

MS. A. 1. 11
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Dear Miss Belham,

It was unkind in me not to have replied to you sooner. But the indisposition to letter writing, which comes on with age, is a problem not satisfactorily to be solved. Pen, a half worth of ink and a twitch or two of the thumb and fore fingers does it. But it is not done. Your imaginary correspondence of mine with B. B. amuses me. Why, he has not had a line from me for nearly two years, I suppose, & indeed scarcely any one else. I grant you, this is only the excuse comparative. A more plausible reason may be that I felt myself totally incompetent to serve you in the matter of publication. I am totally out of the authors trade, but, as I hear the case is, no bookseller will risk upon poems now a days, nor advance the slightest sum upon them. Marry, they will publish for you, you paying for paper and printing, and take rather more than half of the proceeds - profits, I cannot say, but trifling diminutions of the poets prime loss -

On a perfect knowledge of this, for I am near to booksellers enough to hear their chat, I fear your project of selling a poem, a long one especially, is quite hopeless. This appear'd so flat to say, that I hung back from saying any thing. Mr. Mason 64 New Bond Street my publisher, on but naming me, will, I am sure, corroborate this, or give you the very best information & advice in his power. On setting up in business, he would needs have a specimen of his neatness in executing orders for publications. He chose a volume of things of mine, and has sold about 20, the risk and loss was his, the multiplication mine, small but I anticipated it, but it a little answered

his purpose, as it was a sort of advertisement of his business, and the books look'd handsomer, to give away than cards. If you will consult him he is kind and intelligent, I will have pleasure in presenting you with a copy of my father's Christen'd "Album verses".

Business done, let me assure you that both Mary and myself retain all kindness for you, we have never sworn or been alienated from you for an instant. We hope to shake hands with you again, at present her spirits are scarcely equal to a meeting. This is the case, I sadly assure you. But if it will give you any pleasure to know that we still love you, keep us in the list of your friends. Have no idle thoughts upon its not being so on my part. You were grave and argumentative, I foolish and funnical; you a little reserved -

Keeling, tho' a little board of sentiment to myself, as Coleridge, when he went about Bristol, disclaiming sugar & declaiming against Slavery, kept a paper of that West India luxury shyly in his pocket to pop in unseen when he went out to tea drinking. Did not I love your verses, have I ever fail'd to see that you had the most feminine soul of all our poet- or prose- wits? Do I forget our merry making? or don't I miss the old days, before health & youth failing doom'd me to this exile.

I crowd both our loves in here.

C. Lamb