

# To Miss LÆTITIA WILLIS, at Gloucester.

MY DEAR LETTY,

Inexpressible was the pleasure I received from yours of the 25th, which was last night put into my hands by Mrs Brentford, the milliner, from Gloucester — I rejoice to hear that my worthy governess is in good health, and, still more, that she no longer retains any displeasure towards her poor Liddy. I am sorry you have lost the society of the agreeable Miss Vaughn; but, I hope you won't have cause much longer to regret the departure of your school companions, as I make no doubt but your parents will, in a little time, bring you into the world, where you are so well qualified to make a distinguished figure. When that is the case, I flatter myself you and I shall meet again, and be happy together; and even improve the friendship which we contracted in our tender years — This at least I can promise — It shall not be for the want of my utmost endeavours, if our intimacy does not continue for life.

About five days ago we arrived in London, after an easy journey from Bath; during which, however, we were overturned, and met with some other little incidents, which, had like to have occasioned a misunderstanding betwixt my uncle and aunt; but now, thank God, they are happily reconciled: we live in harmony together, and every day make parties to see the wonders of this vast metropolis, which, however, I cannot pretend to describe; for I have not as yet seen one hundredth part of its curiosities, and I am quite in a maze of admiration.

The cities of London and Westminster are spread out into an incredible extent. The streets, squares, rows, lanes, and alleys, are innumerable. Palaces, public buildings, and churches rise in every quarter; and, among these last, St Paul's appears with the most astonishing pre-eminence. They say it is not so large as St Peter's at Rome; but, for my own part, I can have no idea of any earthly temple more grand and magnificent.

But even these superb objects are not so striking as the crowds

of people that swarm in the streets. I at first imagined that some great assembly was just dismissed, and wanted to stand aside till the multitude should pass; but this human tide continues to flow, without interruption or abatement, from morn till night. Then there is such an infinity of gay equipages, coaches, chariots, chaises, and other carriages, continually rolling and shifting before your eyes, that one's head grows giddy looking at them; and the imagination is quite confounded with splendour and variety. Nor is the prospect by water less grand and astonishing than that by land: you see three stupendous bridges, <sup>1</sup> joining the opposite banks of a broad, deep, and rapid river; so vast, so stately, so elegant, that they seem to be the work of the giants; betwixt them, the whole surface of the Thames is covered with small vessels, barges, boats, and wherries, passing to and fro; and below the three bridges, such a prodigious forest of masts, for miles together, that you would think all the ships in the universe were here assembled. All that you read of wealth and grandeur in the Arabian Nights' Entertainment, and the Persian Tales, <sup>2</sup> concerning Bagdad, Diarbekir, Damascus, Ispahan, and Samarkand, is here realized.

Ranelagh looks like the enchanted palace of a genie, adorned with the most exquisite performances of painting, carving, and gilding, enlightened with a thousand golden lamps, that emulate the noon-day sun; crowded with the great, the rich, the gay, the happy, and the fair; glittering with cloth of gold and silver, lace, embroidery, and precious stones. While these exulting sons and daughters of felicity tread this round of pleasure, or regale in different parties, and separate lodges, with fine imperial tea and other delicious refreshments, their ears are entertained with the most ravishing delights of music, both instrumental and vocal. There I heard the famous Tenducci, <sup>3</sup> a thing from Italy – It looks for all the world like a man, though they say it is not. The voice, to be sure, is neither man's nor woman's; but it is more melodious than either; and it warbled so divinely, that, while I listened, I really thought myself in paradise.

At nine o'clock, in a charming moonlight evening, we embarked

at Ranelagh for Vauxhall, in a wherry so light and slender that we looked like so many fairies sailing in a nutshell. My uncle, being apprehensive of catching cold upon the water, went round in the coach, and my aunt would have accompanied him, but he would not suffer me to go by water if she went by land; and therefore she favoured us with her company, as she perceived I had a curiosity to make this agreeable voyage — After all, the vessel was sufficiently loaded; for, besides the waterman, there was my brother Jerry, and a friend of his, one Mr Barton, a country gentleman, of a good fortune, who had dined at our house — The pleasure of this little excursion was, however, damped, by my being sadly frightened at our landing; where there was a terrible confusion of wherries, and a crowd of people bawling, and swearing, and quarrelling: nay, a parcel of ugly-looking fellows came running into the water, and laid hold of our boat with great violence, to pull it a-shore; nor would they quit their hold till my brother struck one of them over the head with his cane. But this flutter was fully recompensed by the pleasures of Vauxhall; which I no sooner entered, than I was dazzled and confounded with the variety of beauties that rushed all at once upon my eye. Image to yourself, my dear Letty, a spacious garden, part laid out in delightful walks, bounded with high hedges and trees, and paved with gravel; part exhibiting a wonderful assemblage of the most picturesque <sup>4</sup>and striking objects, pavilions, lodges, groves, grottoes, lawns, temples and cascades; porticoes, colonades, and rotundos; adorned with pillars, statues, and painting: the whole illuminated with an infinite number of lamps, disposed in different figures of suns, stars, and constellations; the place crowded with the gayest company, ranging through those blissful shades, or supping in different lodges on cold collations, enlivened with mirth, freedom, and good humour, and animated by an excellent band of music. Among the vocal performers I had the happiness to hear the celebrated Mrs —, <sup>5</sup>whose voice was loud and shrill, that it made my head ache through excess of pleasure.

In about half an hour after we arrived we were joined by my uncle, who did not seem to relish the place. People of experience

and infirmity, my dear Letty, see with very different eyes from those that such as you and I make use of – Our evening's entertainment was interrupted by an unlucky accident. In one of the remotest walks we were surprised with a sudden shower, that set the whole company a-running, and drove us in heaps, one upon another, into the rotunda; where my uncle, finding himself wet, began to be very peevish and urgent to be gone. My brother went to look for the coach, and found it with much difficulty; but as it could not hold us all, Mr Barton stayed behind. It was some time before the carriage could be brought up to the gate, in the confusion, notwithstanding the utmost endeavours of our new footman, Humphry Clinker, who lost his scratch periwig, [6](#) and got a broken head [7](#) in the scuffle. The moment we were seated, my aunt pulled off my uncle's shoes, and carefully wrapped his poor feet in her capuchin; [8](#) then she gave him a mouth-ful of cordial, which she always keeps in her pocket, and his clothes were shifted as soon as we arrived at lodgings; so that, blessed be God, he escaped a severe cold, of which he was in great terror.

As for Mr Barton, I must tell you in confidence, he was a little particular; but, perhaps, I mistake his complaisance; and I wish I may, for his sake – You know the condition of my poor heart: which, in spite of hard usage – And yet I ought not to complain: nor will I, till farther information.

Besides Ranelagh and Vauxhall, I have been at Mrs Cornelys' assembly, [9](#) which, for the rooms, the company, the dresses, and decorations, surpasses all description; but as I have no great turn for card playing, I have not yet entered thoroughly into the spirit of the place: indeed I am still such a country hoyden, [10](#) that I could hardly find patience to be put in a condition to appear, yet, as I was not above six hours under the hands of the hair-dresser, who stuffed my head with as much black wool as would have made a quilted petticoat; and, after all, it was the smallest head in the assembly, except my aunt's – She, to be sure, was so particular with her rumpt gown [11](#) and petticoat, her scanty curls, her lappet-head, [12](#) deep triple ruffles, and high

stays, that every body looked at her with surprise: some whispered, and some tittered; and lady Griskin, by whom we were introduced, flatly told her, she was twenty good years behind the fashion.

Lady Griskin is a person of fashion, to whom we have the honour to be related. She keeps a small rout <sup>13</sup> at her own house, never exceeding ten or a dozen card-tables, but these are frequented by the best company in town – She has been so obliging as to introduce my aunt and me to some of her particular friends of quality, who treat us with the most familiar good-humour: we have once dined with her, and she takes the trouble to direct us in all our motions. I am so happy as to have gained her good-will to such a degree, that she sometimes adjusts my cap with her own hands; and she has given me a kind invitation to stay with her all the winter. This, however, has been cruelly declined by my uncle who seems to be (I know not how) prejudiced against the good lady; for, whenever my aunt happens to speak in her commendation, I observe that he makes wry faces, though he says nothing — Perhaps, indeed, these grimaces may be the effect of pain arising from the gout and rheumatism, with which he is sadly distressed — To me, however, he is always good-natured and generous, even beyond my wish. Since we came hither, he has made me a present of a suit of clothes, with trimmings and laces, which cost more money than I shall mention; and Jerry, at his desire, has given me my mother's diamond crops, which are ordered to be set a-new; so that it won't be his fault if I do not glitter among the stars of the fourth or fifth magnitude. I wish my weak head may not grow giddy in the midst of all this gallantry and dissipation; though, as yet, I can safely declare, I could gladly give up all these tumultuous pleasures, for country solitude, and a happy retreat with those we love; among whom, my dear Willis will always possess the first place in the breast of her

Ever affectionate,  
LYDIA MELFORD