

Dawson Turner to Ellen Hutchins: 11th September 1814

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Yarmouth 11th September 1814

I set about writing to you, my dear Madam, with fear & trembling, &, I own it, with some reluctance, lest it should unfortunately happen that in the weak state in which I am but too apprehensive that my letter will reach you, that reading of it will be too greatly an exertion for you, & I should thus tend to produce an effect that I am most anxious to avoid. And yet I cannot bear the idea of remaining longer silent; for I would not for the world have you think that I could forget you while suffering on the bed of sickness, nor would I willingly omit any means in my power to afford you during your illness consolation or amusement. I am looking daily for the news that you were kind enough to promise I should from time to time receive of your health, & I devotedly pray that it may be of the kind I wish. – It will give you, I know, pleasure to hear that all of us in this house are perfectly well. Little Ellen grows nicely & begins to speak quite plain & to know her letters. How glad I shall be when you can come yourself & instruct her. In the meantime you need not fear lest her excellent mother should have unfulfilled the duty of a godmother in teaching the child her Lord's Prayer, & creed, & commandments & catechism. In this respect I have the greatest comfort in the education of my children, & I hope it will please God to record my wife's endeavours to make good principles take root in them. In point of Botany, in which I still hope you feel some delight, I am sorry to say I have nothing to communicate. For the last five weeks I have been quite a fish out of water, having been turned out of my study by carpenters etc, bricklayers, who have been adding another room to it. Even now they have not done, so that I am still without access to my plants or half my books. The poor Fuci stand quite still, & the same is necessarily the case with the Jungermanniae while Mr Hooker is traversing the mountains of Italy & Switzerland. He has been as far as Turin & Milan, with both while he exceedingly delighted, & he is now on his way home by Zurich & Geneva. He speaks of his success in botany with the greatest delight, especially among the Alps the roads over which made by Bonaparte he describes as good as any turnpikes in England or Ireland, & says the French have reason on their side when they speak of them as the 8th wonder of the world. Lord Byron has just published a new Poem, called Lara, but it is anonymous, probably because the noble author thought it would add nothing to his former fame, & in this I think he judged right. Though full of fine passages, it bears sad marks of haste & is more obscure even than the Giaour. Mr Phillips, the Royal Academician, who is now in this house, painting Mrs Turner & my daughters, had lately the same task to perform for Lord Byron, & says he was just the strange dark man that you would suppose from his works. I wish I had any means of sending you the print taken from the picture, which really is very fine. Do not you love to see the portraits of great men? They are to my mind among the most interesting things possible, & I am therefore inclined to envy Mr Phillips, who is at this time engaged to paint Campbell, Southey & Walter Scott, & Rogers. His having been for the same reason lately with the Prince Regent & with the Emperor of Russia & King of Prussia are honours I could readily dispense with, however enviable I know that they appear in the eyes of most people. Had I more than one son, I really should be tempted to bring up one of them as an artist, supposing him possessed of the talents that are required, & above all of that emulation that is even more important than genius. Mr Salt's travels in Abyssinia are just out & you will find amusement

& information in them, but by no means to such an extent as might have been expected from a traveller in so interesting country. He is the very reverse of Dr. Clarke, who, as Dr Johnson says of Goldsmith, touches upon every kind of writing & does not fail to ornament whatever he touches – do not, I beg of you, put yourself to any painful exertion for the sake of writing to me, but ask some friend to let me know how you are, & above all things, take care of yourself. That God may be pleased to help & pardon you, is the hearty wish and earnest prayer of

Your sincere friend D. T