

Portland, Oregon, June 2d, 1860

My Dear Mother:-

It has not been a long time since I wrote to you, and as I sit down to-night to write, I really feel as if I had "nothing to communicate." But I know you will be glad to hear from me, even though my letter should prove uninteresting; and there is pleasure in the thought that there is one at least who will receive even such a letter from me with pleasure, - a friend whose pride - which often makes unjust toward others, - could never dictate a conformity to the custom of awaiting a reply before I write a second or a third time. But I acknowledge remissness in this duty to you, and while I believe there can be no really valid excuse for such negligence in a son I will attempt none, or at least shall not claim that there is aught of extenuation in what I offer: For one who has had as much experience in letter-writing as myself, I believe there are few who have a greater faculty for making them uninteresting. While I am decidedly in favor of short speeches or sermons, I do dislike to attach my <sup>name</sup> to a half-filled sheet of paper in the form of a letter, especially if to a far away friend. In fact, I am every way opposed to short letters, when friendship and affection are the dictators. I wonder



if I have not by the use of the plural here made a distinction where there is no difference? for is there such a thing as friendship without affection? Webster makes a difference, I believe, - a "nice distinction," - but I think I shall contend there is none: at least that there is no such a principle in my nature as to feel one without the other. But I was talking about short letters, and was going to say that I often do not write at all from the fact that I feel I have not sufficient material to make, what in my mind, constitutes a letter.

In Oregon we are all well. Sewell is with Mac, on the farm, and, in a letter I rec'd from him a few days ago, expresses himself as well satisfied with his position. He has changed but little since he left home; his tastes and pursuits seem to be about the same. I think, while Mack and Willard may be called the politicians of the family, Sewell is emphatically entitled to the appellation of "Timrod". Neither of the former engage in politics, however, ~~in~~ as office-seekers; but judging from the amount of political lore displayed by them when engaged in argument with their political opponents, I should decide them much better qualified for position than many who seek and obtain it. They are both tolerable speakers. Mac, both in conversation and speaking, has a better faculty of telling what he knows than Willard, and if inspired by the same ambition in future which now impels him, when he arrives at the age of 60, would be called a better informed man, - and a smarter



one, if I lacked up by as calm a judgment, or rather, if he could rid himself of some of that impetuosity which always characterized his disposition, and prevented his a proper exhibition of respect for the opinions of those opposed to him in sentiment. In this, however, I would not leave the inference that he is anything worse than an unpleasant disputant when particularly interested in his subject, and ~~cannot~~ <sup>unable to</sup> convince his opponent by reason, which I will give him the credit of dealing in largely. But among their "fellow-citizens" they are respected and esteemed men of more than ordinary understanding. In politics, as in many other things, I differ with <sup>them;</sup> yet, as I take but little interest in such matters, or, rather, have but little faith <sup>in</sup> my ability to make proselytes or "save the Union" by engaging in political harangues, I seldom place myself in a position, with them, where I would assuredly come out second best. Content in granting to them a superiority in this respect, when the subject is broached, and their "position" stated, I conclude that "discretion is the better part of valor," and act upon Jacob's principle of maintaining "a respectful silence" upon all matters of doubtful expediency," and thus the argument closes. When on the farm, however, I very often am compelled to act as "Mr. President" and "fellow citizens" for them while they debate upon some subject, and however many sidelong glances I may cast toward the book-case or writing-stand the speaking continues until "Mr. President" and "Fellow Citizens" becomes very tired and would very willingly escape to one of these places and leave the orators without an audience could he do so consistently. I used to think the



character or tastes of the man was but little  
foreshadowed in the boy; but I think differently now.  
And I sometimes think that line of distinction between boy-  
hood and manhood, in our family, is not under  
the age of forty-five. How fast we grow old! Fifteen  
more days and I will begin my twenty-eighth year; not  
quite six months more and Sewall will be in his 37th and  
Decatur in his 24th. Frank, too, is a man; and those little  
boy brothers whom I left at home six years ago, are fast  
approaching the years of maturity. I wonder why they never  
write to me? I should love to hear from them, and should  
be happy to answer their letters. I send them papers occa-  
sionally. Tell them I shall claim something in return from  
them—and that "something" must be a letter. David, I presume,  
is not at home. If he is, tell him he is included in this re-  
quest. Clayton and Corra, I only remember as very little  
boys, with very large eyes, and as I always had a great  
fondness for children, as brothers, I loved them the more.

Of my prospects, (pecuniary) I have never spoken particu-  
larly. I will only say now that they are not what  
I six years ago thought they would be by the  
time I attained my present age; nor yet what  
they might have been, had I been the possessor of  
foreknowledge. It was always my desire that I might  
attain a position in this respect, by which I might be  
enabled to make your situation one of more than com-  
mon comfort and independence; but thus far hope has only  
been deferred. Yet I never despair. Give my love to father  
and brothers. For the present good-bye. I will write again  
I should love to hear from you more frequently, if you could make  
it convenient to write. Again good-bye  
Mother?  
Affectionately, Ray. B. Rees.