

To Mrs. E. L. Pierce  
Gorham, Maine, U.S. of America.

St. Petersburg, November 28,  
December 10, 1856.

Dear Mother,

You will remember that I arrived in this city just one year ago today. Therefore it is an anniversary of some importance to me - A year's residence here has not quite made the place like home, however familiar it may have become - But certainly I do not regret the step I took in leaving my perhaps more secure prospects and more closely-attached friends in Portland, to exchange them for what I have found here - You know I never wished to become "fixed for life", with the road to the end of it plainly marked out and visible before me, too soon - and it would have been too soon for me, I am satisfied, if I had avoided myself of any occasion hitherto presented for becoming "settled down" - So you see I can dispose easily of most personal considerations in passing a self-examination at the end of a year as to whether I did right in coming here - by getting rid in this way of the principal objection as to its having turned me away from a path I had advanced some way in, towards a new and doubtful one - Perhaps the year of has been of more pleasure than profit - more of amusement than instruction - but certainly I would not give up its experience and even unfruitful occupations for what I might have had instead, at Portland: and some of its events have affected me for eternity, and

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Date: November 28 - December 10, 1856

Description: Josiah Pierce reflecting on his life in Russia

in a way, I hope, to be turned to good account - You see I write to you openly my poor thoughts of myself, without fear that they will be as ridiculous or uninteresting to you, as they would be if proclaimed thus to others, and as confidently as when I first came home to you from school -

It is by no means as cold now, as when I first passed through the then strange streets of this far northern town, twelve months ago - Indeed, something like a January thaw is now taking place and the streets are running with water - to the comfort I dare say of many poor people here, who are said to be much troubled this winter on account of a slight rise in price of their great need - firewood - I feel the cold however more sensitively than last year - Such is the usual experience of foreigners who live here - just as a man's nose having been once frozen, afterwards will freeze more quickly and at a higher temperature -

One day of last week, I made a trip to Cronstadt, when the thermometer stood at about 8° above zero, but I really suffered much from the cold there, as I should not have done at home, for one of the piercing wintry winds of Russia blew over the gulf of Cronstadt which we had to cross upon the ice - The distance from here was about 40 miles, as we went along the coast to Oranienbaum, and crossed from there to the island of Cronstadt - I went with Mr. Prince (one of the wandering "Salem boys") who is the manager of the branch in this city

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of the Boston commercial house of W. Ropes & Co. Four of the seven  
American ships, all freighted and frozen in for the winter at Cronstadt are  
owned or chartered by that house - A doleful winter is before the Captains  
and crews of the 388 foreign vessels suddenly entrapped there in icy fetters.  
They have no amusements or occupations except what they can devise for  
themselves - but after all - excepting for the loss of work - they are more  
comfortable than if at sea - Two of the American Captains have their  
wives with them, and four of them, at least, are from Maine - I took  
with me for their consolation, and much to their gratification, all my  
late Eastern Argus's - and shall continue to do what I can for them  
during the winter - The ships look strangely enough, standing fast, with  
all their rigging still up, in the cold white plain of snowy ice - Men  
walk out to them, and carriages drive around them. Most of them  
are clustered inside the great "Merchants mole", forming an enclosure, with  
frowning batteries, around them; but many are outside in the channel,  
in all sorts of positions, just as they were caught while making ~~valdely~~  
effort to get out through a channel which 500 men & some steamers  
vainly endeavored to clear through the ice soon after its first congelment -  
Mr. Prince & I went in one of the "troika's" - 3 horse sledges - and getting  
up at 5 in the morning, easily made the journey of 80 miles to Cronstadt and  
back, in season for tea at 8 o'clock in the evening - Our daylight is brief at  
present - lastly only from 9 o'clock till half-past 3 - and the social life  
of the city begins at dinner - I have dined out almost every other day

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for a fortnight - Not very good for the health, you may say -

Last Sunday, the first Court ceremonial requiring the attendance of the diplomatic corps took place since our return from Moscow - It was on the occasion of the baptism of the newly-born son of the Grand-Duke Nicholas, brother to the Emperor - which was performed in the splendid chapel of the Winter Palace, with the sweetest music and most careful ceremonial of the Greek church. The Emperor was god-father - the babe's grand-mother (the Duchess of Oldenburgh) was god-mother - In Russia you know the god-parents are believed to have, more than any where else, the most solemn responsibilities regarding their god-child's spiritual welfare - The Metropolitan of this district baptized the child - which was naked - & was duly immersed three times in a great font, after its eyes, mouth, hands & feet had been anointed with the holy chrism, in ~~shape~~ figure of a cross. The father & mother, (according to rule) were absent - The priests wore their most gorgeous robes - The nurse who held the child was in the peculiar Russian nurse's costume, with broad blue head-band adorned by diamonds - The great dignitaries of state - & foreign ministers, &c, were all there, in full costume -

I have received (yesterday) a very brief note from Ella, dated Nov. in which she says you had been ill with rheumatism, and while keeping your room amused yourself a little with my letters & the pictures which went with them - I am glad if they can while away any weary or painful moments you may have - and so inclose some more - which you may consider as "Sights from my window" or Winter street scenes in St. Petersburg, though I trust you will not again have the like occasion to be amused by such things, and with love to all at home, I remain, your affectionate son, Josiah -

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