people from Connecticut.

We passed to-day through beautiful fields of wheat which were beginning to show the heads. We passed one beautiful village called Pittsford which we walked through between sundown and dark.

May 28, 1844.

Awoke this morning and found ourselves in the city of Rochester. Found on inquiring of the captain that we were to lay here some hours, so we took time to run over the city and among other things visited the falls where Sam Patch took his last leap. The falls are estimated variously as to height, some making them as high as 120 feet. My judgement would make them a little less than 100 feet. A man was fishing down below the falls, of whom we inquired the height. He looked around to them and guessed they were about 75 feet high, seeming to be entirely unconscious of their grandeur. The size of the river I should take to be a little less than that of the Connecticut at Bellows Falls. The main falls was perpendicular the whole distance. We were told that there were two or three other falls below the main falls but inferior to the main falls in magnificence. We left Rochester between nine and ten o'clock. We have gone along much more rapidly than we did last week.

May 29, 1844.

We went to bed last night expecting to be awakened early this morning to see Lockport. As usual we found ourselves far short of

the expected place this morning, but we bore it as patiently as we could till about nine o'clock when we came to Lockport—a romantic place indeed. There are five locks each ten feet high, and after passing them we went seven or eight miles where the canal was dug in solid rock.

June 13, 1844.

It is a long time since I have written anything to you. We are now on board the steamboat called "The West Wind," which lies moored before Louisville, Ky. From Rochester to Buffalo I found the boat so crowded with passengers that it was inconvenient to write. We arrived at Buffalo on the day following the one on which we left Lockport. Spent one day in Buffalo. We intended to have gone to Niagara Falls, but the day proved to be too rainy to go about much. Sailed from Buffalo on Thursday evening about seven o'clock in the steamboat "Commander Perry" for Cleveland. The Lake was rather rough during the night and grew more so till noon of the next day. We awoke safely moored at Erie, Pa., where we remained during the day on account of the roughness of the weather. We finally sailed from Erie about seven o'clock in the evening, and the next morning found ourselves in Cleveland, Ohio. This was Saturday morning and we determined not to leave Cleveland on our journey till Monday. On Monday we took passage on the boat "Wm. Conwell" for Portsmouth, but we did not leave till Tuesday noon.

[From Louisville, Mr. and Mrs. Ranney sailed down the Ohio, up the Mississippi and Missouri to Council Bluffs and went from there by horseback to the Pawnee Mission. The exact location of the Pawnee Mission is not known. Most of the Pawnee villages were located on the Platte River, west of Council Bluffs, in the territory which later became the state of Nebraska, and we know that the mission was located somewhere in this territory. About a year after they arrived at their station, news reached the missionaries of the death of Joseph Ranney, Timothy's father. A letter of condolence was written, part of which is in the hand of Timothy and part in the hand of Charlotte. The following are extracts from this letter. C.R.R.]

18.

My Dear Mother:—

Pawnee Mission, June 28, 1845.

And so is my father gone? When the sad intelligence first reached me I had mingled emotions which it would take another pen than my own to describe. Though I scarcely expected to see him again this

side of Heaven, yet I hoped to hear of his welfare on earth a little before he departed to be here no more forever. It is all right I trust, he is not lost for God took him. What was our loss, we hope, was his gain. The exchange of worlds for him was glorious; earth for Heaven. Let us therefore dry our tears and make suitable preparation to meet him where tears shall flow no more forever.

I can think of nothing that would be likely to interest you more than some account of our situation and prospects for usefulness in this land of moral darkness and spiritual death. We have invariably enjoyed good health since we have been here. Kind Providence has watched over us here as always. Some of the time we have been in the midst of excitement and we apprehend not entirely free from danger of savage malice. Hitherto hath the Lord upheld us and we trust Him for strength for the future. We have seen the wild Indians of the prairie excited to fury by the wrongs they were suffering at the hands of the white man, but they have not molested us and have much reason to think they look upon us with favor. Perhaps they understand but little of our motives in coming among them. As yet we do not know that there is one among them that has obeyed the requirements of the Gospel or has comprehended them so that he is capable of obeying. Many of them listen with fixed attention when they can hear the Gospel preached in their own tongue. We yet understand so little of their language that it is difficult to convey to their minds any right apprehension of the Truth as it is in Jesus.

Mr. Dunbar is engaged in translating the Gospel by Mark into their language. In order to acquire a knowledge of the language I spend some time writing with him.

As to our family, you have probably heard that we have two girls. One a half-breed about eight or nine years old and we think a lovely girl. She has been with us since the twenty-sixth of October last. We call her name Eliza Farrar. Her mother was killed a few years since by a war party of the Kansas tribe. At the same time this girl was taken and scalped, of which she has the marks now on the back of her head. We think she is becoming quite attached to us and hope will be unwilling to leave us at present. She has often said she would like to have us go to the States so that she might go with us. As to our other girl—she is a full-bred Indian. Her father and mother are both living. We should judge that she is about six or seven years old. They keep no account of the ages of their children. She came to live with us the first day of last May, and we think she has improved rapidly in her appearance for the two months. Both of the girls are learning

to read, spell and sing, and the older one to write. We hope it will not be long before she will be able to write a few words that you may see.

All of the Indians are fond of the white man's singing and will sit a long time and listen to the little music we are able to make, though they cannot understand the words at all. I often wish that one of my brothers were here, who could play on a flute or some other instrument. I think it would have a happy effect upon the minds of these untutored people.

This from your son, Timothy.

19.

[Enclosed in the same letter was the following in the hand of Charlotte. C.R.R.]

Dear Mother:—

But a few moments are allotted to me for the purpose of conversing with you through the medium of the pen. Could I but see you in this hour of trial I would allow my tears to flow afresh with yours at the dispensation of an all wise Providence and mingle my petitions with yours before The Throne of Grace for resignation and for wisdom. How transient are earthly comforts! May we, as the cords which confine us to this world are severed, place our affections more strongly on enduring and substantial joys.

Do you ask how I spend my time here? Two hours every day I am employed in teaching a class of Indian girls in their own language to read, write, and sing in English. The rest of my time I devote to domestic duties and to assisting our associate, who has a large family of children, about her needlework. Our circle of white people here is small, there being seven families among a population of several thousand Indians. What little society we have is pretty good though not the most refined.

It is sometimes revolting to see the degrading and filthy habits of these children of nature. Their ignorance and stupidity! Nothing but the hope of elevating them would induce us to stay among them. We hope that ere long this moral wilderness will blossom as the rose and the fruits of righteousness abound. Our prospects have been shaded with gloom, but the star of hope is beginning to shed its benign influence over and around us. We seem to see the heathen abandoning their superstition and embracing the True Light. How soon this will be a reality, we know not. Will you not pray that it may be rapidly?

Your affectionate daughter, Charlotte.