

# **Letter to Lord Leigh**

**Parkes, Henry (1815-1896)**

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On each page of the original the word "Copy" is written, and on the  
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All quotation marks retained as data

All unambiguous end-of-line hyphens have been removed, and the trailing  
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## **Letter to Lord Leigh**

**1844**

Letter from Henry Parkes to Lord Leigh

**December 30 1844**

Sydney N.S.W. 30th Decr. 1844

My Lord,

The person who, by this letter, takes the liberty thus abruptly to introduce himself to your Lordship's notice, has no better claim to your attention than his being a native of Stoneleigh, - the son of a former tenant on your Lordship's estate. My story is as follows:

About two and twenty years ago, there was living at Stoneleigh, a person of the name of Thomas Parkes. I recollect well the old farm house which he tenanted, standing beside a green lane leading from Gibbett Hill to Kerby Corner, the length of two fields from the Coventry and Warwick turnpike road. The individual who now addresses your Lordship, and who is the youngest child of Thomas Parkes, was not born in that old house, but on another small farm a short distance from it, called Candley or Candley Moat where my father, and my grandfather also, I believe, were born. When I was a child, my father left that part of the country.

[Nine lines erased]

From the time my father left Stoneleigh, I might date the commence-of suffering and hardship which soon resulted in bleak and lasting destitution. My father removed, first into Glamorganshire, and afterwards to Gloucester, where he became completely beggarred, losing the remnant of his little worldly means in a small retail shop. By this time my elder brothers, and my sisters, (except one, the eldest) had left home, and gone to service; and I, not quite ten years of age, went to work at a Rope manufactory for fourpence pr day. My father also now went out to day-labour, first at gardening, then, harvest time coming on, he took a job of reaping, at which I was taken from the rope walk to assist. After the harvest, he could get no further work for some time, and I went back to rope-making and my two shillings pr. week. During the autumn he obtained employment to break stones for a new road then in progress from Cheltenham to Cirencister, and I was again taken to partake of this new occupation, as I was able to do nearly as much of this sort of work as my father. We stayed among the hills of Gloucestershire, working on the new road for two months, during which time we were supplied with provisions by the Contractors according to the truck system, which, together with our lodging, consumed all our earnings. My father then returned to Gloucester. Our next employment was breaking stones on the road

between Cheltenham and Gloucester, which we did all through the following winter. I shall never forget that winter. My poor mother, then in a state of grievous bodily debility, with my eldest sister, had been all this time keeping on the little retail shop already named. The profits, however, arising from that, (if indeed there were any) added to our joint earnings, were not sufficient to keep us from extreme suffering. I remember that, though we were professedly sellers of bread, we often had not a morsel to put within our lips. On many occasions, my poor father would wake up at two or three o'clock on a dark winter morning, and, mistaking the cry of the watchman, or some other indication of the hour, would hurry us off to our work, with the hope (as we had three or four miles to go) of beginning at day-break; when, having arrived at the spot, and waited an hour or two, almost frozen to death, we would be apprised of the true time of morning by the passing of the London coach, which we knew left Gloucester at five o'clock. On many a day we worked without food, or with scarcely any. And, at home, our few things had long been going, one after another, to the pawnbrokers, till we had scarcely an article left for our comfort or our use; - clothing, furniture, bedding, all were gone. Returning home from our miserable work, I am sure, we often saw the trembling of each other's heart, for fear of meeting with some new misery of that day's bringing. If your Lordship will pardon my quoting from a great good poet,

“Our evenings then were dull and dead  
Sad case it was, as you may think,  
For very cold to go to bed;  
And then for cold not sleep a wink.”

At length my father determined to return back as far as Birmingham, towards our native place. My mother had a brother settled in Birmingham, and also a nephew, named Faulconbridge, (the son of another brother) who owed my father at the time he left Warwickshire, I believe, about forty pounds. It was the hope of getting part of this money, I think, which induced my father to remove to Birmingham. It must have been in the month of March that we set out on this miserable journey.

I, then between ten and eleven years of age, my father and mother, and my eldest sister. Our money could not have exceeded ten or twelve shillings. We travelled the first day to within three or

four miles of Worcester, when my sister fainted on the road side, and we had difficulty in reaching the nearest inn, where we stopped for the night. The next day (which I recollect was a Saturday) we walked on as far as Droitwich,\* at which place we stayed, in a small lodging house, till Monday morning; when we proceeded on to Birmingham, arriving there about noon. The weather was very wintry during this journey; the wind and sleet, at times, went almost through us, we were so thinly clothed; and my sister and mother, when we reached Birmingham, were in consequence quite ill. We went first to my uncle's, who seemed half inclined to disown us; but his heart got the better of him, and he took us in, and set before us the only comfortable dinner which we had seen for many months. But alas two of our number could not eat; my poor mother and sister were heartbroken at the coldness of those who often feasted beneath their roof in better days. We stayed at my uncle's house two or three days, when my father took a small house, at his desire, in another part of the town, borrowing from him two chairs, and two or three other articles for our use. In the mean time, my father called upon my cousin, who owed him the forty pounds, but he said he had paid the amount to a Mr. Gilbert, of Coventry, one of my father's creditors. I and my father both, now went out to look for work; my father obtained employment at a brick-kiln, to dig out, and temper the clay; and I, a day or two afterwards, was employed at another yard, to carry away, and lay down the new-made bricks, from the moulder, at six shillings pr. week. My father still endeavoured to get the money from Faulconbridge, disbelieving that he had paid it to Gilbert; and went to an attorney, who undertook the recovery of it. Upon this, Faulconbridge came and proposed some arrangement which was to be completed in about a week; but on the day appointed, there came in his stead a Sheriff's officer, who took my father to prison at the suit of Gilbert. This Mr Gilbert had said, if he could ever find my father, he would prosecute him with the utmost rigour; and it appeared that Faulconbridge, knowing this, made a journey to Coventry, or wrote, to inform him where my father was living; as he came to point out our house to the officer who brought the arrest. I have said that, when living at Gloucester, I often went home at evening from my work, with a heart trembling for fear of finding it made more miserable during the day. On this occasion, I still remember, I ran home with glad expectations of finding it more comfortable, for my mother had told me in the morning, Faulconbridge was coming to

pay part of the money, I found my mother and sister crying bitterly before the fireless grate; and then they told me that my father was gone to prison. For months after this, we had no means of support beyond my six shillings pr. week, eighteen pence of which we paid for a place to live in. At last my sister obtained employment at a staymaker's shop, at five or six shillings weekly, but I soon afterwards lost my work the summer season being over, and brickmaking at that place suspended till the Spring. Within a few weeks, however, I obtained fresh employment, in the work-shop of an Ivory Turner, at three shillings per week. I was with this man two or three months, but he was a great drunkard, frequently going to the alehouse for half the week together, leaving me idle; he was also in the habit of singing obscene songs and saying all manner of unkind things to me about the poverty of my mother and sister. One day, when he was drinking, I went out, and agreed with another master in the same trade - he was an old man, an excellent workman, and as good a master; with him I stopped for eight years.

My other brothers and sisters came over to Birmingham, at different times, from Gloucestershire, except my eldest brother, who had, before we removed, gone back into Wales, where he married, and soon afterwards died. My sisters came to us first, the youngest coming round by Warwick to see my father in prison, and giving him all her wages. My father came home in about a year or year and half, having taken the benefit of the insolvent's act. The attorney employed on his behalf, I remember, was paid afterwards by weekly instalments of two shillings and half-a-crown. My father now obtained employment in attending to gentlemen's gardens, a day or two at one, and then a few days at another; his first employer in this way being the lawyer who obtained his liberation from prison. My eldest sister set herself up in business as a staymaker, the younger ones assisting her. And thus we lived more happily than we had done for years. My master gave me a trifle, weekly, above my wages, for pocket money, out of which, when I grew to the age of seventeen or eighteen years, as it increased as I became more useful, I was enabled to purchase tickets for the Mechanics' Institution; and resume something like educational training, which had been totally neglected from the time I was a child of seven or eight years. About this time I commenced scribbling verses, though I was exceedingly illiterate, not being able to spell aright the commonest words. Some of my first efforts were to immortalise Mr. Thomas Attwood. In truth I grew up a great reformer, I know

not, my Lord, what are your political tenets, but, in making this acknowledgement, I have no apprehensions of your Lordship's political anger.

If your Lordship will bear with me a little longer, I will now make short work of my rough and rambling account. At the age of twenty I left my old master, and started as an Ivory Turner on my own account. I did not succeed in business, as all branches of trade were suffering under great depression, in consequences of the failures in America at that time. In July 1836, I married a young woman named Clarinda Varney, neice of Mr J. Varney, Whip Manufacturer, of Cheapside Birmingham, with whom I had kept company for two or three years. I was then turned twenty one years of age. My wife's friends, who were better circumstanced in life than mine, were opposed to our marriage; and after it took place, treated us very coldly, the more so, as I got on but very badly in my business. We struggled on together, however, for two or three years, when I determined to leave England. My wife was at first very much against leaving her native country; but, after her consent was obtained, she seemed even more desirous than I, of doing so. We first thought of going to the United States, but there were then obstacles in our way which we could not surmount. In November 1838, we left Birmingham, and went up to London. By this time we had two children, both of whom died in their infancy. Part of that winter I worked journeyman in Jacque's Ivory & Bone Toy Manufactory, Leather Lane, Holborn. On the 28th March 1839, I and my wife embarked on board the Barque "Strathfieldsaye", Capt. Spence, bound for Sydney. The vessel left Gravesend the same day, and finally sailed from Plymouth on the 8th April. We anchored on the 27th July in Sydney Cove, after a remarkable fine passage, without touching any where, or meeting with any accident. My wife was delivered, at sea, two days before our arrival, of our third child; we could not in consequence remove from the ship under seven or eight days. When I had taken a place of lodging, and removed my few packages of baggage from the ship, I found myself, with my wife, in her then-delicate state of health, and her new-born infant, without money for our support (my all amounting only to a few pence) in a land of strangers. For two weeks I searched Sydney for employment as a turner, living by the sale of my few books, and a few articles of turnery which my shop-mates gave me, when leaving London. I could get nothing of that kind to do, and I then engaged with the late Sir John Jamison M.C. as a farm labourer at

the wages of £25 pr. annum, with a ration and half, that is, food for myself, and half the same quantity for my wife. We stayed on an estate of Sir John's, about forty miles from Sydney, for six months, when I left his service, with the following certificate from his son-in-law W. Gibbes Esq. J.P., who superintended the establishment.

“This is to certify that Henry Parkes, the bearer of this, lived in the service of Sir John Jamison, of Regentville, Knight, from August 1839 to Feby 1840 during which time he conducted himself with the utmost propriety, & punctuality & is a very deserving person.

(Signed) W. Gibbes J.P.

“Regentville

Feby 21st. 1840

(The original of this sent to Lord Leigh)

When we came down to Sydney again, I obtained work in an ironmonger's store at 24/- pr. week; but I did not stay there longer than a month, meeting with employment in a foundry, to finish brass castings &c. at 30/- weekly. I stayed at this last place about three months, when I was attacked with dysentery which confined me to home for ten or twelve days. After my recovery, I applied to Lt. Colonel Gibbes M.C. (father of Mr. W. Gibbes already named) who is Collector of Customs at Sydney, for employment as an extra tidewaiter, which he gave me; and I have been so employed to the present time. The duty of such officers is to be day and night on board ship, seeing that the taking-in and discharge of cargo is carried on according to the law and regulations of the Port. We are only occasionally on duty and pay, but when off duty, are allowed to employ ourselves otherwise as we like. Our pay, when on duty, is 6/- pr. day. When off duty, I follow my trade as an Ivory Turner but can get very little to do. During the last two years, I have not been employed more than one third of my time by the Customs, owing to the numerical diminution of shipping in our port.

I should have stated that when I first arrived in New South Wales & for a long time afterwards, all the necessaries of life were at an enormous high price, bread being 8d and potatoes 4d pr.lb., rent, too, was exorbitant, a single room in a small house letting for 8/-, 10/-, and even more pr. week. It was, therefore, as much as I could do to get a livelihood. It was three months before I could even purchase a bed to sleep upon, making shift with some old coats, and other spare clothing. I have since been hoping, month after month, and year after year, to be able to send a trifle to my father, who is still living in Birmingham, I fear, in great indigence; but have not

yet had it in my power. My mother has died since I left home.

My Lord, I now come to the object of my present application to you, which is to pray your Lordship, if you think, after my plain story, that I have struggled hard, and deserved better of the world, to use your influence to obtain for me the appointment to some situation in H.M. Customs a degree above a tidewaiter, or employment in any other Government Department.

I will confess, if your Lordship will pardon me, that I am chiefly emboldened to apply to you, from the fact of your being a poet. Yet it is not indeed any vain conceit of congeniality of mind; for I feel conscious that I have little claim to that high character; but poetry has been to me a world of dear companionship and sunny joy, and, despite the soberer admonitions of reason, I am disposed to place universal trust in the ministering spirits of that world's riches. Byron has said the stars are the poetry of heaven, and I am sure the poetry which is in the stars, and in the flowers and shining blades of grass, was a bright guardian power ever present to me, in the deep wretchedness and ignorance of my early life. In my very childhood, I seldom joined in the sports of children. The spirit of my later boyhood was so cowed by the sneers and taunts of those who daily gazed upon my destitution that I scarcely dared to look a happy boy in the face. I had no books, and I could read but little, still I would wander into the woods and fields; and then I felt alone, yet with something which made me almost happy. No wonder then that Poets should be the idols of my admiration, the bright sanctifiers of humanity, in my most fond belief.

Herewith I send, and most respectfully beg your Lordship's acceptance of, a small volume of verses, (I have called them Poems) which I published by subscription in Sydney, two and a half years ago. I also take the liberty to send some "Sonnets" in manuscript, which I have written since that publication; and I hope you will not be displeased at my enclosing with them a parcel of Colonial newspapers.

In conclusion, if your Lordship should be pleased to use your influence in my behalf, I beg leave to state the following particulars relative to my eligibility for the kind of office which I seek. My age is twenty-nine (29 $\frac{1}{2}$ ) and half years, having been born on the 27th May 1815. I believe my birth was registered at Stoneleigh Church, or at St. Michael's Coventry. I was married on the 11th July 1836 at Edgsbaston Church near Birmingham, by the Rev. Charles Pixell, vicar of that parish. My family, besides my wife, consists at present

of two children. Of my general character, I hope the testimonials forwarded to your Lordship with this, will be considered satisfactory. In one of those testimonials, I am recommended for the situation of Landing Waiter, or of Locker, either of which I should most thankfully accept. I have no objection to any of the Australian Colonies. The duty of Landing waiter is to attend during the day on the public wharf, and take account of the cargo landed thereon from shipboard; and the duty of Locker is to open and close the Bonded Stores, and to receive and deliver the goods warehoused. My friends at Birmingham would take the trouble to obtain a certificate of my birth, or other documents, if such are required. I take the liberty to send their address.

If your Lordship should be pleased not to interfere in this matter, will you be good enough to forward the Credentials herewith, to the address given above, as I, at the distance of sixteen thousand miles, cannot otherwise recover them. And may I solicit, most earnestly and respectfully, an answer to myself.

I am, my Lord  
your Lordship's most humble  
and most obedient Servant  
Henry Parkes.

The Right Honorable)  
Lord Leigh)  
&c.&c.&c.)

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## **Footnote**

(Footnote: \*Since this letter was forwarded to Lord Leigh, I recollect it was not at Droitwich, but at Bromsgrove, where we stopped. H.P. Jan. 10th. 1845)