

Letter from Dorothy Wordsworth to Thomas de Quincey, May 01, 1809

154. D. W. to Thomas De Quincey

Address: Thomas de Quincey Esq^{re}, No 82 Gt Titchfield Street, Cavendish Square, London.

Postmark: E May 5 1809. *Stamp:* Keswick 298.

MS. Miss Maud Craig.

Japp. K. MY i. 371, p. 292.

Grasmere, Monday, May 1st [1809]

My dear Friend,

I have just dismissed Johnny with his shame-faced smile, telling him that I wanted to be alone to write to Mr. de Quincey. I asked him what I should say for him and he could think of nothing but that I should tell you to come back again, and even of that he was

ashamed, and seemed to struggle with other thoughts which he could not utter while he blushed all over his face. He is a happy creature -- more joyous than ever; and yet more thoughtful. I am sure you will say he is much improved, and will perceive his mind opening before you when you renew your long conversations with him. Reading is now no longer a painful exertion to him, though certainly he does not make out his words without great difficulty -- but he likes the exercise, not much yet for the sake of the matter contained in his Book, but as an exercise, and I do not doubt that in a little time he will be able to read without spelling, though he is slow in learning --

I was called down stairs and found Miss Hutchinson reading Coleridge's *Christabel* to Johnny -- She was tired, so I read the greatest part of it: he was excessively interested especially with the first part, but he asked 'why she could not say her prayers in her own room', and it was his opinion that she ought to have gone 'directly to her Father's Room to tell him that she had met with the Lady under the old oak tree and all about it.'

My dear Friend, I felt a pang when you complained of not having heard from us for so long a time, though I had written a hurried letter on Friday evening, the day on which we received yours. It appeared to me as if I had been ungrateful and unfeeling in not

writing; at least that there might be something like social intercourse between us while your mind was vexed and harassed by the labour which for our sakes you have taken upon you, though I could not have hoped to be very entertaining; for what have I to tell you but of the goings-on of our quiet household? -- We are indeed now a quiet family, wanting Sissy and, above all, Coleridge; who though not noisy himself makes a bustle in the house -- besides we have been but little plagued with smoke lately which makes us seem to have nothing to do but to sew, read, write, walk about and play with the Children for our pleasure. I often wish that you were here now, that you might know that we are not always oppressed with business and labour -- but soon we are to have workmen again at the chimnies and they will revive past miseries; but we do hope that they may do something to prevent our suffering next winter as we suffered the last; for we are assured by many persons that Register stoves will entirely cure the evil in the parlours, and we would gladly submit to the inconvenience of having the kitchen chimney pulled down (which we think will be the only effectual remedy) -- but alas! in two years more, we fear we shall have to remove from this house, for Mr. Crump has taken a

-- 325 --

Cottage at Ambleside for the next summer, a proof that he wishes at least to spend the summer months among the Lakes, and what is to be gained by letting his own house and renting another? It will be very grievous to be disturbed again, if we *should* get the chimnies cured, after having had one whole year's trouble and discomfort; and *you* will be left in the lurch, for if we quit this house there is no prospect but of our quitting *Grasmere*, for there is not another shelter for us here. but this is anticipating evils, and foolishly too, when we have had so many actual evils of the same kind to endure. We are greatly concerned at the delay of the Pamphlet, but much more at your being detained in London so long, and your having so much trouble. I will quit this subject with a hope that before the end of this week we may receive the parcel. By the bye I hope you will have had leisure to think about Johnny's pictures, for he expects them with impatience, and is very proud of those which he already possesses. My Brother has begun to correct and add to the poem of the White Doe, and has been tolerably successful. He intends to finish it before he begins with any other work, and has made up his mind, if he can satisfy himself in the alterations he intends to make, to publish it next winter, and to follow the publication by that of Peter Bell and the Waggoner.¹ He has also made a resolution to write upon publick affairs in the *Courier*, or some other newspaper, for the sake of getting money; not wholly however on that account for unless he were animated by the importance of his subject and the hope of being of use he could do nothing in that way.² Coleridge, however, writes to desire that he will not withdraw himself from poetry, for he is assured that there will be no need of it as he (Coleridge) can get money enough. I have, indeed, better hopes of him at present than I have had for this long time, laying together his own account of himself, and the account which Mrs. C. gives us of him. He intends to go to Penrith on Wednesday to superintend the Press, therefore you may expect a visit from The Friend

on Monday morning (I believe that is the day on which it will arrive in London). As to my Brother's writing for a newspaper I do not much like the thought of it; but, unless the pamphlet (the most improbable thing in the world) should make his poems sought after I know not how we can go on without his employing some portion of his time in that way -- but the misfortune is, that he cannot lay down one work, and begin with another -- It was never intended that he should make a trade out of his faculties. His

-- 326 --

thoughts have been much employed lately in the arrangement of his published poems, as he intends to blend the 4 volumes³ together whenever they are re-printed - or should I say *if ever?* for we hear no more from Longman, and I believe that the two last volumes scarcely sell at all. This reminds me of the last Edinburgh review which I saw at Mr. Wilson's. There never was such a compound of despicable falsehood, malevolence, and folly as the concluding part of the Review of Burns's Poems (which was, in fact, all that I thought it worth while to read being the only part in which my Brother's works are alluded to). It would be treating Mr. Jeffrey with too much respect to notice any of his *criticisms*; but when he makes my Brother censure himself; by quoting words as from his poems which are not there, I do think it is proper that he should be contradicted and put to shame. I mentioned this to my Brother and he agrees with me; not that he would do it himself; but he thinks it would be well for you, or some other Friend of his to do it for him -- but in what way? -- I think a letter might be addressed to him in the Edinburgh Papers and in one or two of the London papers. A private letter to himself would be of no use; and of course he would not *publish* any condemnation of himself in his own Review, if you were to call upon him to do so. I wish you would think about it. Mr. Wilson came to us on Saturday morning and stayed till Sunday afternoon -- William read the *White Doe*; and Coleridge's *Christabel* to him, with both of which he was much delighted. He has promised to come again on Wednesday and stay all night and my brother in return has promised to read *Peter Bell* to him. They talked about going thro Wales and thence into Ireland, and I do not think that the scheme will drop therefore you must hold yourself in readiness to meet them in Wales if you should not be here at the time. Miss Hutchinson has some thoughts of going into Wales in June; in which case William would accompany her; and Mr. Wilson would either go along with them or follow them -- but if Miss H. does not go into Wales so soon, they most likely will defer the journey till the Autumn, when you will, I hope, certainly be here. -- --

Do excuse this scrawl. I left the Parlour for the pleasure of being alone; and having no fire upstairs, I sat down in a sunny spot in a room without a table, and am writing with the writing desk upon my knee, -- a lazy trick I will allow -- but it will be to you a sufficient excuse for my bad penmanship. Mrs. Kelsall has

-- 327 --

sent a very pretty carpet for your new house -- but we are not at all satisfied with the colour and pattern of the Calico for Bedcurtains, etc., and are upon the whole sorry that we did not make choice ourselves at Kendal -- I am called away -- I go unwillingly, for I wanted to fill my Paper. God bless you! believe me ever, my dear Friend, your affectionate

Dorothy Wordsworth.

I dare say my Sister will write to you soon, for the pleasure of writing, not to spare me trouble, for I assure you it never can be a trouble to me to write to you. Again God bless you!