

Sketches of Life and Manners with Delineations of Scenery in England, Scotland, and Ireland: interspersed with Moral Tales and Anecdotes, in original Letters: in two volumes. By Mrs. Mary Ann Grant. Vol. II. Second Edition, 1811. Printed by Cox, Son, and Baylis, London.

Letter XXXV (vol 2, pp. 27-34)

To Miss T-----

Weeley Camp, July 1803.

I should have written, my ever dear Mary Ann, immediately on my arrival here, but wished to procure a frank from the colonel of our regiment, who was every day expected to join; however, as he does not appear likely to pay us an early visit, I now take up my pen, lest you should think I have grown a bad correspondent, or that I feel less affection and friendship than formerly; believe me, my dear girl, my heart never glowed with warmer feelings for you than at this moment. I bore the journey tolerably well, upon the whole, but got a sad fright at Brentwood: our horses took fright at some drums that were beating as we entered the village, and galloping with the utmost fury, knocked down a poor child that was running across the road: totally unmanageable, it was not in the power of the postilion to stop them for some time; you may better imagine my feelings, my dear Mary Ann, than I can describe them: as soon as the horses could be checked, G. went to enquire the consequence of the accident, and to offer some compensation: I was greatly relieved on his return, to find that the little sufferer had received no material injury; and was most thankful for so providential an escape. We slept at Ingatestone, and the next morning proceeded through the flourishing town of Chelmsford, to Witham, Keldon [Kelvedon?], a remarkable pretty village, and Colchester, an ancient, large, and populous town, with barracks for several thousand men. We arrived at Weeley to dinner; it is an insignificant village; but the encampment is large. I frequently accompany my dear G. to visit it; we have lodgings in the close vicinity.

The other evening, we strolled to see an extraordinary family; who, with a good estate, and property in the Bank, to the amount of sixty thousand pounds, deny themselves almost the common necessaries of life. We were conducted by their only attendant, a decrepid old woman, through a narrow dark passage (the principal entrance to the house being shut up, and the front court overgrown with weeds, forming a cool receptacle for frogs, &c.) whose dim light, for most of the windows of the house were blockaded to save the tax, scarcely served to discover the miserable master and mistress of this wretched mansion; to whom we were announced, in no very cordial manner, and were evidently intruders; however, as it would not wear out the *already worn out* chairs very much, to sit down for a few minutes, we were desired to be seated. Mr. C. was, for several years, a captain in the army; and did not then, 'tis said, betray that excessive love of money for which he is now noted. The remnants of his profession, his sword, sash, &c. hung up in the hall; and were considered great ornaments by the old man; who seemed delighted in pointing them out to us; and, indeed, if he wished us to notice them that was necessary; for it would have been impossible to have discovered of what materials they were formed, from the wilderness of dust and cobwebs, which had been accumulating about them for at least forty years. A youth now appeared, who was introduced as heir to those possessions, that formed at once the misery and pride of his father. His appearance was even more filthy and disgusting than that of Mr. C.; his dress was ragged

and dirty in the extreme, and his manners uncouth and awkward beyond description. We were shewn over the grounds, which are extensive, and had they a liberal owner could be rendered very beautiful. The young squire boasted of cultivating them entirely himself, taking care not to lose an inch of ground, that its produce at the market, might fetch something substantial for the pockets: he next pointed to a quantity of gravel, which, he said, his father had given him, by way of pocket-money, and that he took good care to make the most of it. The old man, on the other hand, *interlarded* his conversation with similar lessons of economy; boasting that he always took care of the value of a farthing. There were several fish ponds, well stored with fine fish; but these Mr. C. seldom touched, as they were his own; the fish-pond he liked best, was the sea, he said, and even there, his saving propensity did not forsake him; he was obliged to take a piece of meat, to bait the fish with, this he thought very extravagant, and in order to prevent its being quite lost, he brought it home for a roast, as it was better to be eat by him than the fish. When the father and son go every year to London, to receive their dividends of more than three thousand pounds, they carry as much stale bread and cheese, with hay, &c. for the horse that draws them, in a taxed cart, as will serve them till they return home; it would be a dreadful expence to put up at inns, they say. In short, it would be endless to enumerate the many instances of despicable parsimony these contemptible beings daily evince – to add to a treasure already too much for them. I confess in considering these misers, I was almost tempted to break the tenth commandment, and envy them the wealth they knew not how to dispose of. Not only meanness but cruelty must also be attached to the old man's character: he had a daughter who married against his consent; he never forgave her, and when she brought a female infant into the world, the pangs of the mother increased by the want of common nourishment, and she expired within a few yards of her unnatural father's door, oppressed by poverty and misery: the poor babe is now nursed by an indigent woman, who lives in the vicinity of Mr. C's house; and is supported in a miserable manner: Mr. C's resentment extends even to the poor little innocent, and he refuses almost the means of sustenance to her. Had I not seen these cruel, miserable wretches, I could hardly credit that such existed. Strange that man, a creature endowed with reason, should pervert his understanding, till he becomes insensible to, or cannot make a proper use of, those blessings, which the goodness of Providence has bestowed upon him. I have so filled my paper with an account of our visit to these niggards, that I have scarcely room to add how truly I am, &c. &c.

Letter XXXVI (vol 2, pp.34-38)

To Miss W----

Weeley Camp, July 1803

It is well for you, my dear Fanny, that you and Jane are so ready to pack up your all, and follow the drum; for your *commanding* officer herewith sends you positive orders to join *your regiment* without delay. Captain H. who will be the bearer of these commands, has orders to assure you, that if you refuse to obey them, you will be superseded in the *favor* of your captain; but that you may feel the less reluctance to comply with such rigid orders, I will endeavour to charm you, even into a wish of joining us, by giving you an idea of the agreeable parties, excursions, &c. which we sometimes make. I find the officers pleasant and attentive; among the female *coterie* of the regiment, is my quondam friend, Mrs. F.; we frequently dine together; and sometimes form little musical parties in the

evening. The other day, a large party of us made a most agreeable excursion. Near the neat little village of St. Osyth is a beautiful park, belonging to Mr. Nassau; we proposed going to see it, and dining *à la rustique*. We accordingly chose a beautiful forenoon, and formed a numerous cavalcade; some on horseback, some in, and some outside of carriages: when we arrived in the park, we found two tents fixed, where we were to dine; the band was placed in different parts of the woods, and had a charming effect, as we wandered over the grounds. There is an ancient priory here, and the ruins of it are very picturesque; one of the towers is still entire; the prospect from it, is commanding, and richly varied with nature's beauties. A gate of this antique building is preserved, and forms the entrance to the park, leading to Mr. Nassau's elegant house, which is surrounded by charming scenery. An aviary, green-houses, and rustic seats adorn the grounds; they are laid out with considerable taste. The day was uncommonly fine, the sun shone with resplendent lustre, and gave an additional charm to every object; while the soul-moving harmony from the sounds of various instruments, echoing in different directions through the woods, exhilarated our spirits, and gave zest to those feelings which a contemplation of the glorious works of nature must always awaken. But to prove that there can be no pleasure without some degree of alloy, in the midst of our enthusiastic feelings, one of the heaviest of summer showers, demanded the aid of umbrellas, cloaks, &c. and drove us to take shelter wherever we could find it; it seemed incessant. What was to be done? Good humour happened to be a prevalent sensation among our party, and we determined not to allow the adverse clouds entirely to over-shadow the pleasure we had promised ourselves; all hands were immediately employed; the *viands*, &c. were quickly conveyed to the village inn, where we as quickly repaired, and soon sat down to a very merry dinner, with a more secure covering than the canopy of Heaven would have then afforded us. We concluded the afternoon of this agreeable day by "lightly tripping" through the mazy dance, till the dusky shades of twilight brought the carriages to convey us home; the night cleared, and we enjoyed a moonlight scene during our ride; now, my dear Fanny, this account is by way of *foretaste*, of what you are to expect, if you obey orders; remember, if you do not, sure punishment awaits for you. Adieu.

(intervening letters written in Scotland, from August 1803. Letter XLI is dated November 1803, from Harwich, and details her journey by ship from Scotland to Essex).

Letter XLI (vol. 2, pp. 67-71)

To Miss B---

Weeley Barracks, December 1803

Thanks, dear Hannah, for your very amusing letter; you tell me, you are extremely anxious about me, and long to know how I am settled; indeed, my dear, when you read a description of the quarters we are now in, I fear your uneasiness will hardly be lessened on my account.

Just as we began to think we should be allowed to remain at Colchester during the winter, an order came for the regiment to repair immediately to Weeley; and here we found so complete a metamorphosis, that I doubted whether some enchantress had not been exerting her magical powers; it appeared hardly possible that in so short a space of time, as seven or eight weeks, barracks to contain five thousand men, could have sprung up by the hands of *men*; yet so it is: the

ploughed ground, and green meadows, where the encampment was formed last summer, have disappeared, and these temporary erections supply their place. The soft ground, and the almost incredible number of men, horses, carts, &c., that have been employed in this business, in order to facilitate its accomplishment, have contributed to make the roads in a state, beyond what you can form any idea of; they are, in fact, one mass of mire. I was carried into our apartment, and when I shall make use of my feet to walk out, appears uncertain. With all the expedition that has been used, you may believe, it was not possible for these barracks to be completely finished; and I am really afraid of the bad effects which may arise from the state of the rooms: that you may form some idea of the whole, I shall describe ours. My dear G. kept a large fire there for several days previous to my going; but, notwithstanding this precaution, the newly plastered walls, were running with water when I entered, and were capable of receiving any impression by the slightest touch; a few iron bars fastened to some bricks, serve the purpose of a stove; and the part sunk for a hearth-stone answers for a fender; as for fire irons we make the best shift we can; one room forms at once, our parlour, bedchamber, and kitchen. We are usually awake about five o'clock in the morning, by a workman coming in to put a lock to the door, shelves to the cupboard, or some other necessary finishing to the room; on getting out of bed, we rise as if from a tepid bath, for our curtains and blankets have to undergo the operation of being well wiped from the damp: encircled, as I have said we are, by mud, you may believe our apartment must frequently be washed; which business I generally contrive to get done while G. is wading through the mire, to parade; I take my station upon the bed.

“Little thinks the townsman’s wife,
While at home she tarries,
What must be the lasses life,
Who a soldier marries.”

But I think I hear you ask, is it possible that you are so mad as to intend remaining in such a place? Why I must own, that my kind G. is continually urging me to take my departure; but I really believe my timidity has made me obstinate; for in that respect, I constantly oppose him; the truth is, there are no lodgings to be had within two miles, and owing to the strict orders now issued for no officer to be absent from the barracks, in consequence of the prevailing idea of an invasion; were I to go thither I should have very little of my husband’s company, and live entirely among strangers; this, at present, would not be comfortable; to go to London would be the most eligible plan; but I really cannot account for my feelings, when I say, that I am unable to persuade myself to leave G.; however, I hope all will be well, for I am completely recovered from every fatigue, and was never happier, or in better spirits.

From female society I am, for the present, completely debarred, since there is no way for a woman to venture out, but upon men’s shoulders, no very pleasant conveyance you must allow; but I look forward with pleasure to a few months hence, when the barracks will be completed, the roads mended, and our little parties again mix agreeably together. In the mean time, am happy in the constant society of my dear G., and the occasional visits of his particular friends. Write to me soon, and inform me particularly of poor Lucy’s state of health. Adieu, dear friend, &c. &c.

Letter XLII (vol. 2, pp. 72-75)

To Miss T-----

Weeley Barracks, February 1804

I received your letter, my dearest Mary Ann, and hasten to answer it, though not very able, as you must remain in suspense, respecting your future plans till you hear from me.....

I am now, thank God, slowly recovering my strength, and have this day, for the first time, quitted my bedchamber: but oh! Mary Ann, I have been very ill, and never thought I should be enabled to write to you again. You, my beloved girl, I believe would have lost your friend, but the Almighty has been pleased to spare to me; may I be grateful for His mercy. My spirits are still very low, I grieve much for my loss, though I am well aware how selfish it is for me to mourn, and am sensible that my sweet little angel is happier with her God, than all my anxiety for her welfare could have made her here; I often reflect upon this, yet my heart proves rebellious, and the mother mourns; it was indeed a severe trial, after all my sufferings, to be deprived of the sweet solace that supported me through them; my poor dear G. he too felt the disappointment very severely; but it was the will of Heaven, and we have no right to complain: many a time, amid all my sufferings did we wish for the skilful attendance of my dear aunt, and the soothing attention of my amiable young friend, who I am certain would have made a very tender nurse; but situated as we were, it was impossible we could request either of you to come.

I have been a good deal harassed by the constant talk of the invasion, which is still threatened, and it is thought this coast will be the point, where the effort of landing will be made; what a scene of destruction would such an event occasion, may God avert so dreadful an evil, and preserve us from the devastation of war on our own shores. I hardly know if there is any cause of fear, but I own I think there is something terrific in these warlike preparations; every where they seem carried on with great vigour; and invasion, with the execrable name of Buonaparte, alone occupies the thoughts and conversation of all politicians, male and female, real and affected. God grant that our fleets and armies, may set the tyrant at defiance, by their loyalty, union, and valour, should he dare attempt to arrest from us our rights, and our liberties; yes, the British lion is roused, and I trust that even his growl will suffice to intimidate the haughty Corsican; but I feel I must lay aside my pen, I have not for some weeks written so much, and I am weary; when I recover my strength and spirits a little better, I will write to all my correspondents, to whom I am greatly in arrears, at present I am not equal to the task..... That peace and happiness may ever be the lot of my dearest Mary Ann, is the earnest prayer of her affectionate, &c. &c.

Letter XLIII (vol. 2, pp. 75-84)

To Miss T-----

Weeley Barracks, June 1804

You tell me my dear, that you have lately read some of Shakespear's historical plays, that you derived much pleasure from the perusal, and are desirous of obtaining my opinion on them [Mary Ann writes at length about Shakespeare].

[Continuing from page 86] Our barracks have now assumed an air of comfort: a neat porch leads to two rooms, which we enjoy, together with a kitchen; and you would smile to see the ways and means we fall upon, to make the *unpolished* furniture allotted us, look neat; the roads are nicely made, and we have the comfort of walking dry, and enjoying a little society; our agreeable parties have again commenced; you would be amused were you to hear our invitations to each other; they are always accompanied by a desire, that each person will bring their camp-stool, knife, glass, &c.; such is the order among those who occupy barracks: G. and I mean to pay London a visit very soon, but we have little to do with the fickle goddess of fashion: a soldier must take his leave when he can get it, and my dear Mary Ann, and a few others, will be pleased to see us at any season. I have swelled this packet to an unconscionable size. Captain H. will be the bearer. Adieu, &c.