

The Salamanca Corpus

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

DH 394/28

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 Eamont 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 tinged 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 1789, and in the 27th year of his age.—*Boucher.*

THE BORROWDALE LETTER.

FRIND,

I send the' thisan to tell the' amackily what dreedful fine things I saw ith' rwoad tuy 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 frowds wi' out yats; an as I was luiken about to gang to Ireland, I saw twea duzzen o' fellows myakin a sea-nag tedder styake ov iron. I ast yan o' them if I cud git riden 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 gangin, an waddn't stay o' neabody niver. Then four men in a lile sea-nag, a fwoal, (I think 'at they caw't a bwoat,) heltert our nag and led it out oth' fwoald, then our nag slipt t' helter 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' tya 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 efter 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 efter; 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 ont, as they dua swine or bulls when they carry them to bait at Kessick, an tha wiln't gang on; than we gat to Dublin prusently. But I hed lik'd tull a forgotten to tell tha seck girt black fish we saw; they snwort when tha cam 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 mwornin when we war 'i Dublin bay, as they caw't whor t'sea gangs up towart land as a dog dus to th' heed of a bull. Twea men i' yan o'thar bwoats cum tull our nag side; tha caw't them Paddeys, yan cuddn't tell ther toke by geese; 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 puzzen tha if thou tyasted it. We ga them twea fellows 't bwoat a helter, 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 toun luik'd like a girt fwoald full o' sheep, at yan cud nobbut just see t'heids on; chimlas luikt like hworns, an kurk steeples an spires, as they caw them, like as menny gwoat-hworns amang-tudder. Seagnags is as rank i' Dublin beck as if thou was luikin at ten thousand geese iv a gutter; they hevent fwoalds for them as we hev in England; 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 men feeds t'em in at wi' girt iron spuins. But, O man! it was lucky I leet ov a man at went to't scuil wi' me when I was a lile lad; we war deevilish thick, an he sed 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 lwonins for lenth, yan cannot see t'yearth for pyavement nea whor; nor I sud niver see awld England agyan if I hed been be mesell, I dar say, for tha ur the devil for settin yan rang if yan ass them. Thare's hooses tha caw public beeldins, at's sae fine; I cannot tell tha what thur like. The Parlemen-hoos, whor gentlemen gang to baite yan anudder, thare's a vast o' girt styan props o' th' fwor side on't; thare's a room wi' reed furms in't, whor tha feight, I luik it's bluid, m'happen.

Thear was a lile woman let's see that hoos, about fwor fuit hee; she was as thick as three awld mears twined togidder. I wundert at she dudn't grow heer, leevin in a hoos twenty or thirty fuit hee, but she was bryad as a haycock. Ebben anenst it, about a styan-thro off the Parlemen-hoos, was Collership-hoos: it's a bigger plyace ner tudder. If thou was iver in whor girt crags hing ovr ov aw sides o' th', it wad be like t'square, as they caw't i' th' middle o' th' Collership-hooses. Fwok 'at I saw thar war myast o' them as black as deevils: it sartainly isn't hell, but tha say tha git deed fwok out o' thar greaves!—I think it's true, for I saw a varst o' deed fwok's byans, an some lockt up i' glass coffins wi' flesh on; an tha hed barns an bits o' flesh presarved i' bottles as fwok dus berries. Thear was a fellow wi' a bunch o' kays 'at opent locks an duirs as fast as luik: it myad me think o' th' Rebelations, whor yan reads o' th' kays o' deeth an hell: thou mappen understands that plyace. We war in a plyace they caw't Muzeem, whor thear's aw things 'at's comical, a thousan things 'at tou niver saw, nor I can caw. Thear was muse-deer hworns, as bryad as our back-bwoard, an bits ov aw manner o' hworns, I cannot tell tha what, but thear's the nyam i' th' Rebelations; an wee'll hev a varst a' toke fra I bea yeable to cum an see tha. I was at a plyace tha caw t'Exchange, whor fwok fra aw nuiks o' th' warld meet togidder to buy an sell aw things 'at iver thou can nyam; t' midst ont's like a beehive, but stands 't top ov lang freestyan legs, wid a girt round winda i' th' crown on't, an like a wide hoos round about t' legs, 'at covers as mickle grund as t' tarn at t' Gowd-Ark Inn, thou kenst. I saw a plyace tha caw Cassel, whor a man tha caw 'Tennant leves; he's stuart ov Ireland for our king, t' Lword Mear ov Dublin's his heed sarvant, an fwok sed he went thro hell to kurk ivry Sunday! I thout it had been sum street lwonnin, mappen, 'at tha caw't sa, but I fairly saw him stannin like a duir-steed, rais'd about twea yeards o' th' yearth, but I think he was chain'd tu th' spot, becose he dudn't stur, mappen deed, but it was a dark black lwonnin, cover'd ovr wi' black hooses, an I persuadet my fuit to carry me a guid way off seck eurositys, 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 comrad 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 ; thear was hoaf-a-duzzen o'priests at wark, but we'd nobbut staid a bit when summet tha caws t'rworgan began a beelin like a hundred mad bulls, an as menny lile lads i' thar sarks began 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 girt feeld a mile about, tha cawd it Steben's Green, I think, efter a man on a girt 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 tha 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 girt street lwonnin : I think tha war brudders, for thar cwoats was like a slyated hoos-side, an tha war as pale as deeth i' th' fyace, like mesell ; roond t'fwor cawd feeld was t' finest gravel gyat thou iver stept on, an thear war hundreds an thousands o' 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 tha waddn'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 becose thear 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 had yan o' them lyadies amang our bigg, she wad sarra 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 tha war sea bryad tea way, an he telt me it was a fashun to veer huips ; nut a badden nowther if it kept thare legs togidder, for thear was some o' them varra bonny ; but I waddent hev yan o' them for a wife if she hed aw Borrodale, wi'out tha wad doff thare huips when they gang to bed, for tha ur as bryad as enny bed i' Borrodale, an thou knows thear 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 seek, 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 sarvisable 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 fwok an ovr fwok sea fast I freeten 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 seek farlies o' purpose to freeten fwok, thears nea matter how menny o' them be trodden to deeth; but I'll promus tha I niver stopt tull I gat tull a sea-nag, 'at cum tuv England; 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 cuddn'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 munnet expect to see me this munth: 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 hwop I's git strang agyan or 't'll be lang, an than I sall cum to see tha. This is nobbut like the clock when it gis warnin 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 abrwoad for fear th' donnet git tha.—TH' END.

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