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The Works of George Lord Lyttleton

Lyttelton, George <Lord>

London, 1774

Letter II.

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St. Winnifred more than I do her. I wish you may not be tired with my travels; but you know I am performing my promise.

I remain yours, &c.

LYTTELTON.



L E T T E R II.

DEAR BOWER,

Shrewsbury, July 14, 1756.

MY last letter ended in setting out for Carnarvon, where I arrived that afternoon. I had a very fine view of the sea, and one of the finest towns I had seen in England or Wales; the old walls of which, with their towers and bulwarks, are almost entire; they are high and strongly built. The towers are round, and rather more of the Roman than Gothic form of architecture. At one end they join to the wall of the castle, which is a vast and noble building, of which the outside is likewise well preserved, but the inside is demolished. The people here shew the remains of a chamber, where king Edward the Second was born, and received the submission of all the nobility in Wales in his cradle. The castle itself was built by his father, and is indeed a noble work.

As we rode from Carnarvon, the country about was softened into a scene of the most pleasing kind, and was rendered more so by the contrast with that from which we came. We travelled along the shore of Menai, an arm of the sea, as broad as the Thames, over-against lord Duncannon's. Our road led us over fine shady lawns, perfumed so with honeysuckles, that they were a *paradisetto*. Over gentle hills, from

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whence

whence we had a lovely view of the Menai and the isle of Anglesea, which lies on the opposite side of it, and then lost them again in agreeable valleys, like those of Reading, or the Hertfordshire vales. We enjoyed these scenes for some miles, till we came into a ferry, by which we passed into Anglesea, and landed at the seat of Sir Nicholas Bayley, which is the pleafantest spot in the island. He has Gotherized an old house with good judgement and taste. The view from it is charming; he sees the sweet country, through which we had travelled, from Carnarvon to Snowdon above it, which ennoble the prospect; the Menai winds, in a most beautiful manner, just under his windows; his woods shade the banks of it on each side of it, quite down to the water; above which, intermixed with them, are ever-green lawns, which, if helped with a very little art, would, together with his wood, make a garden, or park, of the most perfect beauty; but all is yet in a rude and neglected state. From thence we went to Baronhill, the seat of lord Bulkeley, above the town of Beaumaris, in the same island; it has a view of the sea, and coast of Carnarvon, which is indeed very fine; but I think inferior to that of lord Edgecombe's, with which I have heard it compared. The house is a bad one; the gardens are made in a very fine taste; but upon the whole, I like it much less than Sir N. Bayley's, though the reputation of the former is greater in Wales.

All the rest of the isle of Anglesea is a naked and unpleasent country, without a tree or hedge to be seen in it, uncultivated still, from the obstinacy of the people, in adhering to the ignorance of their forefathers; so that I am told it does not produce the tenth part of what the land is capable of, if improved by the agriculture of England. From Beaumaris we rode over the lands, at low water, to Penman Mawr, a high and rocky mountain, the passage over which must have been
very

very frightful, before they built a wall along the edge of the road, which secures you from the danger of falling down the precipice that is below it into the sea; but with this guard it is very agreeable, the prospect of the sea and country being very fine.

I never saw any thing that struck me more than the first view of Conway castle, to which we soon came after passing this mountain; it was built by Edward the First, in much the same style with that of Carnarvon; but stronger and more regular. The situation is noble, and it stands upon a rock of considerable height; instead of a ditch, three sides of it are defended by an arm of the sea, and four turrets that rise above the towers, besides two others at one end, standing below the others, about the middle of the rock, that over-hangs the sea. The walls between are battlements, and look very strong; they are, in some places, fourteen or fifteen feet thick, in none less than twelve. The whole together hath the grandest appearance of any building I ever beheld, especially as the walls of the town, which are built like those of Carnarvon, but with bolder and handsomer towers, appear right in one view to the eye with the castle, when first you approach it. All the outside remains, except one tower, as in the time of Edward the First; and that was not demolished either with battering engines or with cannons, but by the people of the place taking stones from the foundation, for their own use, whenever they pleased; the consequence of which was, the greatest part of the tower fell into the sea: but the upper part more surprizingly continues still firm in the form of an arch; and lord Hertford, the present proprietor, hath forbid any dilapidation for the future. We were told, his grandfather would have lived in this castle, could he have purchased any lands in the country about; but finding none to be sold, he dropt the design.

I wish he had pursued it, for then we might have seen the inside entire; a sight which would have given me a great deal

of pleasure. But now the floors, cielings, and roofs, are all taken away, so that we can hardly guess at its ancient magnificence. The hall must have been a noble room; it is 100 feet long, 30 wide, and 30 high; the roof was supported by very beautiful arches, which still remain. There are two chimneys in it, and it was well lighted. The stone-work of the windows is exceeding handsome. Had our friend Millar (the builder of Hagley house) been with us, he would have fallen down and adored the architect. The eight towers seem to have contained three very good bed-chambers each, placed one above another, besides some upper rooms. The chambers are 18 feet diameter, except one called the king's chamber, which has a bow window, gained out of the thickness of the wall; and the room is by that means extended about 30 feet; over the arch of that window, are the arms of Edward the First.

This and all the other chambers appear to the eye 12 or 13 feet high; but I am promised an accurate plan of the whole by one of the country. It certainly merits very particular examination; but I should have been more curious about it, had it been built in *Henry the Second's* time. From Conway castle, we travelled half a day's journey through a very romantick country, to Rudland, or rather Land-castle, the remains of which are less perfect than Carnarvon or Conway; nor was it ever equal to them, either in extent or beauty, which I am sorry for, as *it was* built by *Henry the Second*. Not far from hence, at a place called Bodrudan, we passed a rainy day in a very comfortable manner, with an old acquaintance of mine, who is the lady of the castle, and hath forbid all depredations, which the people of the neighbourhood used to make, by taking it down to build and repair their houses and pigsties, which would have demolished it like the tower of Conway. The next morning we went to the tops of the hill, from whence we had a view of the whole vale of Clwydd,

from

from one end to the other, which is equalled by none in England for fertility and beauty. There is neither mountain or rock to be seen in any part of it: after you turn your back upon Rudland, the hills on one side of it rise very gradually by gentle ascents: most of them are cultivated quite to their summits, others half way up; and when the tops are not enclosed, they are a fine grassy down, like Clent-hill, and shaded and enlivened with wood, like the slopes in my park; but yet I prefer the scenes in Montgomeryshire to this lively vale: there is a great beauty in this, but there is no majesty; whereas there, as in the mind of our friend the *madona*, the soft and the agreeable is mixed with the noble, the great, and the sublime. About the middle of this vale, upon the brow of a hill, stands Denbigh castle, a very fine ruin; it encloses as much ground as Conway or Carnarvon, but hath not so much building. The towers of it are standing at a very considerable distance from one another, being fewer in number; but they are in the same style of architecture, having been built in the reign of the same king, who by these strong fortresses secured to himself and his posterity the dominion of North Wales. The hall is still pretty entire, and rivals that of Conway, except that the roof doth not appear to have been arched.

The towers are all in a ruinous state; I think it a pity and shame to the owner, that more care is not taken to preserve such respectable remains of antiquity. When we left the vale of Clwydd, we went into a barren and mountainous country, which continued from Rythin as far as Wrexham.

The church of the latter is called one of the wonders of Wales; it does indeed equal, if not exceed, any in England. I have not described to you the cathedral of Bangor or St. Asaph; the first I did not see, and I was told it was not worth seeing; the latter hath nothing in it to deserve description: nevertheless I should be glad to see the dean of E—— well seated

seated in either of them, or rather at St. Asaph. From Wrexham we went to Wynstay, the seat of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn. Part of the house is old; but he had begun building a new one before his death, in a very good taste. One wing is finished, and that alone makes a very agreeable house. The view from it is the most chearful I ever beheld; it stands in the middle of a very pretty park, and looks over that to a most delightful country; but if the park was extended a little farther, it would take in a hill, with the view of a valley, most beautifully wooded; and the river Dee winding in so romantic and charming a manner, that I think it exceeds that of Festiniog, or any confined prospect I ever beheld: among other objects that embellish the scene, there is a fine bridge of stone. Tell Mrs. C—S—, I would have her leave Clermont, and the banks of the Thames, and build a house in this lovely spot. I will visit her every year; she will not be at any expence in making a garden, for nature hath made one to her hands, infinitely better than that of S—. Upon one of the neighbouring hills, which hath the same prospect as this, one Mr. Yorke has a seat, which I only saw at a distance; and which, I am told by a lady at Shrewsbury of a good taste, excels any in Wales for natural beauty.

Indeed the country, for five or six miles, is of another temper, exceedingly fertile, and very romantic. While I was looking at it, I asked Mr. P—, “Whether he thought it possible for the eyes to behold a more pleasing sight?” He said, “Yes; the sight of a woman one loves.” My answer was, “When I was in love, I thought so.”

Our last visit in Wales was to Chirk-castle; it was destroyed in the civil wars, and hath been rebuilt; it is a bad imitation of an old castle, the most disagreeable dwelling-house I ever saw; nor is there any magnificence to make
amends

amends for the want of convenience; the rooms are large indeed in one part, but much too low; and the cielings are so heavy with clumsy fret-work, that they seem ready to fall upon one's head; it has a fine extensive prospect, but no other beauty of any kind, nor is the prospect to be compared with some we have seen at the other castles in Wales.

I am, &c.

LYTTELTON.

F I N I S.

...the prospect to be compared with some we have seen at the other castles in Wales. I am, &c. LYTTELTON. F I N I S. ...the country, for five or six miles is of another temper, exceedingly fertile and very romantic. While I was looking at it, I asked Mr. R. "Whether he thought it possible for the eyes to behold a more pleasing sight?" He said, "Yes; the sight of a woman one loves." My answer was, "When I was in love, I thought so." Our last visit in Wales was to Glamorgan; it was destroyed in the civil wars, and hath been rebuilt; it is a bad imitation of an old castle, the most disagreeable dwelling-house I ever saw; nor is there any magnificence to make amends

A JOURNEY INTO WATER.

At the first of our entrance, the water was
shallow in our path, but such was the
force of the wind, that they were ready
to fall upon our heads: it was a fine
and pleasant kind of rain, and I
found with some we have had at the
same place.

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LETTER

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