



The Letters of Matthew Arnold, Vol. 6, 1885-1888

Matthew Arnold

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The University Press of Virginia edition of *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, edited by Cecil Y. Lang, represents the most comprehensive and assiduously annotated collection of Arnold's correspondence available. When complete in six volumes, this edition will include close to four thousand letters, nearly five times the number in G.W.E. Russell's two-volume compilation of 1895. The letters, at once meaty and delightful, appear with a consecutiveness rare in such editions, and they contain a great deal of new information, both personal (sometimes intimate) and professional. Two new diaries are included, a handful of letters to Matthew Arnold, and many of his own that will appear in their entirety here for the first time. Renowned as a poet and critic, Arnold will be celebrated now as a letter writer. Nowhere else is Arnold's appreciation of life and literature so extravagantly evident as in his correspondence. His letters amplify the dark vision of his own verse, as well as the moral background of his criticism. As Cecil Lang writes, the letters "may well be the finest portrait of an age and of a person, representing the main movements of mind and of events of nearly half a century and at the same time revealing the intimate life of the participant-observer, in any collection of letters in the nineteenth century, possibly in existence."

In this final volume of the Virginia edition of Arnold's letters, Arnold joins for the last time a Royal Commission on Education, traveling first to Germany, and then on to Switzerland and Paris. Following his wife and younger daughter, Arnold also makes his second American visit, this time to see "the Midget," his first grandchild. Both missions reveal his well-known and characteristic zest for people and places?new acquaintances, new scenery, the total experience of living?observing, absorbing, recording, and moving on.

Finally, with maximum nostalgia and minimum regret, he resigns the inspectorship of schools in which he had spent nearly all of his adult existence and settles down, in sweet, bucolic content, to the life of a country squire. Then, tragically, abruptly, and predictably, it screeches to a halt. Manifestly, he had lived daily with intimations of mortality.

The series-cumulative index included with this volume is an invaluable resource for tracking Arnold's records of his active life.

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