

Brother's
interest in
politics

Portland, Oregon, June 2, 1860

My dear Mother:--I have not been a long time since I wrote to you, and as I sit down tonight to write, I really feel as if I had "nothing to communicate", but I know you will be glad to hear from me, even though my letter should prove uninteresting and there is pleasure in the thought that there is one at least who will receive even such a letter from me with pleasure-- a friend whose pride--which often makes unjust toward others--could never dictate a conformity to the custom of awaiting a reply before I write a second or third time. But I acknowledge remissness is this duty to you, and while I believe there can be no really valid excuse for such negligence in a son I will attempt none, or at least shall not claim that there is aught ~~is~~ of extenuation in what I offer: For one who has had as much experience in letter-writing as myself I believe there are few who have a greater faculty for making them uninteresting. While I am decidedly in favor of short speeches or sermons, I do dislike to attach my name to a half-filled sheet of paper in the form of a letter, especially to a faraway friend. In fact, I am every way opposed to short letters, when friendship and affections are the dictators. I wonder if I have not by the use of the plural here made a distinction where there is no difference? for is there such a thing as friendship without affection? Webster makes a difference, I believe, -- "a nice distinction"--but I think I shall contend there is none: at least that there is no such a principle in my nature as to feel one without the other. But I was talking about short letters, and was going to say that I often do not write at all from the fact that I feel I have not sufficient material to make, what in my mind, constitutes a letter.

In Oregon we are all well. Sewell is with Mac, on the farm, and, in a letter I received from him a few days ago, expresses himself as well satisfied with his position. He has changed but little since he left home, his tastes and pursuits seem to be about the same, while Mac and Willard may be called the politicians of the family, Sewell is emphatically entitled to the appellation of "Nimrod". Neither of the former engage in politics, however as office-seekers; but judging from the amount of political lore displayed by them when engaged in argument with their political opponents, I should decide them better qualified for position than many who seek and obtain it.

They are both tolerable speakers. Mac, both in conversation and speaking, has a better faculty of telling what he knows than Willard, and if inspired by the same ambition in future which now impels him, when he arrived at the age of ? would be a better informed man, and a smarter one, if backed up by as calm a judgment, or rather if he could rid himself of some of that impetuosity which always characterized his disposition and prevented a proper exhibition of respect for the opinions of those opposed to him in sentiment. In this, however, I would not leave the inference that he is anything worse than an unpleasant disputant when particularly interested in his subject, and unable to convince his opponents by reason, which I will give him the credit of dealing in largely. But among their "fellow-citizens" they are respected and esteemed men of more than ordinary understanding. In politics, as in many other things, I differ with them; yet as I take but little interest in such matters, or rather, have but little faith in my ability to make proselytes or "save the Union" by engaging in political harangues, I seldom place myself in a position, with them, where I would assuredly come out second best, content in granting to them a superiority in this respect, when the subject is broached, and their "position" stated, I conclude that discretion is the better part of valor, and act upon Jacob's principal of maintaining a "respectful silence" upon all matters of doubtful expediency and thus the argument closes. When on the far, however, I very often am compelled to act as "Mr. President" and "fellow citizens" for them while they debate upon some subject, and however many sidelong glances I may cast toward the book-case or writing-stand the speaking continues until "Mr. President" and "Fellow Citizens" becomes very tired and would very willingly escape to one of these places and leave the orators without an audience could he do so consistently. I used to think the character or tastes of the man was but little foreshadowed in the boy; but I think differently now. And I ~~sometimes~~ sometimes think that line of distinction between boyhood and manhood, is our family, is not under the age of forty-one. How fast we grow old! Fifteen more days and I will begin my ~~twenty-eighth~~ twenty-eighth year; not quite six months more and Sewell will be in his 27th and Decatur is his 24th. Frank, too, is a man; and those little boy brothers whom I left at home six years ago, are fast approaching the years of maturity. I wonder why they never write to me? I should love to hear from them, and should be

happy to answer their letters. I send them papers occasionally. Tell them I shall claim something in return from them--and that "something" must be a letter. David, I presume, is not at home. If he is, tell him he is included in this request. Clayton and Corra, I only remember as very little boys, with very large eyes, and as I ~~was~~ always had a great fondness for children, as brothers, I loved them the more. Comments on his lack of pecuniary success.

Affectionately,

Ray R. Rees