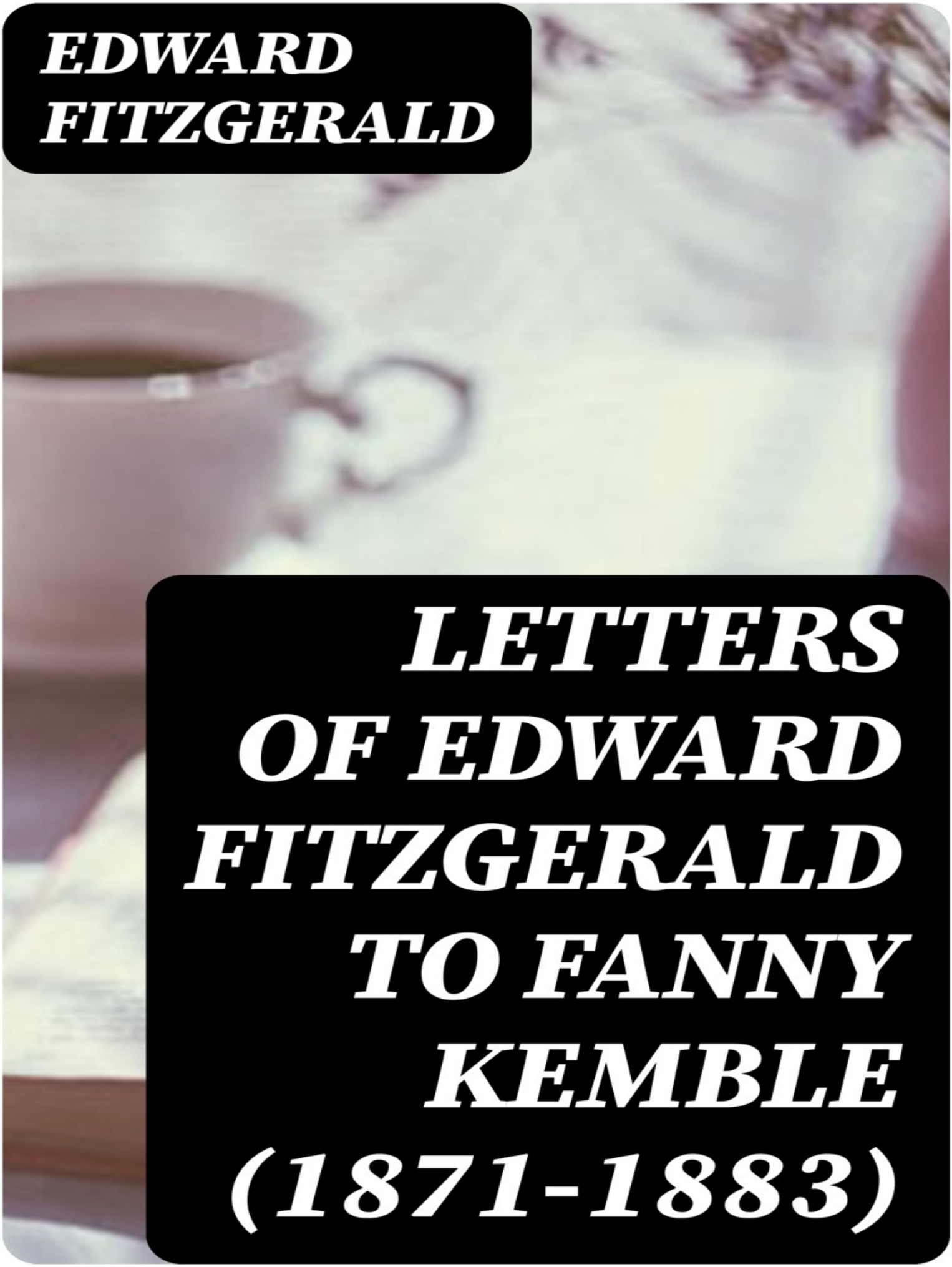

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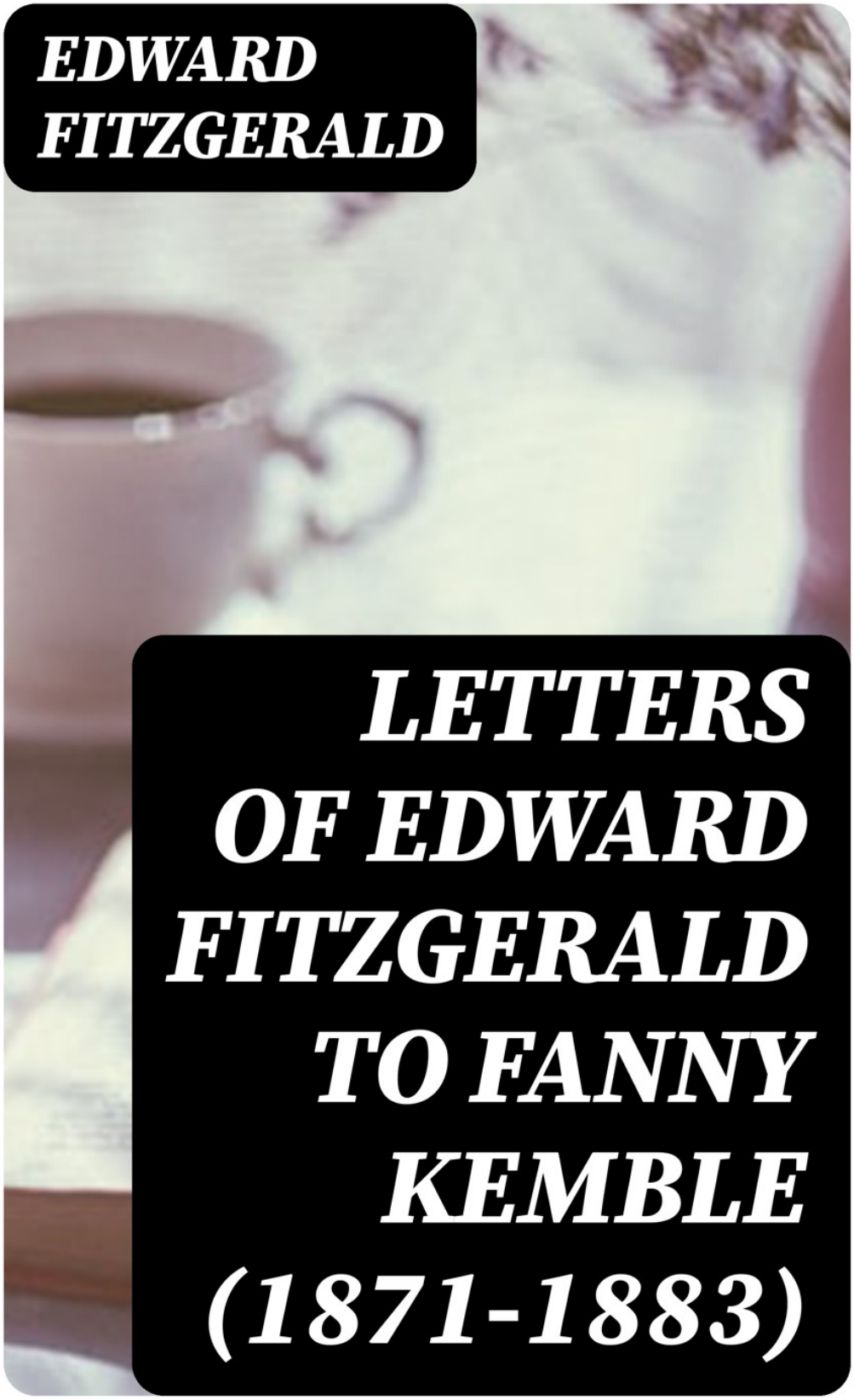

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Edward FitzGerald

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Table of Contents

I.

Table of Contents

WOODBRIDGE, *July* 4, [1871.]

DEAR MRS. KEMBLE,

I asked Donne to tell you, if he found opportunity, that some two months ago I wrote you a letter, but found it so empty and dull that I would not send it to extort the Reply which you feel bound to give. I should have written to tell you so myself; but I heard from Donne of the Wedding soon about to be, and I would not intrude then. Now that is over [3a]—I hope to the satisfaction of you all—and I will say my little say, and you will have to Reply, according to your own Law of Mede and Persian.

It is a shame that one should only have oneself to talk about; and yet that is all I have; so it shall be short. If you will but tell me of yourself, who have read, and seen, and done, so much more, you will find much more matter for your pen, and also for my entertainment.

Well, I have sold my dear little Ship, [3b] because I could not employ my Eyes with reading in her Cabin, where I had nothing else to do. I think those Eyes began to get better directly I had written to agree to the Man's proposal. Anyhow, the thing is done; and so now I betake myself to a Boat, whether on this River here, or on the Sea at the Mouth of it.

Books you see I have nothing to say about. The Boy who came to read to me made such blundering Work that I was forced to confine him to a Newspaper, where his Blunders were often as entertaining as the Text which he mistook. We

had ‘hangarues’ in the French Assembly, and, on one occasion, ‘ironclad Laughter from the Extreme Left.’ Once again, at the conclusion of the London news, ‘Consolations closed at 91, ex Div.’—And so on. You know how illiterate People will jump at a Word they don’t know, and twist it in[to] some word they are familiar with. I was telling some of these Blunders to a very quiet Clergyman here some while ago, and he assured me that a poor Woman, reading the Bible to his Mother, read off glibly, ‘Stand at a Gate and swallow a Candle.’ I believe this was no Joke of his: whether it were or not, here you have it for what you may think it worth.

I should be glad to hear that you think Donne looking and seeming well. Archdeacon Groome, who saw him lately, thought he looked very jaded: which I could not wonder at. Donne, however, writes as if in good Spirits—brave Man as he is—and I hope you will be able to tell me that he is not so much amiss. He said that he was to be at the Wedding.

You will tell me too how long you remain in England; I fancy, till Winter: and then you will go to Rome again, with its new Dynasty installed in it. I fancy I should not like that so well as the old; but I suppose it’s better for the Country.

I see my Namesake (Percy) Fitzgerald advertizes a Book about the Kembles. That I shall manage to get sight of. He made far too long work of Garrick. I should have thought the Booksellers did not find that pay, judging by the price to which Garrick soon came down. Half of it would have been enough.

Now I am going for a Sail on the famous River Deben, to pass by the same fields of green Wheat, Barley, Rye, and

Beet-root, and come back to the same Dinner. Positively the only new thing we have in Woodbridge is a Waxen Bust (Lady, of course) at the little Hairdresser's opposite. She turns slowly round, to our wonder and delight; and I caught the little Barber the other day in the very Act of winding her up to run her daily Stage of Duty. Well; she has not got to answer Letters, as poor Mrs. Kemble must do to hers always sincerely

E. F.G.

II.

Table of Contents

Woodbridge. Nov^r. 2/71.

Dear Mrs. Kemble,

Is it better not to write at all than only write to plead that one has nothing to say? Yet I don't like to let the year get so close to an end without reminding you of me, to whom you have been always so good in the matter of replying to my letters, as in other ways.

If I can tell you nothing of myself: no Books read because of no Eyes to read them: no travel from home because of my little Ship being vanished: no friends seen, except Donne, who came here with Valentia for two days—*you* can fill a sheet like this, I know, with some account of yourself and your Doings: and I shall be very glad to hear that all is well with you. Donne said he believed you were in Ireland when he was here; and he spoke of your being very well when he had last seen you; also telling me he thought you were to stay in England this winter. By the by, I also heard of Mrs. Wister being at Cambridge; not Donne told me this, but

Mr. Wright, the Bursar of Trinity: and every one who speaks of her says she is a very delightful Lady. Donne himself seemed very well, and in very good Spirits, in spite of all his domestic troubles. What Courage, and Good Temper, and Self-sacrifice! Valentia (whom I had not seen these dozen years) seemed a very sensible, unaffected Woman.

I would almost bet that you have not read my Namesake's Life of your Namesakes, which I must borrow another pair of Eyes for one day. My Boy-reader gave me a little taste of it from the Athenæum; as also of Mr. Harness' Memoirs, [6] which I must get at.

This is a sorry sight [7] of a Letter:—do not trouble yourself to write a better—that you must, in spite of yourself—but write to me a little about yourself; which is a matter of great Interest to yours always

E. F.G.

III.

Table of Contents

[*Nov.* 1871.]

Dear Mrs. Kemble,

I ought to be much obliged to you for answering my last letter with an uneasy hand, as you did. So I do thank you: and really wish that you would not reply to this under any such pain: but how do I know but that very pain will make you more determined to reply? I must only beg you not to do so: and thus wash *my* hands of any responsibilities in the matter.

And what will you say when I tell you that I can hardly pity one who suffers from Gout; though I would undoubtedly

prefer that you should be free from that, or any other ailment. But I have always heard that Gout exempts one from many other miseries which Flesh is heir to: at any rate, it almost always leaves the Head clear: and that is so much! My Mother, who suffered a good deal, used often to say how she was kept awake of nights by the Pain in her feet, or hands, but felt so clear aloft that she made Night pass even agreeably away with her reflections and recollections.

And you have your recollections and Reflections which you are gathering into Shape, you say, in a Memoir of your own Life. And you are good enough to say that you would read it to me if I—were good enough to invite you to my House here some Summer Day! I doubt that Donne has given you too flattering an account of my house, and me: you know he is pleased with every one and everything: I know it also, and therefore no longer dissuade him from spending his time and money in a flying Visit here in the course of his Visits to other East Anglian friends and Kinsmen. But I feel a little all the while as if I were taking all, and giving nothing in return: I mean, about Books, People, etc., with which a dozen years discontinuance of Society, and, latterly, incompetent Eyes, have left me in the lurch. If you indeed will come and read your Memoir to me, I shall be entitled to be a Listener only: and you shall have my Château all to yourself for as long as you please: only do not expect me to be quite what Donne may represent.

It is disgusting to talk so much about oneself: but I really think it is better to say so much on this occasion. If you consider my circumstances, you will perhaps see that I am

not talking unreasonably: I am sure, not with sham humility: and that I am yours always and sincerely

E. F.G.

P.S. I should not myself have written so soon again, but to apprise you of a brace of Pheasants I have sent you. Pray do not write expressly to acknowledge them:—only tell me if they don't come. I know you thank me. [9]

IV.

Table of Contents

[27 *Feb.*, 1872.]

Dear Mrs. Kemble,

Had I anything pleasant to write to you, or better Eyes to write it with, you would have heard from me before this. An old Story, by way of Apology—to one who wants no such Apology, too. Therefore, true though it be there is enough of it.

I hear from Mowbray Donne that you were at his Father's Lectures, [10a] and looking yourself. So that is all right. Are your Daughters—or one of them—still with you? I do not think you have been to see the Thanksgiving Procession, [10b] for which our Bells are even now ringing—the old Peal which I have known these—sixty years almost—though at that time it reached my Eyes (*sic*) through a Nursery window about two miles off. From that window I remember seeing my Father with another Squire [10c] passing over the Lawn with their little pack of Harriers—an almost obliterated Slide of the old Magic Lantern. My Mother used to come up sometimes, and we Children were not much comforted. She was a remarkable woman, as you said in a former letter:

and as I constantly believe in outward Beauty as an Index of a Beautiful Soul within, I used sometimes to wonder what feature in her fine face betrayed what was not so good in her Character. I think (as usual) the Lips: there was a twist of Mischief about them now and then, like that in—the Tail of a Cat!—otherwise so smooth and amiable. I think she admired your Mother as much as any one she knew, or had known.

And (I see by the Athenæum) Mr. Chorley is dead, [11] whom I used to see at your Father's and Sister's houses. Born in 1808 they say: so, one year older than yours truly E. F.G.—who, however, is going to live through another page of Letter-paper. I think he was a capital Musical Critic, though he condemned Piccolomini, who was the last Singer I heard of Genius, Passion, and a Voice that told both. I am told she was no Singer: but that went some way to make amends. Chorley, too, though an irritable, nervous creature, as his outside expressed, was kind and affectionate to Family and Friend, I always heard. But I think the Angels must take care to keep in tune when he gets among them.

This is a wretched piece of Letter to extort the Answer which you feel bound to give. But I somehow wished to write: and not to write about myself; and so have only left room to say—to repeat—that I am yours ever sincerely

E. F.G.

V.

Table of Contents

[1872.]

Dear Mrs. Kemble,

I set off with a Letter to you, though I do not very well know how I am to go on with it. But my Reader has been so disturbed by a Mouse in the room that I have dismissed him —9½ p.m.—and he has been reading (so far as he could get on) Hawthorne's Notes of Italian Travel: which interest me very much indeed, as being the Notes of a Man of Genius who will think for himself independently of Murray &c. And then his Account of Rome has made me think of you more than once. We have indeed left off to-night at Radicofani: but, as my Boy is frightened away by the Mouse, I fancy I will write to you before I take my one Pipe—which were better left alone, considering that it gives but half an hour's rather pleasant musing at the expense of a troubled night. Is it not more foolish then to persist in doing this than being frightened at a Mouse? This is not a mere fancy of the Boy—who is not a Fool, nor a 'Betty,' and is seventeen years old: he inherits his terror from his Mother, he says: positively he has been in a cold Sweat because of this poor little thing in the room: and yet he is the son of a Butcher here. So I sent him home, and write to you instead of hearing him read Hawthorne. He is to bring some poisoned Wheat for the Mouse to-morrow.

Another Book he read me also made me think of you: Harness: whom I remember to have seen once or twice at your Father's years ago. The Memoir of him (which is a poor thing) still makes one like—nay, love—him—as a kindly, intelligent, man. I think his latter letters very pleasant indeed.

I do not know if you are in London or in your 'Villeggiatura' [13a] in Kent. Donne must decide that for me.

Even my Garden and Fields and Shrubs are more flourishing than I have yet seen them at this time of Year: and with you all is in fuller bloom, whether you be in Kent or Middlesex. Are you going on with your Memoir? Pray read Hawthorne. I dare say you do not quite forget Shakespeare now and then: dear old Harness, reading him to the last!

Pray do you read Annie Thackeray's new Story [13b] in Cornhill? She wrote me that she had taken great pains with it, and so thought it might not be so good as what she took less pains with. I doated on her Village on the Cliff, but did not care for what I had read of hers since: and this new Story I have not seen! And pray do you doat on George Eliot?

Here are a few questions suggested for you to answer—as answer I know you will. It is almost a Shame to put you to it by such a piece of inanity as this letter. But it is written: it is 10 p.m. A Pipe—and then to Bed—with what Appetite for Sleep one may.

And I am yours sincerely always

E. F.G.

VI.

Table of Contents

WOODBRIDGE: *June* 6, [1872].

DEAR MRS. KEMBLE,

Some little while ago I saw in a London Book Catalogue 'Smiles and Tears—a Comedy by Mrs. C. Kemble'—I had a curiosity to see this: and so bought it. Do you know it?—Would you like to have it? It seems to be ingeniously contrived, and of easy and natural Dialogue: of the half

sentimental kind of Comedy, as Comedies then were (1815) with a serious—very serious—element in it—taken from your Mother's Friend's, Mrs. Opie's (what a sentence!) story of 'Father and Daughter'—the seduced Daughter, who finds her distracted Father writing her name on a Coffin he has drawn on the Wall of his Cell—All ends happily in the Play, however, whatever may be the upshot of the Novel. But an odd thing is, that this poor Girl's name is 'Fitz Harding'—and the Character was played by Miss Foote: whether before, or after, her seduction by Colonel Berkeley I know not. The Father was played by Young.

Sir Frederick Pollock has been to see me here for two days, [15] and put me up to much that was going on in the civilized World. He was very agreeable indeed: and I believe his Visit did him good. What are you going to do with your Summer? Surely never came Summer with more Verdure: and I somehow think we shall have more rain to keep the Verdure up, than for the last few years we have had.

I am quite sure of the merit of George Eliot, and (I should have thought) of a kind that would suit me. But I have not as yet found an Appetite for her. I have begun taking the Cornhill that I may read Annie Thackeray—but I have not found Appetite for her as yet. Is it that one recoils from making so many new Acquaintances in Novels, and retreats upon one's Old Friends, in Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Sir Walter? Oh, I read the last as you have lately been reading—the Scotch Novels, I mean: I believe I should not care for the Ivanhoes, Kenilworths, etc., any more. But Jeanie Deans, the Antiquary, etc., I shall be theirs as long as I am yours sincerely

E. F.G.

VII.

Table of Contents

WOODBRIDGE: *August* 9, [1872].

DEAR MRS. KEMBLE,

I think I shall hear from you once again before you go abroad. To Rome! My Brother Peter also is going to winter there: but you would not have much in common with him, I think, so I say nothing of an Acquaintance between you.

I have been having Frederick Tennyson with me down here. [16a] He has come to England (from Jersey where his home now is) partly on Business, and partly to bring over a deaf old Gentleman who has discovered the Original Mystery of Free-masonry, by means of Spiritualism. The Freemasons have for Ages been ignorant, it seems, of the very Secret which all their Emblems and Signs refer to: and the question is, if they care enough for their own Mystery to buy it of this ancient Gentleman. If they do not, he will shame them by Publishing it to all the world. Frederick Tennyson, who has long been a Swedenborgian, a Spiritualist, and is now even himself a Medium, is quite grand and sincere in this as in all else: with the Faith of a Gigantic Child—pathetic and yet humorous to consider and consort with.

I went to Sydenham for two days to visit the Brother I began telling you of: and, at a hasty visit to the Royal Academy, caught a glimpse of Annie Thackeray: [16b] who had first caught a glimpse of me, and ran away from her Party to seize the hands of her Father’s old friend. I did not

know her at first: was half overset by her cordial welcome when she told me who she was; and made a blundering business of it altogether. So much so, that I could not but write afterwards to apologize to her: and she returned as kind an Answer as she had given a Greeting: telling me that my chance Apparition had been to her as ‘A message from Papa.’ It was really something to have been of so much importance.

I keep intending to go out somewhere—if for no other reason than that my rooms here may be cleaned! which they will have it should be done once a year. Perhaps I may have to go to my old Field of Naseby, where Carlyle wants me to erect a Stone over the spot where I dug up some remains of those who were slain there over two hundred years ago, for the purpose of satisfying him in his Cromwell History. This has been a fixed purpose of his these twenty years: I thought it had dropped from his head: but it cropped up again this Spring, and I do not like to neglect such wishes. Ever yours

E. F.G.

VIII.

Table of Contents

April 22, [1873.]

Dear Mrs. Kemble,

One last word about what you call my ‘Half-invitation’ to Woodbridge. In one sense it is so; but not in the sense you imagine.

I never do invite any of my oldest Friends to come and see me, am almost distressed at their proposing to do so. If

they take me in their way to, or from, elsewhere (as Donne in his Norfolk Circuit) it is another matter.

But I have built a pleasant house just outside the Town, where I never live myself, but keep it mainly for some Nieces who come there for two or three months in the Summer: and, when they are not there, for any Friends who like to come, for the Benefit of fresh Air and Verdure, *plus* the company of their Host. An Artist and his Wife have stayed there for some weeks for the last two years; and Donne and Valentia were to have come, but that they went abroad instead.

And so, while I should even deprecate a Lady like you coming thus far only for my sake, who ought rather to go and ask Admission at your Door, I should be glad if you liked to come to my house for the double purpose aforesaid.

My Nieces have hitherto come to me from July to September or October. Since I wrote to you, they have proposed to come on May 21; though it may be somewhat later, as suits the health of the Invalid—who lives on small means with her elder Sister, who is her Guardian Angel. I am sure that no friend of mine—and least of all you—would dissent from my making them my first consideration. I never ask them in Winter, when I think they are better in a Town: which Town has, since their Father's Death, been Lowestoft, where I see them from time to time. Their other six sisters (one only married) live elsewhere: all loving one another, notwithstanding.

Well: I have told you all I meant by my 'Half-Invitation.' These N.E. winds are less inviting than I to these parts; but I and my House would be very glad to entertain you to our

best up to the End of May, if you really liked to see Woodbridge as well as yours always truly

E. F.G.

P.S.—You tell me that, once returned to America, you think you will not return ever again to England. But you will—if only to revisit those at Kenilworth—yes, and the blind Lady you are soon going to see in Ireland [19a]—and two or three more in England beside—yes, and old England itself, 'with all her faults.'

By the by:—Some while ago [19b] Carlyle sent me a Letter from an American gentleman named Norton (once of the N. American Review, C. says, and a most amiable, intelligent Gentleman)—whose Letter enclosed one from Ruskin, which had been entrusted to another American Gentleman named Burne Jones—who kept it in a Desk ten years, and at last forwarded it as aforesaid—to me! The Note (of Ruskin's) is about one of the Persian Translations: almost childish, as that Man of Genius is apt to be in his Likes as well as Dislikes. I dare say he has forgotten all about Translator and Original long before this. I wrote to thank Mr. Norton for

(*Letter unfinished*.)

IX.

Table of Contents

[1873.]

Dear Mrs. Kemble,

It is scarce fair to assail you on your return to England with another Letter so close on that to which you have only just answered—you who *will* answer! I wish you would

consider this Letter of mine an Answer (as it really is) to that last of yours; and before long I will write again and call on you then for a Reply.

What inspires me now is, that, about the time you were writing to me about Burns and Béranger, I was thinking of them ‘which was the Greater Genius?’—I can’t say; but, with all my Admiration for about a Score of the Frenchman’s almost perfect Songs, I would give all of them up for a Score of Burns’ Couplets, Stanzas, or single Lines scattered among those quite *im*perfect Lyrics of his. Béranger, no doubt, was The *Artist*; which still is not the highest Genius—witness Shakespeare, Dante, Æschylus, Calderon, to the contrary. Burns assuredly had more *Passion* than the Frenchman; which is not Genius either, but a great Part of the Lyric Poet still. What Béranger might have been, if born and bred among Banks, Braes, and Mountains, I cannot tell: Burns had that advantage over him. And then the Highland Mary to love, amid the heather, as compared to Lise the Grisette in a Parisian Suburb! Some of the old French Virelays and *Vaux-de-vire* come much nearer the Wild Notes of Burns, and go to one’s heart like his; Béranger never gets so far as that, I think. One knows he will come round to his pretty *refrain* with perfect grace; if he were more Inspired he couldn’t.

‘My Love is like the red, red, Rose
That’s newly sprung in June,
My Love is like the Melody
That’s sweetly play’d in tune.’

and he will love his Love,

‘Till a’ the Seas gang Dry’

Yes—Till a’ the Seas gang dry, my Dear. And then comes some weaker stuff about Rocks melting in the Sun. All Imperfect; but that red, red Rose has burned itself into one’s silly Soul in spite of all. Do you know that one of Burns’ few almost perfect stanzas was perfect till he added two Syllables to each alternate Line to fit it to the lovely Music which almost excuses such a dilution of the Verse?

‘Ye Banks and Braes o’ bonnie Doon,
How can ye bloom (so fresh) so fair?
Ye little Birds how can ye sing,
And I so (weary) full of care!
Thou’lt break my heart, thou little Bird,
That sings (singest so) upon the Thorn:
Thou minds me of departed days
That never shall return
(Departed never to) return.’

Now I shall tell you two things which my last Quotation has recalled to me.

Some thirty years ago A. Tennyson went over Burns’ Ground in Dumfries. When he was one day by Doon-side—‘I can’t tell how it was, Fitz, but I fell into a Passion of Tears’—And A. T. not given to the melting mood at all.

No. 2. My friend old Childs of the romantic town of Bungay (if you can believe in it!) told me that one day he started outside the Coach in company with a poor Woman who had just lost Husband or Child. She talked of her Loss and Sorrow with some Resignation; till the Coach happened

to pull up by a roadside Inn. A ‘little Bird’ was singing somewhere; the poor Woman then broke into Tears, and said —‘I could bear anything but that.’ I dare say she had never even heard of Burns: but he had heard the little Bird that he knew would go to all Hearts in Sorrow.

Béranger’s Morals are Virtue as compared to what have followed him in France. Yet I am afraid he partly led the way. Burns’ very *Passion* half excused him; so far from its being Refinement which Burke thought deprived Vice of half its Mischief!

Here is a Sermon for you, you see, which you did not compound for: nor I neither when I began my Letter. But I think I have told you the two Stories aforesaid which will almost deprive my sermon of half its Dulness. And I am now going to transcribe you a *Vau-de-vire* of old Olivier de Basselin, [23a] which will show you something of that which I miss in Béranger. But I think I had better write it on a separate Paper. Till which, what think you of these lines of Clément Marot on the Death of some French Princess who desired to be buried among the Poor? [23b]

[P.S.—These also must go on the Fly-leaf: being too long, Alexandrine, for these Pages.]

What a Letter! But if you are still at your Vicarage, you can read it in the Intervals of Church. I was surprised at your coming so early from Italy: the famous Holy Week there is now, I suppose, somewhat shorn of its Glory.—If you were not so sincere I should think you were persiflaging me about the Photo, as applied to myself, and yourself. Some years ago I said—and now say—I wanted one of you; and if this letter were not so long, would tell you a little how to sit.

Which you would not attend to; but I should be all the same, your long-winded

Friend

E. F.G.

X.

Table of Contents

Woodbridge, *May* 1, [1873.]

Dear Mrs. Kemble,

I am very glad that you will be Photographed: though not by the Ipswich Man who did me, there are no doubt many much better in London.

Of course the whole Figure is best, if it can be artistically arranged. But certainly the safe plan is to venture as little as possible when an Artist's hand cannot harmonize the Lines and the Lights, as in a Picture. And as the Face is the Chief Object, I say the safest thing is to sit for the Face, neck, and Shoulders only. By this, one not only avoids any conflict about Arms and Hands (which generally disturb the Photo), but also the Lines and Lights of Chair, Table, etc.

For the same reason, I vote for nothing but a plain Background, like a Curtain, or sober-coloured Wall.

I think also that there should be no White in the Dress, which is apt to be too positive for the Face. Nothing nearer White than such material as (I think) Brussels Lace (?) of a yellowish or even dirty hue; of which there may be a Fringe between Dress and Skin. I have advised Men Friends to sit in a—dirty Shirt!

I think a three-quarter face is better that a Full; for one reason, that I think the Sitter feels more at ease looking