

Mr Pierre Irving
son of Mr & Mrs Irving
New York



Washington Irving - Jan 29 - 1825 -
H. M. M.

W838a

Paris, March 29th 1825.

My dear Pierre

I am very much gratified by your letter. It is full of goodness and good feeling. You have taken the observations of my former letter, however, much too strongly if you have supposed them to produce any thing like mortification. They were rather meant to warn you for the future not to censure you for the past. I had felt, in my own case, how instantly a young man gets beguiled away by the imagination, and wanders from the safe beaten path of life, to lose himself in the mazes of literature. scarcely any author ever set forth with the intention or mission of becoming such: he becomes so by degrees; and I have seen enough of literary life to warn ^{all} ~~any~~ of them who are dear to me, ~~not to trust to his passions~~ should I see any danger of their straying into it.

Upon the whole I am glad that you have entered into your father's counting house. You will there have a certain & a prosperous path in life marked out for you; instead of having to adopt & clear away a doubtful one for yourself. You will in all probability have the means of living independently and indulging your tastes & talents at an age when in another line of life you might have the whole

struggle of existence before you. In our country too, a commercial life does not imply the abandonment of other paths of honorable ambition. Many of our most valuable public men have been merchants; and indeed there are few men who have greater influence in our community than individuals who combine the intellectual acquirements of the scholar with the practical habits of the man of business and the modest influence of the man of goodwill. There is no city in the world which presents a fairer scope for honorable emulation to the intelligent & enlightened merchant than New York. Its vast & rapidly increasing prosperity; the wide extent of its commercial connexions & commercial influence, its multiplied internal and external relations point it out as the great metropolis of North American trade. What must be the importance & power of such a city in a corporatized nation like ours; what must be the importance of its ~~citizens~~, ~~but~~ leading citizens both in matters of commerce and of politics; its merchants must become like the merchants of the old commercial republics of Europe, men fit to entertain & to confer with princes.

I am glad you do not relinquish your studies. On the contrary, take yourself to become a valuable man at all points. Make yourself diligent and exact in ~~the~~ ~~balate~~ business; inform yourself well in all matters connected

with it; do not play the gentleman merchant; but while in the counting house apply yourself as closely and punctually as if you were a hired clerk & depending upon your good conduct for your place. When you have leisure do not waste it in idle society; by idle I mean what is termed fashionable society. Of all places I was ever in New York is one where more time is wasted at that precious period of life when the power of knowledge are to be won and the habits formed that are to determine the character and fortunes of after life. I speak this from sad experience; how many an hour of hard labour & hard study have I had to subject myself to, to atone in a slight degree for the hours of which I suffered society to cheat me out of. Young people enter in society in America ^{at an} ~~where~~ they agree that they are cramped up in schools in Europe. Do not waste your earnings in parties of pleasure; devote as much as possible to valuable reading. ~~Retain~~ Take care not to lose what you have at college. Keep up your knowledge of the learned languages and endeavor to advance in them. Read history regularly and attentively. As your time for reading will be limited do not waste it on any reading but such as will go towards informing your mind, and improving your taste. Do not read for mere amusement. Do not seek to feed the imagination; that will always extract food for itself out of the sternest studies. Do not read for the purpose of mere conversation and the popular works of the day, reviews, magazines &c.

The content to appear ignorant of those topics rather than
and through fear of appearing ignorant. The literature
of the day is clearly the most pigment the most imme-
diately interesting, ~~to learn~~ but it is generally transient;
it runs pages away and leaves no general knowledge; no
permanent topic in the mind. And then it is so expressive
as it of one field his attention to contemporary literature
he is overwhelmed with it. Make yourself ~~not~~ on the other
hand, well acquainted with the valuable standard
authors, which have stood the test of time. They ~~will~~
they will always be in fashion; and in becoming intimately
acquainted with them you become intimately acquainted
with the principles of knowledge and good taste. It is like
studying ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~paraphrases~~ & statues of old masters. Read
such works as are connected with ^{the moral & political} ~~English~~ history and
of England, for they are all full of application to our
own national character & history, and they tend to
enrich ~~and~~ calm & deep thinking, and to produce that
enlarged and independent mode of considering subjects,
that becomes a free man.

I suppose you know something of modern languages.
French ^{& Spanish are} the most important to an American merchant.
French in fact is the great medium of general conversation
throughout the world, and should be completely mastered.
It is one of the most difficult unless taken up at an early

age, on account of the nicety of its sounds; or rather
half sounds, all other languages have a fullness of tone
that the ear & the tongue catch pretty soon: but the
French with its semi tones, is barbarous on an unprac-
tised tongue. It is the most limited too of modern
languages, abounding in constructions, and turns of ex-
pression & idiomatical phrases, to supply the defect of
its paucity of words; ~~but~~ these make it a barren lan-
guage in the mouth of any one ~~but~~ who is not well
acquainted with its idioms, & who has not studied it
well. But as the course of events has made it a univer-
sal language, in preference of to others which are more
barbarous & obscure, it is necessary to become well
acquainted with it.

The Spanish language on the
contrary is full of power, magnificence and melody.
In my taste it excels the Italian in variety and expres-
sion. It has twice the quantity of words that the
French has. I do not know any thing that delights
me more than the old Spanish literature. You will find
more splendid histories in the language and then its
poetry is full of animation, pathos, humour, beauty,
sublimity. The old literature of Spain partakes of the
character of its history & its people: there is an oriental
splendour about it. The mixture of arabic fervour

magnificence & romance with its castilian pride and
punctilio; the chivalrous heroism; the unimpeachable
virtue; the sublimated notions of honour & courtesy
all contrast finely with the sensual amours; the
self-indulgence, the unpunished and crafty intrigues
which so often form the groundwork of Italian story.

With all the charms of Italian literature the greater
part of its Italian letters is ~~not~~ unfit for youthful reading
particularly for female reading; it depicts a most
immoral and despicable state of society; it breathes
profligacy: ~~as does Spanish literature~~ The Italian
language is rich in historical works. As far as I
~~have~~ can judge from my own reading the literatures
the ~~few~~ most free from licentiousness in morals are the
Spanish & the German. The Spanish because the greater
part was written at a time when romantic notions prevailed
in Spain of manly honour and female virtue and the
German, because almost all its Italian letters have been
produced within the last last fifty years, under the
restraints of modern decency. I do not know any dramatists
who have written so much and whose writings are so free from
any thing that would call up a blush at the most persnick-
ish, as old Calderon among the Spaniards and Schiller
among the Germans, and I do not know any that have shown

a freer scope of imagination, and finer riches of
language.

But I am running away into a kind of digression
when I only meant to make an incidental remark on
the subject of languages. Make yourself well acquainted
with the French & Spanish as they may be useful to you
as a merchant. I again repeat, devote as much of your
time as you can spare from business and healthy exercise
to the storing your mind with valuable information, such
as will make you a useful man and an important member
of a busy community. Do not be impatient to enter in
society & to make a figure in drawing rooms. A man can
perform figure to any purpose until he has acquired the
knowledge & experience of years, and as to the trifling distinc-
tion that a clever young man sometimes gains, it is
transient, often injurious to himself and never con-
ducive to any valuable & permanent result.

There is a set of you now growing up, which, if you are
true to yourselves and to one another, if you study well to
make yourselves valuable men, and stand by one another
~~in all worth~~ honourably & zealously in all vicissitudes
of fortune, you cannot fail to make a flourishing and
most respectable family connexion. I trust you will have
a more easy ~~and~~ time and more than fast future than
~~the set~~ the set who have preceded you and who are

gradually moving off of the scene as you enter upon
it. Our lives have been chequered & disastrous; we
have had to make our way from nothing and under many
discouragements, yet we have in some measure made our way,
and opened a path for those who are to come after us - &
we shall ~~and~~ have them a name that will at least be an
honest one. But whatever we have had of occasional pros-
perity, and of respectability in the eyes of our fellow citizens,
I ascribe in a great measure to a principle of mutual
interest and mutual assistance that has prevailed among
us. It has been one of the greatest sweeteners of our lives
& ours, and the greatest comforters of our days of adversity.
It is one that grapples me to Mother with the tenderest
of ties when ever I remember all that they have been to
me, and that fills my heart with love and my
eyes with tears whenever I think of your uncle William
whose character and conduct should be held up as exam-
ples to the family.

I must bring my letter to a close, ~~for~~ or it will be
too late for the opportunity.

Give my love to your mother and all the family,
and believe me your affectionate uncle

Washington Irving

W.B. among
P.S. The books I desired Mr. Brewster to send you are Bayle's Dictionary -
It is a work full of learning & information; but to be read with discretion
- It is unsound in religious matters & in some of his philosophy.