

Ashenfelter, Singleton. Untouched by the Conflict: The Civil War Letters of John Singleton Ashenfelter. Edited by Jonathan W. White and Daniel Glenn. Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 2019.

Letters show that life goes even in wartime—often oblivious to war?

College student life, young manhood, alcohol, religion,

Friendship between Ashenfelter and Samuel Pennypacker

Two pages on key participants in the letters, xxi-xxii

Introduction—well researched and offers a fine introduction of Ashenfelter and Dickinson College

Named after a participant in a notorious murder trial, 3

Member of a literary club as a young man, Young Men’s Literary Union, 3

Enrolled at Dickinson College in 1862, many southern students, drinking, cardplaying, pranks, 8

Discipline and resistance to studying, 10-11

Educational emphasis on transition to manhood, learning restraint

Doubt and contempt for religion, 13

Describes Ashenfelter as “arrogant, erudite, witty, impulsive, ambitious, self-interested, introspective, and deeply intellectual.” P. 13

Much about women and friendship, little about the war, 15

Contempt for college president, 19

Prank, 21

Professors check on students in their rooms during study hours, 21

Describes his classes, 23-24

College expenses, 24

Short militia duty during Gettysburg campaign, 25-26

Bored with studies, 27

Much reading, library with 25000 books—much to read, 28

Broke into bell room, 28

Drunkenness and near fight in literary societies, 33—combination of the elevated and absurd?

Seems to revel in his own clever, sophomoric writing

Doubts that Bible was inspired, Christ not the son of God and Christianity itself “unnatural” 34

Seems to be a desist, and not sure about a future life, 34

Copperheads are “traitors,” 35

Now thinks Victor Hugo a better writer than Charles Dickens, 35

Claims as a sophomore he has read 10,000 pages, 35

Glad there is a large library, 35

Geology shows creation story in Bible to be false, why not a superior religion to replace that of the Bible, 36

Interest in various young women, 39

Confesses to his own ambition—marriage might be part of that, 40

Rushes through studying to read on his own, 43

Calls a fellow student a genius, 44-45

Why did not God create a perfect human race?, 46

Almost an atheist and wonders why nature can permit’s people’s foolish actions, 46

Best friend not forgotten, 50

Violent impulses, 50

Women, 49-50
 Will reveal to him his most private thoughts, 53
 “My standard of right lies wholly solely & entirely within myself,” 54
 Prefers Henry Clay to Charles Sumner, 55
 No desire to be known after his death, 55
 Thinks fear is important to Christianity, “conceived in selfishness & supported by fear,” 57
 Cannot attend church when he does not believe, 58-59
 He is not ready to deny the existence of God, 59
 Not homesick but friendsick, lonely, 61
 Tries not to swear, 62
 Woman who objects to his drunkenness, 67-68
 Logic and Newton, 70
 Alcohol, impulse to drink, 71-72
 Overland campaign, iffy on military situation, 72-73
 Copperheads, 74
 Souvenirs, Antietam, 75
 Sees Christianity as “such a monstrous absurdity that I am intolerant as a puritan,” 78
 Easy senior years, 79
 Senior address on religious liberty, 80
 Pleased by outcome of 1864 presidential election, 80
 Marriage of friend, sexual activity, 82ff
 Speech opposed to universal suffrage, 86
 Bad to have too much conscience, 87
 Now somewhat reluctant to depart college, 89
 Irony, 94
 Marriage, engagement, 96-97
 Graduation, 98
 What is right is what contributes to his pleasure, 100
 Universal suffrage both wrong and inexpedient, 101-2
 Blames the people for the politicians and the government, 101-2
 Religion, God, 102
 Impatient with control of college life, 106
 Bored with classes and textbooks, 107
 Determined to study law, 109
 Poetry, 110
 Skeptical about Grant and lenient terms for Confederate surrender, 111
 Troublesome students, discipline, 112-13
 Boarding club for students, 114
 More of a “good fellow” than a “good student” at Dickinson, 115
 Professor chastises him for his “carelessness” and “indifference,” 115
 Speeches, 116
 Procrastination, 119
 Adventures with women after the war, 122
 Finally married a woman who was engaged to another, 123
 Dickinson College curriculum, 126-28
 Expenses to attend Dickinson College, 129-31

Dickinson College during Gettysburg campaign, 132-39
Speech on Capital Punishment at Dickinson College, 140-43