

Letter 5.

Post. Office Dept.
Jan. 29, 1885

Dear May,

Pardon my not having written to you before. I have been very dull and out of spirits.— oppressed with innumerable things — debts; ill success in everything, incapacity to write and want of any hope of ever succeeding in it if I do.

I cannot do any thing — I believe I am the feeblest and most good-for nothing mortal anywhere living. I am poor and in debt; there are plenty of mean enough abilities — heaven knows — who manage to make plenty of money from writing — I can absolutely make nothing. Where every blockhead's work is accepted and paid for, mine is hardly treated with civility. If I had money enough to get me bread and butter, I would never think of this at all: but I haven't & can see nothing but a prospect of actual poverty ahead of me — absolute want. So I go on dragging through the days drearily enough, with a few, very few, sunny spaces here & there — just so many as to keep me from breaking down entirely. You will see I had not much heart in me to write to you and even now I only write such a letter as you will hardly thank me for. But you must write me a cheerup one in return; tell me how your preparations get on, when you go and under what means etc.

I wrote another fairy tale the other day¹ — much to mother's disgust; who is unlimited in her complaints of the impractical and outlandish character of my writings, which indeed fetch no money — or even respect. As to the story I made it in a dull lifeless state of mind, so I dare say it is bad enough I have also made 5 stanzas of a poem on winter² — one stanza of which is good — the rest bad — very good & very bad — the majority bad however. I have to read in March a paper to the Lit. & Sci. Society³ here on "The Modern School of Poetry in England"⁴ and I am sorry I agreed to it; for my ideas are all going to the winds — days & days pass over me without a single thought, idea or fancy ever entering my head. I am as dull as a clod. I write this in my office and here is some work at my elbow just brought in to do.

Wherefore for the present I remain

Your faithful friend.
A. Lampman

¹ Probably "The Fairy Fountain" (see also Letter 4).

² "Winter," dated 10 April 1885, *Among the Millet, and Other Poems* 27-29, *Poems*, 24-27.

³ Formed in 1869 by the amalgamation of the Natural History Society of Ottawa (founded in 1863) and the Bytown Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum (founded in 1853), the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society was dissolved in 1907. Because records of its meetings do not begin until 1898, the exact date on which Lampman read his paper is not known.

⁴ *Essays and Reviews* 58-69, 244-58.