

A HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED LETTER OF
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON.

BY RUTHVEN DEANE.

It is extremely interesting to read any of Audubon's original letters, particularly those touching upon certain birds or subjects which we are familiar with by frequent reading of his works. The following short letter written on the completion of his drawing of the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaëtos*) has but recently come into possession of his granddaughter, Miss M. R. Audubon, and through her kindness I am able to present it here. In his 'Ornithological Biography' Vol. II, in the article on the Golden Eagle, Audubon writes: "In the early part of February 1833, while at Boston in Massachusetts, I chanced to call on Mr. Greenwood,¹ the proprietor of the Museum of that city, who informed me that he had purchased a very fine Eagle, the name of which he was desirous of knowing. . . . I recognised it at once as belonging to the species whose habits I have here to describe, and I determined to obtain possession of it, . . . I sat up nearly the whole of another night to outline him, and worked so constantly at the drawing, that it nearly cost me my life, I was suddenly seized with a spasmodic affection, that much alarmed my family, and completely prostrated me for some days; but thanks to my heavenly Preserver, and the immediate and unremitting attention of my most worthy friends Drs. Parkman,² Shattuck,³

¹ Ethan A. Greenwood bought out the management in a Museum, January 1, 1825, and located on Court St., Boston. This was known as the New England Museum and was at that time considered valuable and was very popular. Three years previous to this date Greenwood had bought the larger part of a collection which had been sold at auction by one Wood. In 1839 the assignees of Greenwood (N. E. Museum) sold the collection to Moses Kimball for his Boston Museum, which was opened in 1841 on the corner of Tremont and Bromfield Sts., and in 1846 was moved to the new museum building near Court St. This Museum afterwards became celebrated as a theatre, a portion of it being still reserved for a natural history collection, where, in 1900, the types of many of Wilson's birds were found.

² Dr. George Parkman, born 1791, died 1849.

³ Dr. George Cheyne Shattuck, born 1783, died 1854.

and Warren¹ I was soon restored to health and enabled to pursue my labors. The drawing of this Eagle took me fourteen days, and I had never before labored so incessantly excepting at that of the Wild Turkey."

Boston.

Feb. 5th 1833.

My dear friends

I am just now quite fatigued by the drawing of a Golden Eagle which although it will make a splendid plate has cost me sixty hours of the severest labor I have experienced since I drew the Wild Turkey. You shall I hope see it through the care of Mr. Gordon.² Do not ever ship any more Nos. to this port unless on vessels that are intended as packets. The Charlotte has not come and it will be a rubber if I can get enough cash to establish our going to Labrador until she does. Push Jos. B. Kidd³ of Edinburgh if he *can* be pushed to paint copies of our drawings. I look on that series as of great importance to us all. Havells' blunder in not having the numbers and paper on board the New York in time, is one which, with him I never can correct. If you can do more than I on this score of punctuality I will be gratified. I shall proceed to New York as soon as the weather moderates, on Sunday last the thermom. was 12 below zero. The work is now I am assured free of duty. When you write give a word of recollection to Dr. Parkman who is a most desirable and worthy friend.

God bless you, forever yours

J. J. Audubon.

¹ Dr. John Collins Warren, born 1778, died 1856. At his death was President of the Boston Society of Natural History.

² Alexander Gordon. A Scotchman, who married Ann Bakewell, youngest sister of Mrs. John James Audubon.

³ Joseph Bartholomew Kidd, born 1808, died 1889. At the age of 23 years he arranged with Audubon to copy some of his birds, which were to be sold and the proceeds divided.