

Letter 8.

P. O. Department
Ottawa, 26 May '86

Dear May,

I was very glad indeed to get your letter, though it gave me much pain to find you so depressed. You must not be so. I know how great the difficulties that lie before us all, especially in any high line of art, seem to be, before we have fairly struck at them and struck at them many times – and I know how miserably small our powers seem to be when we consider what we long to do and what we think we ought to do. But after all the difficulties are to a very large extent the creations of a sensitive imagination, and if we approach them in a humble, cheery and patient spirit they disappear to a very considerable degree. I very often feel totally forlorn and impotent in the presence of what I have planned for myself to do. But I find that it is useless to be always examining myself and endeavouring to calculate one's own strength and resources. The best is to go actively to work on the first thing in the way of one's art that lies in the road.—to forget if possible that one is trying to be great and just endeavor to do what one has in hand as naturally and truthfully as one can. Life has some boons either visibly or invisibly for every one, and all work that is faithful and comes from a full heart is of value. I for instance have very little time to work—I seem to be getting less & less all the time—but I keep pounding away—and manage to produce some small thing every now and then—not much, but as good as I can make it.—When I hear from you again, I hope you will be able to say that you have sympathized with me in this, and gone about it in some such way yourself. I think a great deal of the good work that has been done in the world has been the outcome simply of a spirit of blind cheerful activity such as I describe. The great souls never knew half the time where they were going or what was to be the net result of it all—but they toiled carelessly and divinely on. Let us emulate them.

Now that I have finished this little sermon, which I may say truly that I practise a little as well as preach, I have only a few things more to say. I have been out of doors a good deal this year and last year also, consequently have been in better health—last summer I went camping with a young musician Duncan Scott (his father is a Methodist minister whom no doubt yours will know)¹ up the River [missing], one of those wild streams that fall into the Ottawa [missing] north. We spent 2 weeks out in [missing] of the forest in the midst of beautiful granite mountains [missing] rapids, and wild river [missing] all which gave us a fresh [missing] next year both [missing] Birth day Duncan & [missing] birchbark [the rest of the page is missing]

A. Lampman

¹ Duncan Campbell Scott (1862-1947) was Lampman's closest friend in Ottawa, the best man at his wedding, and, after his death, his literary executor. In 1879 Scott was appointed to a junior position in the Indian Branch of the Department of the Interior, a wing of the federal civil service in which he worked for the remainder of his life, eventually rising to its senior position of Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs. He was a skilled pianist and would soon show himself to be an accomplished poet and short-story writer. In recent years his assimilationist beliefs and practices as Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs have made him a controversial and, in some quarters, reviled figure. His father was the Rev. William Scott (1813-91), a preacher in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada (see also Introduction for May's father).