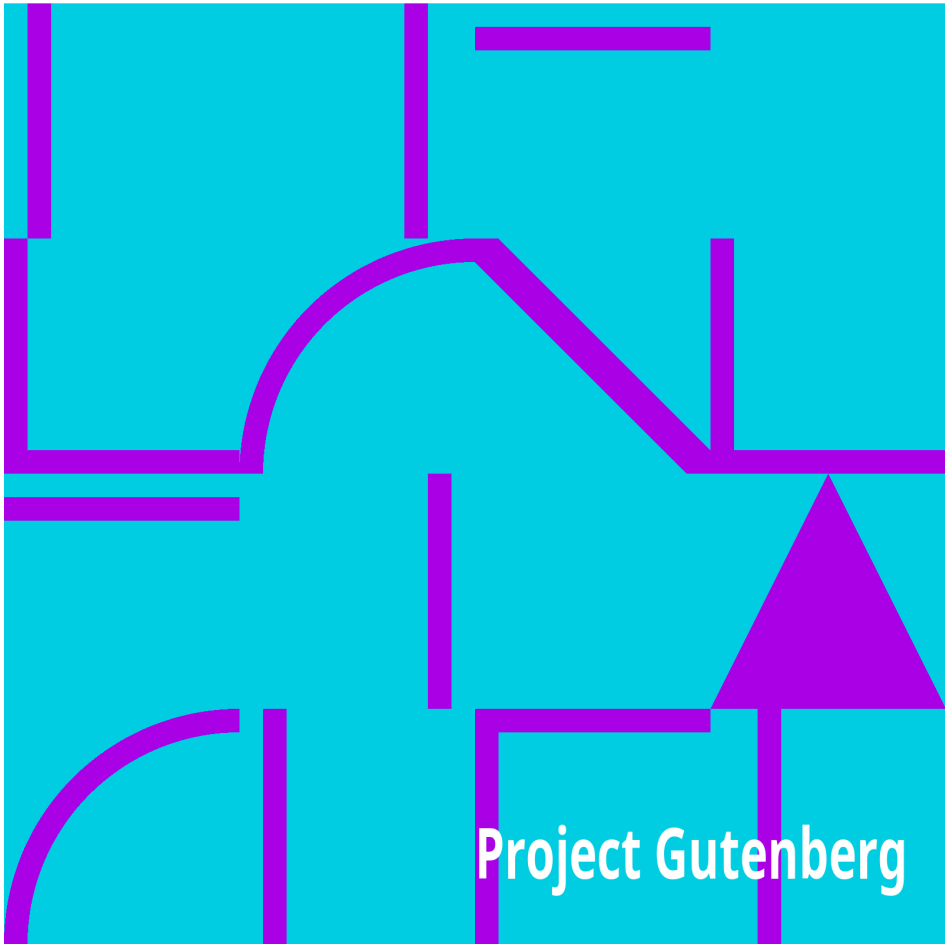
The Lumley Autograph

Susan Fenimore Cooper



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THE LUMLEY AUTOGRAPH

by

Susan Fenimore Cooper

{by Susan Fenimore Cooper (1813-1894), daughter of James Fenimore Cooper. "The Lumley Autograph" was published in Graham's Magazine, Volume 38 (January-June 1851), pp. 31-36, 97-101. The author is identified only in the table of contents for Volume 38, p. iii, where she is described as "the Author of 'Rural Hours'".

{Transcribed by Hugh C. MacDougall, Secretary, James Fenimore Cooper Society; jfcooper@wpe.com. Notes by the transcriber, including identification of historical characters and translations of foreign expressions, follow the paragraphs to which they refer, and are enclosed in {curly brackets}. The spelling of the original has been reproduced as printed, with unusual spellings identified by {sic}. Because of the limitations of the the Gutenberg format, italics and accents (used by the author for some foreign words, and in a few quotations) have been ignored. A few missing periods and quotation marks have been silently inserted.

{A brief introduction to "The Lumley Autograph.":

{"The Lumley Autograph" was inspired, as Susan's introductory note states, by the constant stream of letters received by her father, asking in often importunate terms for his autograph or for pages from his manuscripts, and even requesting that he supply autographs of other famous men who might have written to him. He generally complied with these requests courteously and to the best of his ability; after his death in 1851, Susan continued to do so, as well as selling fragments of his manuscripts to raise money for charity during the Civil War.

{"The Lumley Autograph" is of interest today primarily because it is a good story. Its broad satire about the autograph collecting mania of the mid-nineteenth century is deftly combined with the more serious irony of a poet's frantic appeal for help becoming an expensive plaything of the rich, while the poet himself has died of want. Susan Fenimore Cooper's typically understated expression of this irony renders it all the more poignant, and the unspoken message of "The Lumley Autograph" is as relevant today as it was in 1851.

{Though "The Lumley Autograph" was published in 1851, it was written as early as 1845, when Susan's father first unsuccessfully offered it to Graham's Magazine, asking "at least $25" for it. [See James Fenimore Cooper to Mrs. Cooper, Nov. 30, 1845, in James F. Beard, ed., "The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper" (Harvard University Press, 1960-68), Vol. V, pp. 102-102]. Three years later he offered it to his London publisher, also without success [James Fenimore Cooper to Richard Bentley, Nov. 15, 1848, Vol. V, p. 390; and Richard Bentley to James Fenimore Cooper, July 24, 1849, Vol. VI, p. 53.] What Graham's Magazine finally paid, in 1851, is not known.}

THE LUMLEY AUTOGRAPH.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "RURAL HOURS," ETC.

[Not long since an American author received an application from a German correspondent for "a few Autographs"—the number of names applied for amounting to more than a hundred, and covering several sheets of foolscap. A few years since an

Englishman of literary note sent his Album to a distinguished poet in Paris for his contribution, when the volume was actually stolen from a room where every other article was left untouched; showing that Autographs were more valuable in the eyes of the thief than any other property. Amused with the recollection of these facts, and others of the same kind, some idle hours were given by the writer to the following view of this mania of the day.]

The month of November of the year sixteen hundred and — was cheerless and dark, as November has never failed to be within the foggy, smoky bounds of the great city of London. It was one of the worst days of the season; what light there was seemed an emanation from the dull earth, the heavens would scarce have owned it, veiled as they were, by an opaque canopy of fog which weighed heavily upon the breathing multitude below. Gloom penetrated every where; no barriers so strong, no good influences so potent, as wholly to ward off the spell thrown over that mighty town by the spirits of chill and damp; they clung to the silken draperies of luxury, they were felt within the busy circle of industry, they crept about the family hearth, but abroad in the public ways, and in the wretched haunts of misery, they held undisputed sway.

Among the throng which choked the passage of Temple-Bar toward evening, an individual, shabbily clad, was dragging his steps wearily along, his pallid countenance bearing an expression of misery beyond the more common cares of his fellow-passengers. Turning from the great thoroughfare he passed into a narrow lane, and reaching the door of a mean dwelling he entered, ascended a dirty stairway four stories high, and stood in his garret lodging. If that garret was bare, cold, and dark, it was only like others, in which many a man before and since has pined away years of neglect and penury, at the very moment when his genius was cheering, enriching, enlightening his country and his race. That the individual whose steps we have followed was indeed a man of genius, could not be doubted by one who had met the glance of that deep, clear, piercing eye, clouded though it was at that moment by misery of body and mind that amounted to the extreme of anguish. The garret of the

stranger contained no food, no fuel, no light; its occupant was suffering from cold, hunger, and wretchedness. Throwing himself on a broken chair, he clenched his fingers over the manuscript, held within a pale and emaciated hand.

"Shall I die of hunger—or shall I make one more effort?" he exclaimed, in a voice in which bitterness gave a momentary power to debility.

"I will write once more to my patron—possibly—" without waiting to finish the sentence, he groped about in the dull twilight for ink and paper; resting the sheet on a book, he wrote in a hand barely legible:

> "Nov. 20th 16—,
>
> "MY LORD—I have no light, and cannot see to write—no fire and my fingers are stiff with cold—I have not tasted food for eight and forty hours, and I am faint. Three times, my lord, I have been at your door to day, but could not obtain admittance. This note may yet reach you in time to save a fellow-creature from starvation. I have not a farthing left, nor credit for a ha'penny—small debts press upon me, and the publishers refused my last poem. Unless relieved within a few hours I must perish.
>
> "Your lordship's most humble,
> "Most obedient, most grateful servant,
> ———— ————"

This letter, scarcely legible from the agitation and misery which enfeebled the hand that wrote it, was folded, and directed, and again the writer left his garret lodging on the errand of beggary; he descended the narrow stairway, slowly dragged his steps through the lane, and sought the dwelling of his patron.

Whether he obtained admittance, or was again turned from the door; whether his necessities were relieved, or the letter was idly thrown aside unopened, we cannot say. Once more mingled with the crowd, we lose sight of him. It is not the man, but the letter which engages our attention to-day. There is still much doubt and uncertainty connected with the subsequent fate of the poor poet, but the note written at that painful moment has had a brilliant career, a history eventful throughout. If the reader is partial to details of misery, and poverty, any volume of general literary biography will furnish him with an abundant supply, for such has too often proved the lot of those who have built up the noble edifice of British Literature: like the band of laborers on the Egyptian pyramid, theirs was too often a mess of leeks, while milk, and honey, and oil, were the portion of those for whom they toiled, those in whose honor, and for whose advantage the monument was raised. Patrons, whether single individuals or nations, have too often proved but indifferent friends, careless and forgetful of those whom they proudly pretend to foster. But leaving the poor poet, with his sorrows, to the regular biographer, we choose rather the lighter task of relating the history of the letter itself; a man's works are often preferred before himself, and it is believed that in this, the day of autographs, no further apology will be needed for the course taken on the present occasion. We hold ourselves, indeed, entitled to the especial gratitude of collectors for the following sketch of a document maintaining so high a rank in their estimation.

And justly might the Lumley Letter claim a full share of literary homage. Boasting a distinguished signature, it possessed the first essential of a superior autograph; for, although a rose under any other name may smell as sweet, yet it is clear that with regard to every thing coming from the pen, whether folio or billet doux, imaginative poem, or matter-of-fact note of hand, there is a vast deal in this important item, which is often the very life and stamina of the whole production. Then again, the subject of extreme want is one of general interest, while the allusion to the unpublished poem must always prove an especial attraction to the curious. Such were the intrinsic merits of the document,

in addition to which, sober Time lent his aid to enhance its value, and capricious Fortune added a peculiar charm of mystery, which few papers of the kind could claim to the same extent. The appearance also of this interesting paper was always admitted to be entirely worthy of its fame. The hand-writing fully carried out the idea of extreme debility and agitation corresponding with its nature, while a larger and a lesser blot bore painful testimony to that recklessness of propriety which a starving man might be supposed to feel; one corner had been ruthlessly abstracted at the time it was seen by the writer of this notice, and with it the last figures of the date; a considerable rent crossed the sheet from right to left, but happily without injuring its contents; several punctures were also observed, one of these encroaching very critically upon the signature. But I need not add that these marks of age and harsh treatment, like the scars on the face of a veteran, far from being blemishes, were acknowledged to be so many additional embellishments. The coloring of the piece was of that precious hue, verging here and there on the dingy, the very tint most charming in the eyes of an antiquary, and which Time alone can bestow. In fact, one rarely sees a relic of the kind, more perfect in color, more expressive in its general aspect, or more becoming to an album, from the fine contrast between its poverty-stricken air, torn, worn, and soiled, and the rich, embossed, unsullied leaf on which it reposed, like some dark Rembrandt within its gilded frame. In short, it was the very Torso of autographs. Happily the position which it finally attained was one worthy of its merits, and we could not have wished it a more elegant shrine than the precious pages of the Holberton Album, a volume encased in velvet, secured with jeweled clasps, reposing on a tasteful etagere.

{etagere = small table or shelf for displaying curios (French)}

But I proceed without further delay to relate some of the more important steps in the progress of this interesting paper, from the garret of the starving poet to the drawing-rooms of Holberton House, merely observing by way of preface that the following notice may be relied on so

far as it goes, the writer—Colonel Jonathan Howard of Trenton, New Jersey,—having had access to the very best authorities, and having also had the honor of being enlisted in the service of the Lumley Autograph upon an occasion of some importance, as will be shown by the narrative.

It was just one hundred years since, in 1745, that this celebrated letter was first brought to light, from the obscurity in which it had already lain some half a century, and which no subsequent research has been able fully to clear away. In the month of August of that year, the Rev. John Lumley, tutor to Lord G——, had the honor of discovering this curious relic under the following circumstances.

Mr. Lumley was one day perched on the topmost step of a library ladder, looking over a black letter volume of Hollinshed, from the well filled shelves of his pupil. Suddenly he paused, and his antiquarian instincts were aroused by the sight of a sheet of paper, yellow and time worn. He seized it with the eagerness of a book-worm, and in so doing dropped the volume of Hollinshed alarmingly near the wig-covered head of his youthful pupil, who with closed eyes, and open mouth, lay reclining on a sofa below. The book, grazing the curls of the young lord's wig, he sprang up from his nap, alive and sound, though somewhat startled.

> {Hollinshed = Raphael Holinshed (d. 1580), famous writer of British historical chronicles, used by Shakespeare as source for some of his plays}

"Hang it Lumley, what a rumpus you keep up among the books! You well nigh drove that old volume into my head by a process more summary than usual."

The learned tutor made a thousand apologies, as he descended the ladder, but on touching the floor his delight burst forth.

"It was this paper, my lord, which made me so awkward—I have lighted on a document of the greatest interest!"

"What is it?" asked the pupil looking askance at letter, and tutor.

"An original letter which comes to hand, just in time for my lives of the tragedians—the volume to be dedicated to your lordship—it is a letter of poor Otway."

> {Otway = Thomas Otway (1652-1685), English playwright who wrote a number of important tragedies in verse, but who died destitute at the age of 33. The Coopers were familiar with his work; James Fenimore Cooper used quotations from Otway's "The Orphan" for three chapter heading epigraphs in his 1850 novel, "The Ways of the Hour"}

"Otway?—What, the fellow you were boring me about last night?"

"The same my lord—the poet Otway—you may remember we saw his Venice Preserved last week. It is a highly interesting letter, written in great distress, and confirms the story of his starvation. You see the signature."

> {Venice Preserved = a well-known play by Otway, written in 1682}

"That name, Otway?—Well, to my mind it is as much like Genghis Khan."

"Oh, my lord!—Thomas Otway clearly—signatures are always more or less confused.

"Well, have it your own way.—It may be Tom, Dick, or Harry for all I care," said the youth, stretching himself preparatory to a visit to his kennels; and such was his indifference to this literary treasure that he readily gave it to his tutor. In those days, few lords were literary.

Mr. Lumley's delight at this discovery, was very much increased by the fact that he was at that moment anxious to bring out an edition of the English Tragedians of the seventeenth century. The lives of several of these authors had been already written by him, and he was at that

moment engaged on that of Otway. A noted publisher had taken the matter into consideration, and if the undertaking gave promise of being both palatable to the public, and profitable to himself, a prospectus was to be issued. Now here was a little tit-bit which the public would doubtless relish; for it was beginning to feel some interest in Otway's starvation, the poet having been dead half a century. It is true that the signature of the poor starving author, whoever he may have been, was so illegible that it required some imagination to see in it, the name of Otway, but Mr. Lumley had enough of the true antiquarian spirit, to settle the point to his own entire satisfaction. The note was accordingly introduced into the life of Otway, with which the learned tutor was then engaged. The work itself, however, was not destined to see the light; its publication was delayed, while Mr. Lumley accompanied his pupil on the usual continental tour, and from this journey the learned gentleman never returned, dying at Rome, of a cold caught in the library of the Vatican. By his will, the MS. life of Otway with all his papers, passed into the hands of his brother, an officer in the army. Unfortunately, however, Captain Lumley, who was by no means a literary character, proved extremely indifferent to this portion of his brother's inheritance, which he treated with contemptuous neglect.

After this first stage on the road to fame, twenty more years passed away and the letter of the starving poet was again forgotten. At length the papers of the Rev. Mr. Lumley, fell into the hands of a nephew, who inherited his uncle's antiquarian tastes, and clerical profession. In looking over the MSS., he came to the life of Otway, and was struck with the letter given there, never having met with it in print; there was also a note appended to it with an account of the manner in which it had been discovered by the editor, in the library of Lord G——, and affirming that it was still in his own possession. The younger Lumley immediately set to work to discover the original letter, but his search was fruitless; it was not to be found either among the papers of his uncle, or those of his father. It was gone. He was himself a tutor at Cambridge at the time, and returning to the university, he carried with him his uncle's life of Otway,

in MS. Some little curiosity was at first excited among his immediate companions by these facts, but it soon settled down into an opinion unfavorable to the veracity of the late Mr. Lumley.—This nettled the nephew; and as Lord G——, was still living, a gouty bloated roue, he at length wrote to inquire if his lordship knew any thing of the matter. His lordship was too busy, or too idle, to answer the inquiry. Some time later, however, the younger Lumley, then a chaplain in the family of a relative of Lord G——'s, accidentally met his uncle's former pupil, and being of a persevering disposition, he ventured to make a personal application on the subject.

"Now you recall the matter to me, Mr. Lumley, I do recollect something of the kind. I remember one day, giving my tutor some musty old letter he found in the library at G——; and by the bye he came near cracking my skull on the same occasion!"

Mr. Lumley was not a little pleased by this confirmation of the story, though he found that Lord G—— had not even read the letter, nor did he know any thing of its subsequent fate; he only remembered looking at the signature. Not long after the meeting at which this explanation had taken place, Mr. Lumley received a visit from a stranger, requesting to see the MS. Life of Otway in his possession. It was handed to him; he examined it, and was very particular in his inquiries on the subject, giving the chaplain to understand that he was the agent of a third person who wished to purchase either the original letter if possible, or if that could not be found, the MS. containing the copy. Mr. Lumley always believed that the employer of this applicant was no other than that arch-gatherer, Horace Walpole, who gave such an impulse to the collecting mania; he declined selling the work, however, for he had thoughts of printing it himself. The application was mentioned by him, and, of course, the manuscript gained notoriety, while the original letter became a greater desideratum than ever. The library at G—— was searched most carefully by a couple of brother book-worms, who crept over it from cornice to carpeting; but to no purpose.

{Horace Walpole = Horace Walpole (1717-1797), a prolific writer, connoisseur, and collector, best known for his extensive correspondence; he established a taste for literary collecting by would-be cultured gentlemen in England}

Some ten years later still—about the time, by the bye, when Chatterton's career came to such a miserable close in London, and when Gilbert was dying in a hospital at Paris—it happened that a worthy physician, well known in the town of Southampton for his benevolence and eccentricity, was on a professional visit to the child of a poor journeyman trunk-maker, in the same place. A supply of old paper had just been brought in for the purpose of lining trunks, according to the practice of the day. A workman was busy sorting these, rejecting some as refuse, and preserving others, when the doctor stopped to answer an inquiry about the sick child.

{Chatterton = Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770), British poet, who created an imaginary Thomas Rowley, a supposed medieval monk, to whom he ascribed some of his poems. Chatterton committed suicide at the age of 18 when a poem of his, allegedly by Rowley, was rejected; he was buried in a pauper's grave. Susan Fenimore Cooper no doubt has this in mind in naming a character in this story Theodosia Rowley.

{Gilbert = Nicolas Gilbert (1751-1780), French poet, who died in Paris at the age of 29. The French writer Count Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863), in his book of essays "Stello" (1832), popularized a legend that Gilbert had died insane and in abject poverty at the charity hospital of the Hotel Dieu in Paris, and compared his miserable end with that of Chatteron; it seems likely that Vigny, whose book appeared while Susan Fenimore Cooper was studying in Paris, was her source for this reference to Gilbert. In fact, Gilbert was not impoverished, and died of injuries after falling from his horse}

"Better, Hopkins—doing well. But what have you here? I never see old papers but I have an inclination to look them over. If a man has leisure, he may often pick up something amusing among such rubbish. Don't you ever read the papers that pass through your hands?"

"No, sir—I 'as no time for that, sir. And then I was never taught to read writing, and these 'ere papers is all written ones. We puts them that's written for one trunk, and them that's printed for another, as you see, sir; one must have a heye to the looks of the work."

"Why yes—you seem to manage the job very well; and I have a trunk, by the bye, that wants patching up before my boy carries it off with him; I'll send it round to you; Hopkins. But stay—what's this?" and the doctor took up a soiled, yellow sheet of paper, from the heap rejected by the workman; it contained a scrawl which proved to be the identical letter of the poor poet, the Lumley autograph, though in what manner it became mingled with that heap of rubbish has never been satisfactorily ascertained.

"Here's a poor fellow who had a hard fate, Hopkins," said the benevolent man, thoughtfully. "It is as good as a sermon on charity to read that letter."

The trunk-maker begged to hear it.

"Well, poor journeyman as I be, I was never yet in so bad a way as that, sir."

"And never will be, I hope; but this was a poet, Hopkins—and that's but an indifferent trade to live by. I'll tell you what, my good friend," said the doctor, suddenly, "that letter is worth keeping, and you may paste it in the trunk I'll send round this afternoon—put it in the lid, where it can be read."

The trunk was sent, and the letter actually pasted in it as part of the new lining. Dr. H——, who, as we have observed, was rather eccentric in his ways, had a son about to commence his career as a soldier; and the worthy man thought the letter might teach the youth a useful lesson of moderation and temperance, by showing him every time he opened his trunk, the extreme of want to which his fellow beings were occasionally reduced. What success followed the plan we cannot say. The trunk, however, shared the young soldier's wandering life; it carried the cornet's uniform to America; it was besieged in Boston; and it made part of the besieging baggage at Charleston. It was not destined, however, to remain in the new world, but followed its owner to the East Indies, carrying on this second voyage, a lieutenant's commission. At length, after passing five-and-twenty years in Bengal, the trunk returned again to Southampton, as one among some dozen others which made up the baggage of the gallant Colonel H——, now rich in laurels and rupees. The old trunk had even the honorable duty assigned it of carrying its master's trophies, doubtless the most precious portion of the colonel's possessions, though at the same time the lightest; as for the rupees, the old worn-out box would have proved quite unequal to transporting a single bag of them, for it was now sadly unfit for service, thanks to the ravages of time and the white ants; and, indeed, owed its preservation and return to its native soil solely to the letter pasted in the lid, which, in the eyes of Colonel H——, was a memento of home, and the eccentric character of a deceased parent.

{cornet = the lowest officer rank in a British cavalry regiment, below that of Lieutenant; now obsolete}

The time had now come, however, when the Lumley autograph was about to emerge forever from obscurity, and receive the full homage of collectors; the hour of triumph was at hand, the neglect of a century was to be fully repaid by the highest honors of fame. The eye of beauty was about to kindle as it rested on the Lumley autograph; jeweled fingers were to be raised, eager to snatch the treasure from each other; busy literati stood ready armed for a war of controversy in its behalf.

It happened that Colonel H—— was invited to a fancy ball; and it also happened that the lady whom he particularly admired, was to be present on the occasion. Such being the case, the most becoming costume was to be selected for the evening. What if the locks of the gallant colonel were slightly sprinkled with gray? He was still a handsome man, and knew very well that the dress of an eastern aymeer was particularly well suited to his face and figure. This dress, preserved in a certain old trunk in the garret, was accordingly produced. The trunk was brought down to the dressing-room, the costume examined piece by piece, pronounced in good condition by the valet, and declared very becoming by the military friend called in as counsellor.

{aymeer = Emir; a Muslim title signifying commander in Arabic}

"But what a queer old box this is, H——," said Major D——, eyeing the trunk through his glass.

"It's one I've had these hundred years," replied the colonel. "So you think this trumpery will do, D——?"

"Do? To be sure it will, my dear fellow—it gives your Milesian skin the true Nawaub dye. But I was just trying to make out an old letter pasted in the lid of your trunk, under my nose here. Is this the way you preserve your family archives?"

{Milesian = slang term for Irish, from Milesius, mythical Spanish conqueror of Ireland; Nawaub = from Nabob, Anglo-Indian slang for one who has returned home from India with a large fortune}

"That letter is really a curiosity in its way," said the colonel, turning from the glass and relating its history, so far at least as it was known to himself.

His friend spelt it through.

"My dear fellow, why don't you give this letter to the father of your fair Louisa; he's quite rabid on such points; you'll make him a friend for life by it!"

The advice was followed. The letter was cut from its old position in the lid of the trunk, and presented to Sir John Blank, the father of the lovely Louisa, who, in his turn, soon placed the hand of his daughter in that of Colonel H——.

Sir John, a noted follower in the steps of Horace Walpole, had no sooner become the owner of this interesting letter, than he set to work to find out its origin, and to fill up its history. Unfortunately, the sheet had received some wounds in the wars, as well as the gallant colonel. One corner had been carried away by an unlucky thrust from a razor—not a sword; while the date and signature had also been half eaten out by the white ants of Bengal. But such difficulties as these were only pleasing obstacles in the way of antiquarian activity. Sir John had soon formed an hypothesis perfectly satisfactory to himself. His mother's name was Butler, and he claimed some sort of affinity with the author of Hudibras; as the Christian name of the poor poet had been almost entirely devoured by the ants, while the surname had also suffered here and there, Sir John ingeniously persuaded himself that what remained had clearly belonged to the signature of the great satirist; as for the date, the abbreviation of "Nov. 20th." and the figures 16— marking the century, were really tolerably distinct. Accordingly, Sir John wrote a brief notice of Butler's Life, dwelling much upon his well-known poverty, and quoting his epitaph, with the allusion to his indigence underscored, "lest he who living wanted all things, should, when dead, want a tomb," and placed these remarks opposite the letter of our starving poet, which was registered in the volume in conspicuous characters as an "Autograph of Samuel Butler, author of Hudibras, showing to what distress he was at one time reduced."

{Samuel Butler (1612-1680), another English author popularly believed to have died in great poverty; he is best known for his long satiric mock-epic poem, "Hudibras" (1663-1678)}

Here the sheet remained several years, until at length it chanced that Sir John's volume of autographs was placed in the hands of a gentleman who had recently read Mr. Lumley's MS. Life of Otway. The identity of this letter, with that copied by Mr. Lumley, immediately suggested itself; and now the first sparks of controversy between the Otwaysians and the Butlerites were struck in Sir John's library.

From thence they soon spread to the four winds of heaven, falling on combustible materials wherever they lighted on a literary head, or collecting hands.

By the bye, the rapidity with which this collecting class has increased of late years is really alarming; who can foresee the state of things likely to exist in the next century, should matters go on at the same rate? Reflect for a moment on the probable condition of distinguished authors, lions of the loudest roar, if the number of autograph-hunters were to increase beyond what it is at present. Is it not to be feared that they will yet exterminate the whole race, that the great lion literary, like the mastodon, will become extinct? Or, perhaps, by taming him down to a mere producer of autographs, his habits will change so entirely that he will no longer be the same animal, no longer bear a comparison with the lion of the past. On the other hand should the great race become extinct, what will be the fate of the family of autograph-feeders? What a fearful state of things would ensue, even in our day, were the supply to be reduced but a quire! The heart sickens at the picture which would then be presented—collectors turning on each other, waging a fierce war over every autographic scrap, making a battle-field of every social circle. Happily, nature seems always to keep up the balance in such matters, and it is a consoling reflection that if the million are now consumers, so have they become producers of autographs; it is therefore probable that

the evil will work its own remedy; and we may hope that the great writers of the next century will be shielded in some measure by the diversion made in their favor through the lighter troops of the lion corps.

As for the full merits of the controversy so hotly waged over the Lumley autograph between the Otwaysians and the Butlerites, dividing the collecting world into two rival parties, we shall not here enter into it. In all such matters it is better to go at once to the fountain head; if the reader is curious on the subject, as doubtless he must be, he is referred to one octavo and five duodecimo volumes, with fifty pamphlets which have left little to say on the point. Let it not be supposed, however, for an instant, that the writer of this article is himself undecided in his opinion on this question. By no means; and he hastens to repel the unjust suspicion, by declaring himself one of the warmest Otwaysians. It is true that he has some private grounds for believing that a dispassionate inquiry might lead one to doubt whether Otway or Butler ever saw the Lumley autograph; but what of that, who has time or inclination for dispassionate investigation in these stirring days! In the present age of universal enlightenment, we don't trouble ourselves to make up our opinions—we take and give them, we beg, borrow, and steal them. True, there are controversies involving matters so important in their consequences, so serious in their nature, that one might conceive either indifference or fanaticism equally inexcusable with regard to them; but there are also a thousand other subjects of discussion, at the present day, of that peculiar character which can only thrive when supported by passion and prejudice, and falling in with a dispute of this nature, it is absolutely necessary to jump at once into fanaticism. Accordingly, I had no sooner obtained a glimpse of the letter of the starving poet, embalmed within the precious leaves of one of the most noted albums of Europe, than I immediately enlisted under Lady Holberton's colors as a faithful Otwaysian. With that excellent lady I take a tragical view of the Lumley Letter, conceiving that a man must be blind as a bat, not to see that it was written by the author of Venice Preserved, and this in spite of other celebrated collectors, who find in the same sheet so much that is

comical and Hudibrastic. Strange that any man in his senses should hold such an opinion—yet the Butlerites number strong, some of them are respectable people, too; more's the pity that such should be the case.

As we have already observed, the controversy began in the library of Sir John Blank, and it continued throughout the life-time of that excellent and well-known collector. At his death, a few years since, it passed into the hands of his daughter, the widow of Colonel H——; and it will be readily imagined that although the main question is still as much undecided as ever, yet the value of the document itself has been immeasurably increased by a controversy of twenty years standing, on its merits. I wish I could add that the fortune of Colonel H—— had augmented in the same proportion; but, unhappily for his widow, the reverse was the case; and it was owing to this combination of circumstances that Lady Holberton at length obtained possession of the Lumley Autograph. Mrs. H—— became very desirous of procuring for her eldest son a cornetcy in the regiment once commanded by his father; as she was now too poor to purchase, the matter required management and negotiation. How it was brought about I cannot exactly say. Suffice it to declare that the young man received his commission, through the influence of Lady Holberton, in a high military quarter, while the Lumley Autograph was placed on a distinguished leaf of that lady's velvet-bound, jewel-clasped album.

It so happened that I dined at Holberton-House on the eventful day upon which the Lumley letter changed owners. I saw immediately, on entering the drawing-room, that Lady Holberton was in excellent spirits; she received me very graciously, and spoke of her son, with whom I had just traveled between Paris and Algiers.

"Wish me joy, Mr. Howard!" exclaimed the lady after a short conversation.

Of course I was very happy to do so, and replied by some remarks on the recent success of her friends in a parliamentary measure, just then decided—Lady Holberton being a distinguished politician. But I soon found it was to some matter of still higher moment she then alluded.

"I never had a doubt as to our success in the house, last night—no; rather wish me joy that I have at last triumphed in a negotiation of two years standing. The Lumley Autograph is mine, Mr. Howard! The letter of poor Otway, actually written in the first stages of starvation—only conceive its value!"

Other guests arriving I was obliged to make way, not however, before Lady Holberton had promised me a sight of her recent acquisition, in the evening. In the mean time I fully entered into her satisfaction, for I had already seen her album in Paris, and heard her sigh for this very addition to its treasures. During dinner the important intelligence that the Lumley letter was her own, was imparted to the company generally.

"I knew it! I was sure of it from her smile, the moment I entered the room!" exclaimed Mr. T—— the distinguished collector, who sat next me.

Another guest, Miss Rowley, also a collecting celebrity, was sitting opposite, and turned so pale at the moment, that I was on the point of officiously recommending a glass of water.

"Have you albums in America, Mr. Howard?" inquired a charming young lady on my right.

"There is no lack of them, I assure you,"—I replied.

"Really! Adela, Mr. Howard tells me they have albums in America!" repeated the young lady to a charming sister, near her; while on my left I had the satisfaction of hearing some gratifying remarks from Mr. T——, as to the state of civilization in my native country, as shown by such a fact.

"And what are your albums like?" again inquired my lovely neighbor.

"Not like Lady Holberton's, perhaps—but pretty well for a young nation."

"Oh dear—not like Lady Holberton's of course—hers is quite unique—so full of nice odd things. But are your albums in America at all like ours?"

"Why yes! we get most of them from Paris and London."

"Oh dear! how strange—but don't you long to see this new treasure of Lady Holberton's—that dear nice letter of Otway's, written while he was starving?" inquired the charming Emily, helping herself to a bit of pate de Perigord.

> {pate de Perigord = an expensive French delicacy: goose liver pate with truffles.}

"Yes, I am exceedingly curious to see it."

"You don't believe it was written by that coarse, vulgar Butler, do you?"

"No, indeed,—it is the pathetic Otway's, beyond a doubt!"

My neighbor, the Butlerite, gave a contemptuous shrug, but I paid him no attention, preferring to coincide with the soft eyes on my right, rather than dispute with the learned spectacles to the left.

After dinner when we had done full justice to the bill of fare, concluding with pines, grapes, and Newtown pippins, we were all gratified with a sight of the poor poet's letter, by way of bonne bouche. A little volume written by Lady Holberton—printed but not published—relating its past history from the date of its discovery in the library of Lord G——, her grandfather, to the present day, passed from hand to

hand, and this review of its various adventures of course only added force to the congratulations offered upon the acquisition of this celebrated autograph.

> {pine = pineapple. Newtown pippin = a green, tart, tangy American apple, originally from Long Island, a favorite of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson; bonne bouche = a tasty morsel (French)}

While the company were succeeding each other in offering their homage to the great album, my attention was called off by a tap on the shoulder from a friend, who informed me that Miss Rowley, a very clever, handsome woman of a certain age, had expressed a wish to make my acquaintance. I was only too happy to be presented. After a very gracious reception, and an invitation to a party for the following evening, Miss Rowley observed:

"You have Autographs, in America, I understand, Mr. Howard."

"Both autographs and collectors," I replied.

"Really! Perhaps you are a collector yourself?" continued the lady, with an indescribable expression, half interest, half disappointment.

"No—merely a humble admirer of the labors of others."

"Then," added the lady, more blandly, "perhaps you will be good-natured enough to assist me."

And, after a suspicious glance toward the spot where Lady Holberton and Mr. T—— were conversing together, she adroitly placed herself in a position to give to our conversation the privacy of a diplomatic tete-a-tete.

"Could you possibly procure me some American autographs for my collection? I find a few wanting under the American head—perhaps a hundred or two."

I professed myself ready to do any thing in my power in so good a cause.

"Here is my list; I generally carry it about me. You will see those that are wanting, and very possibly may suggest others."

And as the lady spoke she drew from her pocket a roll of paper as long, and as well covered with names as any minority petition to Congress. However, I had lived too much among collectors of late to be easily dismayed. The list was headed by Black Hawk. I expressed my fears that the gallant warrior's ignorance of letters might prove an obstacle to obtaining any thing from his pen. I volunteered however to procure instead, something from a Cherokee friend of mine, the editor of a newspaper.

> {Black Hawk = Black Hawk (1767-1838), an American Indian (Sac) chieftain, defeated by the U.S. Army in 1832, whose "Autobiography" (1833) became an American classic.}

"How charming!" exclaimed Miss Rowley, clasping her hands. "How very obliging of you, Mr. Howard. Are you fond of shooting? My brother's preserves are in fine order—or perhaps you are partial to yachting—"

Bowing my thanks for these amiable hints, I carelessly observed that the letter of the Cherokee editor was no sacrifice at all, for the chief and myself were regular correspondents; I had a dozen of his letters, and had just given one to Mr. T——. This intelligence evidently lessened Miss Rowley's excessive gratitude. She continued her applications, however, casting an eye on her list.

"Perhaps you correspond also with some rowdies, Mr. Howard? Could you oblige me with a rowdy letter?"

> {rowdies = in the mid-nineteenth century, an American slang term for backwoodsmen or other rough and disorderly types}

I drew up a little at this request; my correspondents, I assured the lady, were generally men of respectability, though one of them was of a savage race.

"No doubt; but in the way of autographs, you know, one would correspond with—"

The sentence remained unfinished, for the lady added,

"I wrote myself to Madame Laffarge, not long since. I am sorry to say Lady Holberton has two of hers; but although an excellent person in most respects, yet it cannot be denied that as regards autographs, Lady Holberton is very illiberal. I offered her Grizzel Baillie, two Cardinals, William Pitt, and Grace Darling, for one of her Laffarges; but she would not part with it. Yet the exchange was very fair, especially as Madame Laffarge is still living."

> {Madame Laffarge = Marie Lafarge (1816-1853), French woman convicted in 1840 for poisoning her husband; later pardoned. Grizzel Baillie = Lady Grizel Baillie (1665-1746), Scottish poet. William Pitt = either William Pitt "the Elder" (1708-1778) or William Pitt "the Younger" (1759-1806), both British Prime Ministers. Grace Darling = Grace Darling (1815-1842), English heroine and lighthouse keeper's daughter, famous for her rescue of castaways in 1838.}

I bowed an assent to the remark.

"And then she herself actually once made proposals for Schinderhannes, to a friend of mine, offering Howard, the philanthropist, Talma, William Penn, and Fenelon for him—all commonplace enough, you know—and Schinderhannes quite unique. My friend was indignant!"

> {Schinderhannes = German bandit chief, executed in 1803. Howard = John Howard (1726-1790), English philanthropist and prison reformer. Talma = Francois Talma (1763-1826), popular

French playwright. William Penn (1644-1718), Quaker founder of Pennsylvania. Fenelon = Francois Fenelon (1651-1715), French Archbishop and writer}

I ventured to excuse Lady Holberton by suggesting that probably at the time her stock of notabilities was low.

Miss Rowley shook her head, and curled her lip, as if she fancied the lady had only been seeking to drive a hard bargain.

"On one point, however, I have carried the day, Mr. Howard. Lady Holberton is not a little proud of her Vidocq; but I have obtained one far superior to hers, one addressed to myself so piquant and gallant too. I called on the dear old burglar on purpose to coax him into writing me a note."

{Vidocq = Francois Vidocq (1775-1857), French police detective who turned robber, and was exposed in 1832.}

I wondered, in petto, whether I should meet any illustrious convicts at Miss Rowley's party the next evening; but remembering to have heard her called an exclusive, it did not seem very probable.

{in petto = silently, to oneself (Latin)}

After running her eye over the list again, Miss Rowley made another inquiry.

"Mr. Howard, could you get me something from an American Colonel?"

I assured the lady we had colonels of all sorts, and begged to know what particular variety she had placed on her catalogue—was it an officer of the regular service, or one of no service at all?

"Oh, the last, certainly—officers who have seen service are so commonplace!"

My own pen was immediately placed at Miss Rowley's disposal, as my sword would have been, had I owned one. As I had been called colonel a hundred times without having commanded a regiment once, my own name was as good as any other on the present occasion.

"You are very obliging. Since you are so good, may I also trouble you to procure me a line from a very remarkable personage of your country—a very distinguished man—he has been President, or Speaker of the Senate, or something of that sort."

To which of our head men did Miss Rowley allude?

"He is called Uncle Sam, I believe."

> {Uncle Sam = "Uncle Sam" became a popular personification of the United States during the War of 1812, replacing Brother Jonathan, and was often used in contradistinction to the British "John Bull"}

This was not so easy a task, for though we have thousands of colonels, there is but one Uncle Sam in the world. On hearing that such was the case, Miss Rowley's anxiety on the subject increased immeasurably; but I assured her the old gentleman only put his name to treaties, and tariffs; and although his sons were wonderfully gallant, yet he himself had never condescended to notice any woman but a queen regnant: and I further endeavored to give some idea of his identity. Miss Rowley stopped me short, however.

"Only procure me one line from him, Mr. Howard, and I shall be indebted to you for life. It will be time enough to find out all about him when I once have his name—that is the essential thing."

I shrunk from committing myself, however; declaring that I would as soon engage to procure a billet-doux from Prester John.

{Prester John = Mythical ruler believed in the Middle Ages to head a powerful Christian Kingdom somewhere in Asia; later identified with the Christian Kings of Ethiopia in Africa}

"Prester John! That would, indeed, be quite invaluable!"

This Asiatic diversion was a happy one, and came very apropos, for it carried Miss Rowley into China; she inquired if I had any Chinese connections.

"Though altogether, I am pretty well satisfied with my Chinese negotiations; as soon as the Celestial Empire was opened to the civilized world, I engaged an agent there to collect for me. But, could you put me on the track of a Confucius?"

{opened to the civilized world = following the so-called Opium War, Britain had in 1842 forced China to open trade with her}

I was obliged to admit my inability to do so; and at the same moment the collecting instincts of Lady Holberton and Mr. T——, drew their attention to the corner where Miss Rowley and myself were conversing; as they moved toward us, Miss Rowley pocketed her list, throwing herself upon my honor not to betray the deficiencies in her role d'equipage, or the collecting negociations just opened between us. Lady Holberton, as she advanced, invited Miss Rowley, with an ill-concealed air of triumph, to feast her eyes once more on the Lumley autograph, and not long after the party broke up.

{role d'equipage = muster roll (French); here, Miss Rowley's list of her autographs}

The next day, in passing Holberton-House, I observed the chariot of a fashionable physician before the door; and at Miss Rowley's party in the evening learned from Mr. T—— that Lady Holberton was quite unwell. The following morning I called to inquire, and received for answer that "her ladyship was very much indisposed." It was not until a week later that I saw Lady Holberton herself, taking the air in Hyde Park. She

looked wretchedly—thin and pale. I inquired from the English friend with whom I was riding, if there was any probability of a change of ministry? He looked surprised; and then catching the direction of my eye, he observed,

"You ask on Lady Holberton's account; but Sir A—— B—— tells me her illness was caused by the loss of the Lumley Autograph."

This unexpected intelligence proved only too true. On returning to my lodgings, I found a note from Lady Holberton, requesting to see me, and, of course, immediately obeyed the summons.

"Lost!—lost!—lost! Mr. Howard!" said the lady, endeavoring to conceal her emotion, as she gave me the details of her affliction.

"It must have been stolen—basely stolen—on the evening of my party. Oh! why did I so foolishly exhibit it among so many people, and collectors among them, too! Never again will I admit more than one collector at a time into the room with my album!" she exclaimed with energy.

I was shocked; surely Lady Holberton did not conceive it possible that any of her guests could be guilty of such base conduct?

"How little you know them! But it is that, Mr. Howard, which has interested me in your favor—you have so much naivete, and ignorance of the moral turpitude of the old world, that I feel convinced you never could be guilty of such an action yourself."

I assured Lady Holberton that in this respect she only did me justice; and, in fact, a theft of the kind she alluded to appeared to me all but incredible.

"Remember that it was only the other day that —— lost his invaluable album; remember that last winter Madame de —— had all her notes on botanical subjects stolen from her own portfolio—and I could mention a

dozen instances of the same wickedness."

These facts were already known to me, but I had forgotten them. I remarked with a glow of national pride, that we certainly were much more virtuous in these matters across the ocean; in America we are much above pilfering autographs; when we do steal, it is by the volume—we seize all an author's stock in trade at one swoop, and without condescending to say even, thank ye, for it.

> {author's stock in trade = though ostensibly referring to the stealing of autographs, Susan Fenimore Cooper is also clearly referring to the widespread pirating of British and other foreign literary works by American publishers, in the absence of international copyright laws—which not only cheated the authors, but made life difficult for American authors expecting to be paid for their creations}

"So I have always understood, Mr. Howard—and I felt that my album was safe with you," observed Lady Holberton, with tears in her eyes.

Wishing to relieve this distress, I proposed advertising for the lost treasure—applying to the police.

Lady Holberton smiled through her tears, as she assured me that the police, old and new, had been enlisted in her service an hour after the discovery of her loss, while communications had been opened with the municipal governments of Brussels, Paris, and Vienna, on the same subject.

> {police, old and new = the first modern English police force had been established in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel — from which the British nickname of "bobby" for policeman.}

"And have you no clue, no suspicions?—your servants—your maid?"

The aspersion on her household was indignantly repelled.

"You will readily believe, Mr. Howard, that a collector, the owner of such an album as I have the honor of possessing, is particularly careful as to whom she admits into her family. I will vouch for all about me; still I have suspicions—but—"

I begged her to speak, if she thought I could be of the least assistance.

"Yes, I will trust my son's friend. Mr. Howard, I here solemnly accuse Theodosia Rowley of having stolen the Lumley Autograph!"

The dignity of manner, the concentrated passion of expression, the strength of emphasis with which Lady Holberton spoke, would have done honor to a Siddons. The natural start of horror and amazement on my part, was also, no doubt, very expressive—for I was speechless with surprise.

"I see you do not credit this," continued the lady.

But thought, like a flash of lightning, had already recalled some circumstances of the last evening at Holberton-House. I did credit the accusation, and immediately informed Lady Holberton of what I had observed, but forgotten, until reminded of the facts by her own remarks. I had seen Miss Rowley, bending low over the album at a moment when some one was telling an exceedingly humorous story which engrossed the attention of the rest of the company.

"Could she have had an accomplice?" cried the lady, with dashing eyes.

I knew nothing on that point. But, I added, that soon after Miss Rowley had left the room very quietly; and as I followed her to fulfill another engagement, she had started, turned pale, and betrayed much nervousness, scarcely allowing me to assist her to her carriage, although we left the house at the same instant.

Lady Holberton's suspicions were now confirmed beyond a doubt.

"And yet it seems incredible that any lady should be guilty of such conduct!" I exclaimed, almost repenting having allowed the previous remarks to pass my lips. "Miss Rowley is undoubtedly a woman of principle—or good moral standing."

"Moral standing!—principle!" exclaimed Lady Holberton, bitterly. "Yes, where an autograph is concerned, Theodosia Rowley has all the principle of a Magpie."

> {Magpie = European bird known for stealing and hiding small bright objects.}

Whatever might have been the fact, it was clear at least that Lady Holberton's opinion was now unalterably made up.

"Remember, she is a Butlerite!" added the lady, thus putting the last touch to the circumstantial evidence against Miss Rowley.

Weeks passed by. The advertisements remained unanswered. The police could give no information. Lady Holberton was in despair; the physicians declared that her health must eventually give way under the anxiety and disappointment consequent upon this melancholy affair. Much sympathy was felt for the afflicted lady; even Miss Rowley called often to condole, but she was never admitted.

"I could not see the crocodile!" exclaimed Lady Holberton, quite thrown off her guard one day, by the sight of Miss Rowley's card which she threw into the fire.

Some consolation, however, appeared to be derived from the assiduous attentions of Mr. T——, who personally admired Lady Holberton; at least he professed to do so, though some persons accused him of interested views, and aiming at her album rather than herself. But although his attentions were received, yet nothing could afford full consolation. At length, all other means failing, at the end of a month, it was proposed that two persons, mutual friends of Lady Holberton and

Miss Rowley, should call on the latter lady, and appeal privately to her sense of honor, to restore the autograph if it were actually in her possession. This plan was finally agreed on; but the very day it was to have been carried into execution, Miss Rowley left town for an excursion in Finland.

As for myself, I was also on the wing, and left London about the same time. The parting with Lady Holberton was melancholy; she was much depressed, and the physicians had recommended the waters of Wiesbaden. Mr. T—— was also preparing for an excursion to Germany; and he was suspected of vacillating in his Butlerite views, brought over by Lady Holberton's tears and logic.

Returning to London, some three months later, I found many of my former acquaintances were absent; but Lady Holberton, Miss Rowley, and Mr. T—— were all in town again. The day after I arrived—it was Tuesday the 20th of August—as I was walking along Piccadilly, about five o'clock in the afternoon, my eye fell on the windows of Mr. Thorpe's great establishment. I was thinking over his last catalogue of autographs, when I happened to observe a plain, modest-looking young girl casting a timid glance at the door. There was something anxious and hesitating in her manner, which attracted my attention. Accustomed, like most Americans, to assist a woman in any little difficulty, and with notions better suited perhaps to the meridian of Yankee-land than that of London, I asked if she were in any trouble. How richly was I rewarded for the act of good-nature! She blushed and courtesied.

> {Tuesday, 20th of August = does this date the final composition of "The Lumley Autograph" or of its setting? August 20 fell on a Tuesday in 1844 and 1850}

"Please, sir, is it true that they pay money for old letters at this place?"

"They do—have you any thing of the kind to dispose of?"

Judge of my gratification, my amazement, when she produced the Lumley Autograph!

Of course I instantly took it, at her own price—only half a guinea—and I further gave her Lady Holberton's address, that she might claim the liberal reward promised far the precious letter. Tears came into the poor child's eyes when she found what awaited her, and I may as well observe at once that this young girl proved to be the daughter of a poor bed-ridden artisan of Clapham, who had seen better days, but was then in great want. It is an ill-wind that blows no good luck, and the contest for the Lumley Autograph was a great advantage to the poor artisan and his family. The girl had picked up the paper early one morning, in a road near Clapham, as she was going to her work; Lady Holberton gave her a handful of guineas as the promised reward—a sum by the bye just double in amount what the poor poet had received for his best poem—and she also continued to look after the family in their troubles.

But to return to the important document itself. Never can I forget the expressive gratitude that beamed on the fine countenance of Lady Holberton when I restored it once more to her possession. She rapidly recovered her health and spirits, and it was generally reported that seizing this favorable moment, Mr. T—— had offered himself and his collection, and that both had been graciously accepted. Miss Rowley called and a sort of paix platree was made up between the ladies. A cargo of American autographs arrived containing the letter of the Cherokee editor, the sign-manual of governors and colonels without number, and I even succeeded in obtaining epistles from several noted rowdies, especially to gratify the ladies. Lady Holberton made her selection, and the rest were divided between Miss Rowley and Mr. T——. Joy at the recovery of the Lumley Autograph seemed to diffuse an unusual spirit of harmony among collectors; many desirable exchanges were brought about and things looked charmingly. Alas, how little were we prepared for what ensued!

{paix platree = patched-up peace (French)}

On the occasion of the presence in London of two illustrious royal travelers, Lady Holberton gave a large party. So said the papers at least; but I knew better. It was chiefly to celebrate the recovery of the Lumley Autograph, and its restoration to her celebrated Album that the fete was given. The Album was produced, in spite of a half-formed vow of Lady Holberton to the contrary, but then His Royal Highness Prince —— —— had particularly requested to see the letter of the poor poet, having heard it mentioned at dinner. The evening passed off brilliantly, their royal highnesses, came, saw, and departed. The crowd followed them to another house, while a favored few, chiefly collectors, remained lingering about the table on which lay the Album. I should have said earlier, that Lady Holberton had appointed a new office in her household the very day after the loss of the Lumley Autograph; this was no other than a pretty little page, dressed in the old costume of a student of Padua, whose sole duty it was to watch over the Album whenever it was removed from the rich and heavy case in which it usually lay enshrined. He was the guard of the Album, and was strictly enjoined never, for one instant, to remove his eyes from the precious volume from the moment he was placed on duty, until relieved.

Well, there we were, some dozen of us, collected about the table; Lady Holberton looking triumphant, Mr. T—— very proud; and there stood the page of the Album, dressed in his Paduasoy gown, with eyes fastened on the book, according to orders, while he supported its gorgeous case in his arms. Some remark was made as to the extraordinary manner in which the precious Autograph had been lost, and then found again. My blood actually boiled, as one of the company turned to me and asked in a suspicious tone, if I did not know more of its history than I chose to confess? My indignation was boundless; fortunately I could produce the friend walking with me in Piccadilly, and the artisan's family at Clapham, as witnesses in my favor. Miss Rowley was standing near me at the moment.

{Paduasoy = a strong corded or gros-grain silk fabric, traditionally associated with Padua, Italy}

"Still, Mr. Howard," observed that lady; "I really cannot see why you should resent the insinuation so warmly. Now, do you know, I am not at all sorry to have it in my power to declare that I have some knowledge of the fate of that paper during its eclipse."

All eyes were instantly fixed on the speaker. The lady smiled and continued:

"Lady Holberton thinks the Lumley Autograph was stolen—I understand she even thought it was stolen by myself—"

She here turned deliberately toward our hostess, who looked uneasy.

"If such were your suspicions, Lady Holberton," continued Miss Rowley, speaking with great deliberation—"I am happy to say they were quite correct—you only did me justice—I am proud to declare the deed was mine—"

We were all speechless at hearing this sudden and bold avowal.

"It was I, Theodosia Rowley, who carried off—the word is of little consequence—who stole, I repeat, that precious paper. So long as the treasure was mine, the consciousness of possessing it was sufficient in itself—but having afterward lost it from my pocket by unpardonable carelessness, I shall at least now glory in the daring deed which made it once my own."

Conceive the amazement which these remarks—delivered with calm enthusiasm—produced among the listening circle. We all know that high crimes and misdemeanors enough are committed by men, and women too; but somehow or other the delinquents are not often given to talking of them; they would just as lief in general that the act should not be known. The effect of Miss Rowley's words was different on different individuals. As for myself, I involuntarily felt for the handkerchief in my pocket. The page of the album drew nearer. Lady Holberton looked aghast, as though she had seen a cannibal. Some bit their lips; others

opened their eyes. Mr. T——, however, who held the album at the moment, and was bending over it when Miss Rowley began her extraordinary disclosure, raised his eyes, fixed his glasses on the fair speaker, and sent through them such a glance as no words can fully describe. It was a glance of intense admiration.

"What exalted views! What sublime sentiments!" he exclaimed in an ecstasy.

But Mr. T——'s blaze of admiration was not the only flame at work, while he was gazing at the heroine of the moment. In the sudden burst of enthusiasm roused by the fair purloiner, he forgot all else; the precious volume in his hand drooped, touched the flame of a wax-light on the table, and in another instant the great Holberton Album, that Album of European reputation—was burning before our eyes—its invaluable leaves were curling, and blackening, and smoking under the devouring flame!

A shriek from Lady Holberton—an unearthly cry from the page of the Album—both echoed by the spectators, came too late. The volume was half consumed. Of the Lumley Autograph not a line remained!

Such was the ill-fated end of the letter of the poor starving poet. It was written amid gloom and distress; its career closed in a stormy hour. The loss of the Album of course broke off the engagement between Lady Holberton and Mr. T——. This however could scarcely have been regretted under the circumstances, for their union, after the catastrophe must have been one long series of miserable reproaches. The sudden change in Mr. T——'s feelings toward Miss Rowley was not a momentary one; the admiration first kindled by that lady's bold declaration, grew to be the strongest sentiment of his heart, and only a few weeks later he was made the happiest of men by receiving as his own the fair hand which accomplished the deed. Miss Rowley and Mr. T—— were united in the bands of matrimony and collectorship. Lady Holberton was still inconsolable when I left London; she was thinking of traveling among

the Hottentots, or in any other clime where albums are unknown and her loss could be forgotten. The journey to Kaffirland was however postponed until the next change of ministry, and I have learned recently that the lady has so far recovered her spirits as to be thinking of an 'Omnibus.' The very last packet, indeed, brought a flattering application to myself; Lady Holberton graciously declaring that the name of Jonathan Howard is not only valued by herself, as that of a friend, but interesting to collectors generally, as having been once connected with that much lamented document, now lost to the world, the letter of the poor starving poet, known as the Lumley Autograph.

> {"Omnibus" = in this context, an "omnibus bill" (i.e., one dealing with a variety of subject) in Parliament}

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