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London, 1774

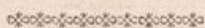
Letter I.

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L E T T E R S

T O

M R. B O W E R.



L E T T E R I.

Brynker, in Carnarvonshire, July 6, 1756.

I WRITE this from the foot of Snowdon, which I proposed to ascend this afternoon; but, alas! the top of it, and all the fine prospects which I hoped to see from thence, are covered with rain: I therefore sit down to write you an account of my travels thus far, as I promised when I left you, and to satisfy your desire of seeing North Wales in description at least, since you are not at leisure to accompany me thither.

I set out from Bewdley, with Mr. D—— and Mr. P——, on Tuesday last. In our way thence to Ludlow, we saw Sir E. B——'s, in a charming situation for the beauty of the prospects, but too much exposed, and in a dirty country. The house is spoiled by too large and too fine a stair-case and hall, to which the other rooms are by no means proportioned. Some of them are wainscotted and inlaid very finely. There is a park, which would be more beautiful, if the master of it had a little more

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taste.

taste. I hear his son has a good one; but the baronet himself hath not much more than his ancestor, who was killed by E. Douglas, at the battle of Shrewsbury. From this place we proceeded to the Clee Hill, a mountain you have often seen from my park; it affords a lovely prospect on every side, but it is more difficult to pass over than any in Wales, that I have yet seen; being covered all over with loose stones, or rather with pieces of rocks. However, we passed it without any hurt to ourselves or horses.

Ludlow is a fine, handsome town, and has an old castle, now in a neglected and ruinous state; but which, by its remains, appears to have been once a very strong fortress, and an habitation very suitable to the power and dignity of the lord president of Wales, who resided there. Not far from this town is Okely Park, belonging to lord Powis, and part of that forest which Milton, in his masque, supposes to have been inhabited by Comus and his rout. The god is now vanquished: but, at the revolution of every seven years, his rout does not fail to keep up orgies there, and in the neighbouring town; as lord Powis knows to his cost, for he has spent twenty or thirty thousand pounds in entertaining them at these seasons; which is the reason that he has no house at this place fit for him to live in. He talks of building one in the park, and the situation deserves it; for there are many scenes, which not only Comus, but the lady of Milton's masque, would have taken delight in, if they had received the improvements they are capable of, from a man of good taste; but they are as yet very rude and neglected. In our way from hence to Montgomery, we passed through a country very romantic and pleasant, in many spots: in which we saw farms so well situated, that they appeared to us more delightful situations than Clermont or Burleigh. At last we came by a gentleman's house, on the side of a hill opening to a sweet valley; which seemed to be built in a taste much superior to that of a mere country esquire. We therefore stoppt, and desired to see it, which curiosity was well paid for: we found it the neatest

neatest and best house, of a moderate size, that ever we saw. The master, it seems, was bred to the law, but quitted the profession about fifteen years ago, and retired into the country, upon an estate of £. 500 *per annum*, with a wife and four children; notwithstanding which encumbrances, he found means to fit up the house in the manner we saw it, with remarkable elegance, and to plant all the hill about him with groves and clumps of trees, that, together with an admirable prospect seen from it, render it a place which a monarch might envy. But, to let you see how vulgar minds value such improvements, I must tell you an answer made by our guide, who was servant to lord Powis's steward, and spoke, I presume, the sense of his master, upon our expressing some wonder that this gentleman had been able to do so much with so small a fortune; "I do not, said he, know how it is, but he is always doing some nonsense or other." I apprehend, most of my neighbours would give the same account of my improvements at Hagley.

Montgomery town is no better than a village; and all that remains of an old castle there, is about a third part of a ruinous tower: but nothing can be finer than the situation of it and the prospect. It must have been exceeding strong in ancient times, and able to resist all the forces of the Welsh; to bridle them, it was built in the reign of William Rufus; three sides of it are a precipice quite inaccessible, guarded with a deep and broad ditch. I was sorry that more of so noble a castle did not remain, but glad to think, that, by our incorporating union with the Welsh, this and many others, which have been erected to secure the neighbouring counties of England against their incursions, or to maintain our sovereignty over that fierce and warlike people, are now become useless.

From hence we travelled, with infinite pleasure (through the most charming country my eyes ever beheld, or my imagination can paint) to Powis Castle, part of which was burnt down about thirty years ago; but there are still remains of a great

house, situated so finely, and so nobly, that, were I in the place of lord Powis, I should forsake Okely Park, with all its beauties, and fix my seat as near there, as the most eligible in every respect. About £. 3000 laid out upon it, would make it the most august place in the kingdom. It stands upon the side of a very high hill; below lies a vale of incomparable beauty, with the Severn winding through it, the town of Welsh-Pool, terminated with high mountains. The opposite side is beautifully cultivated half way up, and green to the top, except in one or two hills, whose summits are rocky, and of grotesque shapes, that give variety and spirit to the prospect. Above the castle is a long ridge of hills finely shaded, part of which is the park; and still higher is a terrace, up to which you are led through very fine lawns, from whence you have a view that exceeds all description. The county of Montgomery, which lies all within this view, is to my eyes the most beautiful in South Britain; and though I have not been in Scotland, I cannot believe I shall find any place there superior, or equal, to it; because the highlands are all uncultivated, and the lowlands want wood; whereas this country is admirably shaded with hedge-rows. It has a lovely mixture of corn-fields and meadows, though more of the latter. The vales and bottoms are large, and the mountains, that rise like a rampart all around, add a magnificence and grandeur to the scene, without giving you any horror or dreadful ideas, because at Powis Castle they appear at such a distance as not to destroy the beauty and softness of the country between them. There are indeed some high hills within that inclosure, but, being woody and green, they make a more pleasing variety, and take off nothing from the prospect. The castle has an old-fashioned garden just under it, which a few alterations might make very pretty; for there is a command of water and wood in it, which may be so managed as to produce all the beauties that art can add to what liberal nature has so lavishly done for this place. We went from thence to see Pestill Rhaidir, a famous

famous cascade; but it did not quite answer my expectations, for though the fall is so high, the stream is but narrow, and it wants the complement of wood, the water falling like a spout on an even descent, down the middle of a wide naked rock, without any breaks to scatter the water. Upon the whole, it gave me but little pleasure.

After having seen the Velino, we lay that night at the house of a gentleman who had the care of lord Powis's lead mines; it stands in a valley, which seems the abode of quiet and security, surrounded with very high mountains on all sides; but in itself airy, soft, and agreeable. If a man was disposed to forget the world, and be forgotten by it, he could not find a more proper place. In some of those mountains are veins of lead ore, which have been so rich as to produce in time past £.20,000 *per annum*, to the old duke of Powis, but they are not near so valuable now. Perhaps, *holy father*, you will object, that the idea of wealth dug up in this place does not consist with that of retirement. I agree it does not; but, all the wealth being hid under ground, the eye sees nothing there but peace and tranquillity.

The next morning we ascended the mountain of Berwin, one of the highest in Wales; and when we came to the top of it, a prospect opened to us, which struck the mind with awful astonishment. Nature is in all her majesty there; but it is the majesty of a tyrant, frowning over the ruins and desolation of a country. The enormous mountains, or rather rocks, of Merionethshire inclosed us all around. There is not upon these mountains a tree or shrub, or a blade of grass; nor did we see any marks of habitations or culture in the whole space. Between them is a solitude fit for Despair to inhabit; whereas all we had seen before in Wales seemed formed to inspire the meditations of Love. We were some hours in crossing this desert, and then had the view of a fine woody vale, but narrow and deep, through which a rivulet ran as clear and rapid

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as your Scotch burns, winding in very agreeable forms, with a very pretty cascade. On the edge of this valley we travelled on foot, for the steepness of the road would not allow us to ride without some danger; and in about half an hour we came to a more open country, though still inclosed with hills, in which we saw the town of Bala with its beautiful lake. The town is small and ill-built; but the lake is a fine object: it is about three miles in length, and one in breadth, the water of it is clear, and of a bright silver colour. The river Dee runs through very rich meadows; at the other end are towering high mountains; on the sides are grassy hills, but not so well wooded as I could wish them to be: there is also a bridge of stone built over the river, and a gentleman's house which embellishes the prospect. But what Bala is most famous for is the beauty of its women, and indeed I there saw some of the prettiest girls I ever beheld. The lake produces very fine trout, and a fish called *whiting*, peculiar to itself, and of so delicate a taste, that I believe you would prefer the flavour of it to the lips of the fair maids at Bala.

After we left the banks of the lake, where we had an agreeable day, we got again into the desert; but less horrid than I have already described, the vale being more fertile, and feeding some cattle. Nothing remarkable occurred in our ride, until we came to Festiniog, a village in Merionethshire, the vale before which is the most perfectly beautiful of all we had seen. From the height of this village you have a view of the sea. The hills are green, and well shaded with wood. There is a lovely rivulet, which winds through the bottom; on each side are meadows, and above are corn fields along the sides of the hills; at each end are high mountains, which seemed placed there to guard this charming retreat against any invaders. With the woman one loves, with the friend of one's heart, and a good study of books, one might pass an age there, and think it a day. If you have a mind to live long, and renew your youth,

youth, come with Mrs. Bower, and settle at Festiniog. Not long ago there died in that neighbourhood an honest Welsh farmer, who was 105 years of age; by his first wife he had 30 children, 10 by his second, 4 by his third, and 7 by two concubines; his youngest son was 81 years younger than his eldest, and 800 persons descended from his body attended his funeral. When we had skirted this happy vale an hour or two, we came to a narrow branch of the sea, which is dry at low water. As we passed over the sands, we were surprized to see that all the cattle preferred that barren place to the meadows. The guide said, it was to avoid a fly, which in the heat of the day came out of the woods, and infested them in the valleys. The view of the said sands are terrible, as they are hemmed in on each side with very high hills, but broken into a thousand irregular shapes. At one end is the ocean, at the other the formidable mountains of Snowdon, black and naked rocks, which seemed to be piled one above the other. The summits of some of them are covered with clouds, and cannot be ascended. They do altogether strongly excite the idea of Burnet, of their being the fragment of a demolished world. The rain which was falling when I began to write this letter did not last long; it cleared up after dinner and gave us a fine evening, which employed us in riding along the sea coast, which is here very cold.

The grandeur of the ocean, corresponding with that of the mountain, formed a majestic and solemn scene; ideas of immensity swelled and exalted our minds at the sight; all lesser objects appeared mean and trifling, so that we could hardly do justice to the ruins of an old castle, situated upon the top of a conical hill, the foot of which is washed by the sea, and which has every feature that can give a romantic appearance.

This morning (July 7) being fair, we ventured to climb up to the top of a mountain, not indeed so high as Snowdon, which is here called Moel Guidon, *i. e.* the nest of the eagle;

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but one degree lower than that called Moel Haprock, the nest of the hawk; from whence we saw a phenomenon, new to our eyes, but common in Wales; on the one side was midnight, on the other bright day; the whole extent of the mountain of Snowdon, on our left hand, was wrapped in clouds, from top to bottom; but on the right the sun shone most gloriously over the sea-coast of Carnarvon. The hill we stood upon was perfectly clear, the way we came up a pretty easy ascent; but before us was a precipice of many hundred yards, and below, a vale, which though not cultivated, has much savage beauty; the sides were steep, and fringed with low wood.

There were two little lakes, or rather large pools, that stood in the bottom, from which issued a rivulet, that serpentine in view for two or three miles, and was a pleasing relief to the eyes.

But the mountains of Snowdon, covered with darkness and thick clouds, called to my memory the fall of Mount Sinai, with the laws delivered from it, and filled my mind with religious awe.

This afternoon we propose going to Carnarvon, and you may expect a continuation of my travels from Shrewsbury, which is our last stage. Through the whole round of them we heartily wished for you, and your friend Browne, and your friend Mrs. S——, who is a passionate admirer of prospects; and that you could have borrowed the chariot of some gracious fairy, or courteous enchanter, and flown through the air with us. You know I always admired Mrs. S—— for the greatness of her taste, and sublime love of nature, as well as for all her other perfections. Adieu, my dear Bower. I am perfectly well, *eat like a horse, and sleep like a monk*; so that I may, by this ramble, preserve a stock of health, that may last all winter, and carry me through my parliamentary campaign. If you write to the ^a Madona, do not fail to assure her of my truest devotion. The most zealous Welsh catholick does not honour

^a A lady, to whom her friends gave that appellation.

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