

Dinton - Dalwood Letters

'Dinton', 5th August 1831.

My dear George,

I have been spreading some rhubarb seed in the sun to send you. I think I have discovered a reason why the seed has never succeeded with you. Cobbett's English Gardener says the seed will only keep one year, so I hope by sending you this packet as soon as fit, and carefully packing it in sulphur, it may vegetate in the Dalwood garden; if you sow it as soon as you receive it. I like Cobbett's book very much; it is very useful in many ways, and my nursery gardens will flourish by its assistance, I have no doubt, although the soil is against me.

Ella wrote to you last month,, and I believe the only two occurrences worth relating in the Dinton journal are that I found a viper snugly reposing in a basket in the greenhouse, and that Papa shot one of the bucks Mr. King gave him, it being the first Venison killed in the Park; much was thought of it, and Charles was very anxious to taste a haunch of it before he went to school. But alas! close mushroomy weather for two days completely spoiled the feast, and my olfactory nerves rejoiced when the dish was removed from the room.

The members of the House of Commons are nearly exhausted by the continual attendance at the House in the very beautiful warm summer we have had and still enjoy. The opposition to the Reform Bill protracts it most unnecessarily. Some very pretty disclosures are made. I cannot help telling you in what a delightful way the electors of Malmesbury received the pay for their votes. Members invited them to a cheese-cake feast. Under each cheesecake was placed a banknote, so they received a double gratification. Everybody thinks the bill will pass the Commons, and those opposed to it put all their trust in the Upper house. It is very diverting to hear the sad passage of some people, but none of their dismal forebodings respecting the passing of the Catholic Relief Bill have as yet taken place; we are not the least alarmed.

The Coronation is to take place in the most economical way possible, in the early part of September, and it is reported that the King will make several new Peers on this occasion. The Opposition catch hold of it, and designate it an unconstitutional measure, because they fear all the new Peers will support Reform. By the bye, Lord Radnor has behaved very handsomely and properly on this occasion. The Borough of Downton, as you may possibly know, belongs to him, and in Lord John Russell's calculations it was left out, and might have remained unnoticed, but Lord Radnor immediately undeceived Lord John, and of course the Borough is disenfranchised. Nothing else is talked of, and Mr. Penruddocke, in a note Mama received from him this morning, says London contains no one but Reformers and Anti-Reformers.

We have not yet prevailed on Papa and Mama to pay a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Ward, the new inhabitants of Teffont Rectory. First of all, the stream has been turned, and the road also has been made nearly straight. This piece of ground Mr. Ward has taken into his garden, which has been levelled to the water's edge, and cut out in all sorts of shapes, with gravel walks between, so as very much to resemble those little gardens and Parterres you have often seen in the neighbourhood of London. The water is to form a Cascade, and a Grotto has been made over it. Such a thing! We found a miniature waterfall also near the gate, and Papa says the man has spoilt the place, and instead of a rapid stream has made a duck puddle. Mr. Ward and his lady come from the neighbourhood of Manchester or Eccles. Whenever we have seen him in his garden, he has always a pair of quite clean lemon-coloured kid gloves on, which do not look very workmanlike, at least in my estimation.

Wyndham Portman has been very ill of a sort of influenza that has been going about very much in England. Inflammation and fever ran so high that one week we expected to hear of his death every day. His constitution held out, and by the dint of excessive bleeding the fever was reduced from inflammatory to typhus, in which he laid for several days. He is now on a fair way to recover, but it not yet allowed to get out of bed. He is considered quite out of danger, for Berkley and Henry have left London, the latter has just taken possession of a little cottage two miles from Bryanstone. I cannot fancy him living there a great deal. It must be more of a place to put his boxes than anything else. His aunts tell him he must get a wife, and his answer is, 'Then she must be a very lowly-minded lady to inhabit my den.' Those little ladies are very well in health at present, saving that Miss. Wyndham has hurt her knee by a fall, and is lying on the sofa, but in excellent spirits. I had a long chat with them yesterday. They have nearly finished their house. The carpets are down and the curtains hung up, but when Aunt Henrietta intends leaving off her old bonnet and plume I cannot say. I think you will see her in it when you come back, if it does not drop off her head from decay. Now I think of it, it is almost four years since you went. How different you would think everything if you could only look at us this moment. Papa and Mama are quite well - no alteration in them. Charles is as tall nearly as Papa, and is quite a great fellow. Henrietta still creeps on, about an inch a year.

William and Ellen leave us to-day to take up their abode at Bramshaw Cottage for the hunting season. We shall miss them sadly. Ellen is such a dear good creature, quite like a sister - (Printer's error in original omitted)... our way of going on - quite a second Margaret. We are becoming Archeresses under Frank and John's tuition, but I think it will be some time before I shoot as well as Robin Hood. I don't strike the target very often; once I put in two arrows out of twelve shots. How you will laugh at me when you read this; however, the other ladies have not yet done so much. We have had beautiful weather all the summer, and a fortnight was boiling hot, which brought forward all the harvest. The croakers told us in the spring that all the crops would be set fire, as soon as ripe, but not one instance has been heard of yet. Papa, Mama and four of us go to Corton to-day. Frank takes Henny to school, Charles gets as far as Ashton on his road to school then the house will be quite empty for a few days. It is not yet settled what is to be done with the Parsonage house at Sutton; it is almost too bad to be added to, and too good to be pulled down. There is no other news. We have sent two Edinburghs and two Quarterlys.

With kindest love,

Your affectionate sister,

CHARLOTTE WYNDHAM