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Gilmore, Eliza OH (Mother), 03/16/1854

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West Point N. Y. Mar. 16th 54

My dear Mother,

I begin to think it
time I wrote you. With the election of a Representative
to Congress I mean a new member, I sent you a copy of
my speech on the Warrier & Philanthropic question.
I intended to have written something to send with it.

You would be surprised to hear what an abundance
of credit I get for that ordinary effusion, but it was
all due to my earnest, impassioned manner. I take a
great deal of pleasure in speaking. There is a sort of thrilling
excitement about it that wakes me up from my usual
lethargy and seems for the time being at least to infuse
a new life through my spirits. This is so much the case
that I fancy sometimes I would do better in a profession
that required such efforts than elsewhere. I have recently
received a letter from Rowland. He spoke of Charlie
and Dillie. Says Charlie is going to Kent's Hill. I am
glad of it, for I am loath to have him brought in
contact with all manner of bad influences too soon.

I do not seem to have accomplished much in the
study line since January. I feel that I am growing
involunt and a little careless. But a period will soon
be put to my career at this place & I will have to
try my hand at something else. Lizzie wrote me that
she had ^{had gone} been up to Livermore to see her mother who had

been quite ill. She regretted that she would be obliged to go
home without seeing you. She & her mother have returned
before this time. I am at a loss to know what course
I had better pursue when I get through here in regard
to money-matters, my clothes will cost so much. I find
if I get into the engineers that my pay will amount to
upwards of 80 dollars per month all told. With this I
will soon be square with the world. If I am sent off
to a distant station it will cost something to defray
travelling expenses. But I can but perceive the wisdom
of remaining attached to the Army for a few years. For
I could not easily get another situation where anything like
the Army pay would accrue to the same amount of labor.
I am in hopes to get a Northern Station but I do not rely
upon it at all. I saw by the papers that Johnathan Cilley's
son has been appointed a Cadet from Maine. I hope
he has the spirit & intelligence of his father. Though
I would not wish him such a destiny. I have read
his father's name on the wall of my room in College.
The son of James Watson Webb is in the Corps in the
second class - a very fine young man & a good scholar.

I suppose you have ere this read the account of the
Black Warrior at Havana. I would not be surprised
if some national difficulty of a serious kind grew out of
this affair. Yet there is little probability for war, and
ever wise our countrymen may be for it. Spain would
show a bad policy indeed to engage in hostilities at
this juncture, of European politics. She might have the

sympathy of England & France - but I think those nations
have already got their hands full. It would be
curious indeed if they should drive us to side with the
Czar. Now the world be in a broil in fact, if we should
declare war against Spain. We can but think even
now that the peaceful spirit of the Millennium is very
far from occupying the hearts of men - the swords have
not been beaten into ploughshares, nor do the lion & the
lamb lie down together. A young man said to me that
it would be a desperate debit in the service for me
in my first experience to lead a solon hope to the storming
of Moro Castle. Our people are very excitable and sometimes
more disposed to maintain honor & rights at the sword's
point than I ever before supposed. I don't shrink
from anything in the line of my duty. I once thought
differently. That everything could & should be peaceably
& amicably settled. But I am convinced that such
ideas are at the present time in the highest degree
visionary. We will have to take the world as we find it
and metaphysical theorizing will not alter the present
state of things. I believe it is the duty of a nation like ours
to set on the defensive, but it would be the height of
temerity to lay open our rich stores & garnered treasures to
the grasping power of foreign avarice - for this latter has
little conscience & little humanity. The spirit of love &
unlimited concession, which are the doctrines of Christ
as applied to men as individuals, have never yet been applied
to public bodies - to nations, only so far as they actuated the
prime movers in public transactions. When the principles of Christ have

prevailed as they undoubtedly will in God's appointed time - when
true Christian men fill the halls of legislation in every country -
wars will have ceased. Now instinct teaches us the principle
of self-defence - and self-preservation impels us to employ
every proper means for our protection. We have transferred
this power to civil society & some imagine that the exertion
of such power is unnecessary & wrong. But let difficulty
come - let oppression show itself in any form - let our lands
be overrun - our houses destroyed - or religious & civil rights which
are now recognized far more than elsewhere on the earth - be
annihilated - let foreigners step in & subjugate us & begin
to trample on us, and theoretical ethics will soon give
way. The established principle that self-preservation is the
first law of our nature, ~~will~~ ^{will} then be felt in its
full force. I believe in diplomacy - in ample negotiation -
but the best way to ward off danger is in prompt & energetic
action. Let the cause be just, the danger imminent, and
then hesitate not in the words of another to use the means the
only means that the God of Nature has placed in our
power. Your son will be ever ready promptly & conscientiously
& heartily to respond to the call of his country. And this
need give no anxiety, no terror to an American mother. But I cannot
write more now - I did not intend to fill my letter with such
thoughts but they happened to be uppermost &
so here they are. Write to me truly dear mother your
feelings & your sentiments they are not & never will be
disregarded by me. I have a great deal of ambition in my
heart & this with certain forms of vanity may often shut
out the pure light of truth, but my cherished purposes
are based on principles of uprightness & integrity give my love
to all - I believe me as ever
My very affectionate Son
A. C. Howland