

Dawson Turner to Ellen Hutchins: 24th July 1814

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Should you not know, my dear Madam, that I have been for the last two months in France, you may well wonder at the length of time which has elapsed since you have received any tidings of me. On my part I not only wonder but feel greatly disturbed to find on my return not a single word from you in answer to what I wrote so long since as the 26th April. When you last had the kindness to write to me, you were happily better, but still far from being well, & this very long silence revives all those alarms, which I had hoped were laid for ever to rest. If you are, but well, I trust you will oblige me just with two lines to tell me so. If, unfortunately your illness continues, I flatter myself your medical attendant will not refuse me the sad consolation of knowing the real state of a friend, from whose intercourse I have for many years, derived one of the sweetest & purest sources of pleasure. To be deprived of you will indeed be a misfortune to me, & should it so happen that different cares & different occupations may render it desirable to you to put a close to our correspondence, I still entreat that I may be allowed to retain a place in your esteem, and that should anything bring you to this quarter of the Kingdom you will not refuse to gratify me by allowing me the opportunity of becoming personally acquainted with you. Perhaps you, like me, have had to lament the illness of your mother. Mine, almost immediately after I last wrote to you, was seized with inflammation of the brain & erysipelas which was fully expected would have proved fatal, but she recovered in a manner truly wonderful, and I therefore took Mrs Turner and my two daughters to Town, and was induced afterwards to carry them onto Paris, partly to show them the Metropolis of a great nation altogether new to us, and partly to bear Mr Hooker company, on his way to some more distant country. I believe I had told you that Hungary was what he originally thought of – this destination he was induced to change because various delays had driven him so late in the season, & instead of it, he is gone to Switzerland, but we have not yet received any tidings of him since we parted at Paris. In this great city I saw everything to astonish & most things to please me. As all the sights were new & it was necessary to accompany the ladies to the theatres, the Louvre etc, I had by no means so much time as I wished for Natural History, but what I saw impressed me with the highest possible opinion of the collections as well as of the knowledge & abilities of the naturalists. Desfontaines, Labillardiere, Persoon and all the Botanists were particularly kind to me, but this really is saying very little in their favour, for kindness is the characteristic of the French Nation and you even receive it from every person whom you accidentally meet in the street and have

occasion to ask the way from one place to another. In the fields I met with but few plants that are not also natives of England; but many of our rarest are there among the most common, as *Salvia pratensis*, *Thlaspi perfoliatum*, *Erygium pratense*, *Melapynum raven*, *Convallaria polygonatum* etc etc. The hurrying manner in which I drove through the country did not allow of my finding Lichens or Mosses or Confervae. Indeed, as far as I could judge, France is very far from being as productive of vegetables of this type as England, & to my surprise I found scarcely any Parisian botanists who had collected or who knew anything about them. I ought to tell you that the Botanists & all the men of science in France are collected in Paris: nothing seems to be done or be attempted in any other Town, & it is the same in the arts everything is concentrated in the Metropolis & every thing public. They do not seem able to comprehend how it is with us, that both in arts & science individuals possess such treasures & many of these who have cultivated them with most success reside far from London. I needed only to instance you, & indeed I very often thought of you while there & wished I could have had you with me, or at least that I had begged of you to oblige me while there by writing. As to public matters I should say, judging from all I saw, that nothing can be more quiet; & everybody with whom I talked joined in this opinion that the abdication of Bonaparte was a blessing for France. Yet they do him the justice to allow that had he not had such a passion for war, he would have been the best monarch they ever had; & when I looked at the immense public works which he did the canals, roads, quays, buildings & bridges as well as at the collections that he made of statues, paintings, books, manuscripts, medals etc & also at the beauty of his coins, & the publications that he occasioned, I could not help saying to myself this was the greatest man the world ever knew & yet he was a dreadful tyrant & a scourge to his generations. You know, my dear Madam, the anxiety with which I shall look for an answer; & I therefore will say no more, & only conclude my letter by begging you once more to accept the assurance of the esteem & regard of your obliged & affectionate friend

Dawson Turner

Yarmouth 24th July 1814