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## Letter to Louise Guiney, 1877 March 8

Patrick Guiney

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March 8. 1877.

My dear Sir:

Thank you for copy of "Household Hints & Recipes". The reading has given me much pleasure, and, though I intend to read and re-read again before I form my opinion of its real merit, I am inclined to give you my impressions about it after a hasty perusal. Before you sent it to me I had indulged the rather savage hope that I could adorn my paternal wampum with the scalp of my beloved daughter. In that hope I was disappointed. Your scalp is safe! In venturing a few comments, however, it may be that I endanger my own wig. At any rate, here she goes.

"Epilogue" is a correct title for the close or peroration; but you apply it equally to the exordium or prologue. "Jinniness" is a horrible word in prose



you. The poem, as a whole, is very clever in its aptness and originality.

As your papa, not as your critic, I have a good deal more to say to you. Perhaps I told you some time that I was possessed with the idea of becoming an actor on the dramatic stage. I applied to <sup>a</sup> celebrated manager for a chance, and placing his hand tenderly on my head, he asked "do you think you can become a great actor"? I stammered that I did not know. "Find that out first," said he, "for it is better to be a slave than a poor actor". That interview cured me. I never went on the stage.

Now, darling, if you feel that you really have the poetic gift, write when you please. But find that out first; better be nobody than a poor poet. I declare I do not know whether you have that <sup>particular</sup> gift. I am



or poetry, and would spoil the Stabat Mater if introduced there. It is said that such is the intimate relation of things that the lifting of a hand sends a vibration to the stars. It may also be said the insertion of a discordant word disturbs the harmony of a poem. "Tuminesc," pshaw! Then, again, how could you undertake to rhyme "Skies" with "unpoaganized"?

Having expressed <sup>myself</sup> thus vigorously I feel about exhausted - short of breath. I have no more fault to find, and beg for your merciful consideration of my envious criticism. I wish I could write as well as you do; but, as I cannot, it is some relief to one who has wooed the Muses in vain, to have an occasional peck at a more fortunate suitor. As a critic, I commiserate myself and congratulate



sure that you have general literary talent capable of pleasure to yourself and service to God. And I am further sure that you write better poetry than nine tenths of those who set up for poets. The essence of poetry is the thought or sentiment, words serving as the mere forms of communication. Our so-called poets very often delude themselves and others with the notion that formulated sounds are poetry!

Before I close, yet, let me ask you if you are not writing too much. It seems to me that such a production as "Household <sup>Minstrelsy</sup> ~~words~~" must be a severe strain on you, coupled with your ordinary studies. Be careful about that, dear; hold in as long as you can; write only when you must do it or burst! - except to

Papa.