

Dinton - Dalwood Letters

'Dinton', 7th April 1831.

My Dear George,

I begin a letter under the pleasing influence of a beautiful harp and pianoforte duet, just finished by Many Anne and Charlotte, arranged beautifully by Boscha; so you will learn they have not yet lost the use of their fingers from the coldness of our climate. It is my full intention that this letter should be quite worthy of travelling to you; therefore I shall write it bit by bit till it is well filled and crossed so as to render it almost illegible. Last night we packed a box with goods for you, or rather for Margaret and your little ones, to which the aunts added some useful toys for their nephew and niece. My own share was a doll a la mode, for Weeta. I hope her Papa will approve of such a thing; I will answer her Mama will, but I rather fear the antipathy you had for your sister's dolls may still continue, or why should it not have descended to Alward?

I cannot think what would have become of you were you in England at present. Reform, Reform, you hear everywhere, nothing else but Reform; but no annual Parliament, no Universal Suffrage. But I must tell you Lord John Russell brought in a Bill and a plan of Reform on the First of March, with the concurrence of the Ministers and the approbation of the King. After a protracted debate of eight nights leave was given to read the bill for the first time without a division of the House. Mama has provided you with Lord John Russell's speech in a pamphlet, that you might have it without mutilation. Of course there is a strong, very strong, party against it, but chiefly the Aristocracy, the country gentlemen being nine out of ten in favour of it. They read it a second time by a majority of one; 609 members were present, which some of its friends in the house say was as many as could be expected, if you consider a hundred and twenty members of the sixty boroughs they intend to disenfranchise. I like the plan; it is honourable in its intentions, evidently; but I am certain it might be improved without any material alterations. For why householders in towns to the amounts of £10 yearly rents should vote, and not give one to the farmer, who may occupy the land to an immense extent, and who necessarily must be, or ought to be, more intelligent and respectable man than a town renter of £10. So I hope such omissions may be corrected, as well as that of the voters not giving their votes at home in their own parish, where everyone knows whether a man is entitled to vote or not. The 18th of this month is the day on which this important bill is to go to the Committee, and its result is most anxiously looked for. Lord Grey says he stands or falls by it. I lamented the Duke's going out of place very much; but he was not party man enough for England, and could never be properly supported, the Whigs hated him for keeping them out of place, and the Tories for having emancipated the Catholics. Barclay Portman and Mr. Bennett are enchanted with this measure, and Mr. Coke of Norfolk, the Father of the House of Commons, is delighted to have lived to see the day it was brought in by the Ministers.

Mr. Bennett is just announced.

April 8th – Mr. Bennett entertained us for a long time yesterday with Country Politics, rising out of the Reform Question. The a'Courts of Heytesbury have to go, are most violent, so much so that they show the absolute necessity of the measure fully. Reports said that Colonel a'Court is canvassing everybody in the county to stand and raise in opposition to our sitting members. Most disgraceful conduct! I should like to duck him well for it. Though without any great difficulty they might find a cleverer man than the worthy Sir John.

Lady Emma Portman and her two sons are to come here today. Barclay is gone to get a day's hunting with William, and comes here to-morrow to spend a few days with us, previous to his going up to London for the rest of the session. He must be in London by the 14th, but he may attend in proper form the wedding of his last remaining sister, Mary Anne, who is going to be married to a Mr. George Drummond, a junior partner in a respectable firm of that name at Charing Cross. Although the match astonished her cousins, as they thought she was at least determined to be My Lady, and would not so soon have despaired. However, the gentleman bears a good character, and her young friends may laugh and quiz as much as they like about it. Though Cupid has this winter been extremely busy amongst our common acquaintances, no one else that you are interested about is going to be married that I know of.

Charlotte has been staying six weeks at Bryanston with Lady Emma, while Barclay was in London. She only returned a fortnight since, when she came home for his Easter holiday.

You will be sorry we have lost our friend and neighbour, Mrs. Penruddocke. Poor thing she died of pure exhaustion at the last, without being worse than usual.

They have instituted a Wiltshire Horticultural Society. The first show and meeting took place last Tuesday. It was a very good one, I understand; the show of flowers was beautiful, and the forced vegetables very fine. My face was so swollen I could not join the party there, at which I was very much vexed. Charlotte was quite angry with me that I did not like the Azalia Indica should go, now blowing in the greenhouse for fear that it should be hurt; and what was her horror to find one in not near such beautiful bloom to get the prize. We hope to get prizes for Australian plants when we get seeds from you; we have some now growing well given us by Mrs. Scott. There is one with a most beautiful leaf; it seems inclined to be a climber.

You will, of course, think from the late riots we are on the brink of destruction, but I do not fancy we are a bit worse than we were. The riots have ceased altogether, and the agricultural population returned to their peaceful habits. It was odd for us not to like to walk any distance from the house, which I assure you was dangerous in many places. I do not think it would have been in either of our neighbouring parishes, but we might have met with imprudent and disorderly people. The Yeomanry Cavalry has been raised again throughout the country. The Wiltshire, for their noble conduct, have had His Majesty's thanks, and by way of distinction called Royal Wilts., and ordered to be clothed in scarlet, which is not in the best taste for an irregular corps; but the poor King is certainly mad about scarlet, for on his accession he wanted to dress the sailors in it!

I started a new page ... so there might have been a gap in the original letter!

It is my firm belief the poor people around here are very thankful to Papa for having recommended them not to leave their parishes and to avoid all rioting when they found how heavily they could be punished. But the law was administered with the utmost leniency, for the magistrate rarely committed the common labourers unless there was proof positive of their having been guilty of some great offence, and it is said they were chiefly shoemakers and little tradesmen who made so much disturbance and destroyed so much property. April 11th. – Yesterdays post announced that Louisa had given another son to the Knatchbull family, and was doing well. Tishy and her four boys were in high health. Her youngest is to be called Robert.

William has had good sport since Christmas; he has nearly recovered from his disfigurement, but I think it will always be perceptible when he laughs, from some muscles having been injured. John is at home from Oxford for Easter, also Charles.

If you meet with Jem Larkham, pray remember his ingratitude. Papa employed him at draining, with old George, last Autumn and Winter, and he earned ten shillings a week, a single man. He was sent to lend a hand at the barn one afternoon, and saw the wheat all nicely sacked. The temptation was too strong; he broke the barn and took a sack of it, which Papa himself traced to the tallet where he slept; so of course conviction followed, and he was sentenced to seven years. Which annoyed poor Papa much, as he thought he had reformed him.

Both Papa and Mama are well at present.
I think this should be long enough to satisfy you.
With best love to Margaret and yourself,
I am your affectionate Sister,

Ella Wyndham