Isaac Ritson’s *The Borrowdale Letter, Copy of a Letter from a Young Shepherd to his Friend in Borrowdale* (1866)
THE
Borrowdale Letter
by Isaac Ritson

COPY OF A LETTER
FROM

A Young Shepherd

TO HIS FRIEND IN BORROWDALE

Describing his voyage from Whitehaven to Dublin, the wonderful sights he saw there, and the hardships he endured.

Whitehaven
Callander & Dixon Printers Market Place
1866.
EXPLANATORY NOTE.

This Epistle, illustrative of the dialect and primitive manners of the district in which Mary of Buttermere was born, was written by Mr. Isaac Ritson, of Lamont Bridge. As a specimen of the Cumberland dialect it has not been exceeded, perhaps never before equalled. This, however, is not its only merit; it abounds throughout with genuine humour, sarcastic, yet innocent, and hid under the natural veil of rustic simplicity. The author, a young man of more than ordinary talent, was the son of Isaac and Elizabeth Ritson, and was born in the year 1761. He received a classical education under the Rev. Mr. Blain. At the early age of sixteen he commenced his career as a teacher or schoolmaster at Carlisle, and afterwards at Penrith, but with little success. He then made a journey into Scotland, with the intention of studying medicine at Edinburgh. After residing there two years he went to London, professedly with a view of completing his medical education by an attendance at the hospitals and on lectures. In London, as well as at Edinburgh, he supported himself by his literary exertions. He published a translation of Homer's "Hymn to Venus," which, though but indifferently executed, was not ill received. In his poetical effusions there was an original wildness. His mind was strongly tinctured with the sombre magnificence of his native country, so that his poetry, like Gray's, was somewhat overloaded with what Dr. Johnson calls "a cumbrous splendour." Some specimens of his muse will be found in "Hutchinson's History of Cumberland," vol. 1, p. 335. He wrote the preface to "Clarke's Survey of the Lakes," and for a short period the medical articles in the "Monthly Review," but many of his best works are lost, particularly a masterly translation of "Hesiod's Theogony." After a short but irregular life in London, he died at Islington in 1780, and in the 27th year of his age.—Boucher.
THE BORROWDALE LETTER.

FRIND,

I send thee thisen to tell thee amackily what dreedful fine things I saw ith' rwoad tuv and at yon Dublin, and t' hardships I've bidden. I set forrat o' Midsummer day and gat to Whitehebben, a girt sea-side town whor sea-nags eats cwoals out o' rack hurreys, like as barrels dus yal drink. I think sea-nags is nut varra wild, for they winter them i'girt twolds wi' out yats; an as I was luiken about to gang to Ireland, I saw twea duzen o' fellows myakin a sea-nag tedder styake ov iron. I ast yan o' them if I cud git ridden to Dublin? an a man in a three nuikt hat 'at knack't like rotten sticks, telt me I mud gang wi' him, for a thing they caw tide, like t'post oth'land, was ganfing, an waddn't stay o' neobody niver. Then four men in a lile sea-nag, a fwoald, (I think 'at they caw't a bwoat,) heltter our nag and led it out oth' fwoald, then our nag slipt thelter an ran away; but tha hang up a deal of wind-clayths like blinder brydals, wi' hundreds o'ryapes for rines. Land ran away an left us; an our nag had eaten se mony cwoals it was cwody, an cantert up wi' ty a end an down wi' tudder. I turnt as seek as a peet; Oh wunds! I was bad, an spewt aw at iver was imma. I thout I sud a deet. I spewt aw cullers. Neest day after we set forrat an island met us; they cawt it Man. I wad fain a seen't cum hard tull us, but it slipt away by an left us; but some mair land met us neest day after; it was varra shy but we follow't it up, becose they said Dublin was on't. I perswadet 'tman wi't three-nuikt hat to ow'rtak't if he brast
his nag, an he telt a fellow to twine tail out, as they du swine or bulls when they carry them to bait at Kessick, an tha wiln't gang on; than we got to Dublin presently. But I hed lik'd tall a forgotten to tell tha seek girt black fish we saw; they enwurt when tha cum out o' th girt dub like thunner, an they swallow land-nags as hens du bigg; mappen eat sea-nags when they dee. It was a nice breet mwarnin when we war 'i Dublin bay, as they ca'n't whor tsea gangs up toward land as a dog dus to th' head of a bull. Twa men i' yan o'th' bweas cum tall our nag side; tha ca'w them Paddeys, yan coudn't tell ther toke by gessae; tha drank hartily of our watter, it stunk tyu; but we had nout better to drink, for't girt dub's as sote as brine, it wad puze them if thou tyasted it. We ga them twes fellows 'i bweo a halter, an tha led our nag into Dublin, as wild as 't was. But O man! what a fine country thar was ov tudder side on us, -hooses as white as drip, an as rank as mice. Dublin town lik'd like a girt fwoald full o' sheep, at yan cud nobbut juvex t'heeds on; chimus liikt like hworms, an kurr steeplies an spires, as they cau them, like as menny gwoat-hworms amang-tudder. Sea-nags is as rank I' Dublin beck as if thou was luikin at ten thousand geese iv a gutter; they hevent fwoolds for them as we huv in Ingland; town keeps them warm i' winter, but tha feed wi' beck sand, as they du at Whitehebben wi' cwoals, but nut out o' rack hurreys; tha've a mouth at a side, whor mon feeds tem in at wi' girt iron spains. But, O man! it was lucky J led ov a man at went to't soulin wi' me when I was a lil' lad; we war deelish thick, an he sad he wad let me see aw things. If I hed gyan into Dublin by mesell, yan ma gang fifty miles a day an nout but hoos for hoos, an like our lwoins for lenth, yan cannot see lyearth for pyaayment nea whor; nor I sud niver see av'd Ingland agyan if I hed been be mesell, I dar say, for th' ur the deevil for settin yan rang if yan ass them. There's hooses tha ca' public beeldins, at's sae fine; I ca'n't tell tha what thur like. The Parlemen-hoes, whor gentlemen gang to bate yan anudder, there's a vast o' girt styan props o' th twor side' on; there's a room wi' reed furms in't, whor the feight, I luik it's bluid, m'happen. 

Theear was a lile woman let's see that hooz, about fwor fuit hee; she was as thick as three awld mears twined togudder. I wundert at she dudn't grow heer, leevin in a hooz twenty or thirty fuit hee, but she was byrad as a haycock. Ebben anesit it, about a styen-thro off the Parlemen-hoes, was Collership-hoes; it's a bigger plyace mer tudder. If thou was iver in whor girt crags king owr ov aw sides o' th', it wad be like t'square, as they ca'n't th middle o' Collership-hoeses. Fwock 'at I saw thar war myast o' tham as black as deeves: it certain is inn't hell, but tha say tha git deed fwock out o' thar greaves! - I think it's true, for I saw a varst o' deed fwock's byans, an some lockt up i' glass coffin wi' flesh on; an tha hed burns an bits o' flesh perserved i' bottles as fwock dus berries. Theear was a fellow wi' a bunch o' kays 'at opent looks an dures as fast as luik: it nayad me think o' th' Rebellations. whor yan reads o' th' kays o' deeth an bell; thou mappen understands that plyace. We war in a plyace they ca'w Muzeen, whor theear's aw things 'at's comical, a thousand things 'at ton niver saw, nor I can saw. Theear was mus-deer hworms, as byrad as our back-bwood, an bits ov aw manner o' hworms, I cannot tell tha what, but theear's the nyam i' th' Rebellations; an we'll huv a varst a' toke fra I bena yeable to cum an see tha. I was at a plyace tha ca'w T'Exchande, whor fwock fra aw muiks o' th' wardl meet togudder to buy an aw things 'at iver thou can nyam; t' midst o's like a beehive, but stands 't top ov lang freestyan legs, wid a girt round winda i' th' crown on', an like a wide hooz round about t' legs, at covers as mickle grund as t' tarn at 't Gowd-Ark Inn, thou knust. I saw a plyace tha ca'w Cassel, whor a man tha ca'w "Tennant levnes; he's stuart ov Ireland for our king. 't Lword Mear ov Dublin's his heed servant, an fwock sed he went thro hell to kurk irvy Sunday! I thout it had been sum street Iwomin, mappen, 'at the cau sa, but I fairly saw him stamin like a duir-steed, rais'd about twey years o' th' yeart, but I think he was chaine'd tu th' spot, becose he dudn't stur, mappen deed, but it was a dark black Iwomin, cover'd owi' black hooses, an I persued my fuit to carry me a guid way off seeck eusoritys, for
I was amyast freetent to deeth; but it was varra weel I hed strenth to run away. Now thou may be sure I gev my conrad a deevlish lessin for trailin me thro' hell, he's flait o' nout, but carry'd me to parish kurk: it's as big as a toun for girtness, an as menny fwok at it; there was hoaf-a-duzzen o'priests at wark, but we'd nobbut staid a bit when summert th' caws t'rworgan began a beelin like a hundred mad bulls, an as menny lile lads i' thar sarks begun a screemin murder, I think, for ivry beel was like thunner; my feet then carry'd me widout perswadin in a callevir ow'r fwok, and aw 'at was imme way, till I gat intul a girl feeld a mile about, th' cawd it Steben's Green, I think, after a man on a gilt gray nag, 'at was stannan a top ov a lile hoos i' th' midst on't. He hed his swurd drawn, but he dursn't git off for want o' room. I think th' sed he'd been freetent as I was, but I was sea freetent I hardly knew what I dud or sed; but I saw annuder man a top ov a lile hoos, i' th' midst ov a gilt street lwonnin: I think th' war brudders, for thar cwoats was like a slyated hoos-side, an thar war as pale as deeth i' th' fyaec, like mesell; roond t'wor cawd feeld was t' finest gravel gyat thou iver stept on, an thar war hundreds an thousands ov fwok stavelin aboot on't. I began to be as mad as I was at cwolly when it brack t'neck o' t' bell-wether, 'at th' wadn't help t' man on his oan nag down when it was amayst dark; I was mad an swet for feer, an dursn't say a word because thar was sa mony three-nuikt hat men thear, an lyadies, as they caw them: I'd better been i' Borrodale. I hav offen thowt sen if we hed yan o' them lyadies among our bigg, she wad surra to keep t' crows off't bravely. I ast a man at I kent, what was t' matter wi' some o' th' wummon fwok, 'ot th' war surra tea way, an he tell me it was a fashun to weer huips; nut a badden nowther if it keep thare legs togidder, for thar was some o' tham varra bonny; but I wadnent hev yan o' them for a wife if she hed aw Borrodale, wi'out th' wad doff thare huips when they gang to bed, for th' ur as brayd as enny bed i' Borrodale, an thou knowws thar wad be nea room but atop o' them, an what rust cud yan git atop ov a whick bed? Hang them! thare aw white-heedit, like our wheet miller
lasses, an tha toke an yilp like mice. I wunder what tha see 'at fancy seck, but tha've nice lile fuits, 'at maks me think tha wad pruive nimmel shipherts on our brant fells; an we wad larn them to soav an clip, an thare huip pockets wad be varra servisable to put a lam in ov aider side, in a coald mwornin i spring, when thare starv'd amayst an gits lile milk. But to be shwort, as our preest sez in his sarmen, I hedn't time to think ov aw this when I saw't, for my fuit ran wi' ma throo amang fwork an owr fwork sea fast I freetent them; tha thout 'at donnet was imme: tha mud ha thout reet if tha thout 't donnet hed setten me forrat, for if tha keep seck farlies o' purpose to freeten fwork, thears nea matter how menny o' them be trodden to deeth; but I'll promas tha I niver stopt tull I gat tull a sea-nag, 'at cum tuv Ingland; an I wa seek agyan afwor I gat hyam; I cud nowther eat or drink aw th' time; an if thou saw me now, thou cudn't tell me be a frosk at hed been hung up bi't heels i' th' sunshine an dry'd to deeth, for I's as thin as lantern leets. I think thou munit expect to see me this muth: this is three days at hyam, an I've a stomach fit to eat t' horse ahint t' saddel. I git five myals a day, an a snack when I gang to bed; I hwap I's git strang agyan or 't'll be lang, an than I sall cum to see tha. This is nobbyt like the clock when it gis warmin to strike twelve, to what I'll tell tha when I cum. My kind luiv to tha, an may guid luck keep tha fra aw 'at's bad, an dunnet be keen o' gangin abrewad for fear th' donnet git tha.—Th' END.

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The Salamanca Corpus

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