

Melrose, January 10th, 1838. Thursday Evening,

I may venture to say you would have been gratified, could you have been with me for the last few days, and especially to-day. I have just returned from a visit to Abbotsoford, and now sit writing within a minute's walk of Melrose Abbey. — But I forget that my journal is three days in arrears.

On the 8th inst. (Tuesday) I went immediately after breakfast to the University and heard Professor Christison's lecture (Materia Medica). He is an excellent lecturer. I spent a half-hour with him, in looking over his Cabinet of Preparations, which contains a large number of fruits &c. preserved in strong brine instead of spirits. I acquired some useful information concerning the best way to close the jars, for which he has some very neat plans. Then I heard Prof. Forbes again, elegant as usual; but he did not succeed very well in his experiments. The next hour I had a rich treat. I heard another lecture from Professor Wilson, on the association of ideas, which on this occasion he noticed in a more practical view than before. He recited, in his glowing manner several passages from Virgil, and a long one from Milton, and gave a long and most eloquent analytic commentary upon each, far exceeding any thing of the kind I ever heard before. After visiting the Library of the University — a most magnificent room — I set out for Holyrood House, which is situated at the foot of the Canongate in a vale, as it were, between Calton Hill and Salisbury Craigs. The greater part of the quadrangle was built in the reign of Charles the Second; but a portion of the side next the Royal Chapel (which is in ruins) belongs to the original structure, and is far more interesting than the rest. I was taken however first to the modern portion, and passed through the rooms occupied by the Earl of Breadalbane, the Lord Keeper (for Holyrood is you know a Royal Palace, still) when he is here. Many of the rooms are lined with Lobelins tapestry — the gift of the court of France — and contain a large number of ~~fine~~ oil paintings — the private property of Earl Breadalbane. They are mostly portraits of his own ancestors and those of the other distinguished Scottish families. One a full length female figure is by Vandyke and is exceedingly beautiful. Several others are by Teniers, Sir

Geoffrey Kneller, &c. There also is the room occupied by George IV. when at Holyrood, and a full length portrait by Milne. I passed through the suite of rooms occupied by Charles II. when driven from France. They contain some fine pictures, and the carved work of the ceiling, &c. is very fine. In the older portion of the building, I first saw the large picture gallery, painted, nobody knows when, of all the Kings, and great men of Scotland. The collection seems to have been painted by the square yard. There is a portrait of Queen Mary, but it is a useless doubt. But I pass over all the rest, and we came to the apartments occupied by the unfortunate Mary; the audience chamber, with the furniture brought from France by Mary; the chair-covers embroidered by her own hand; the Bible chair or throne for herself and Darnley; thence we ascended to her private apartments, which remain almost as she left them, so that except for the marks of age, you might fancy that she left them only last week. Her bed is still in its place, her looking glass and toilet-table; and above all her work-box, that ever of which is embroidered with her own hand. Within are the various compartments for needles, thread, &c. — and especially, a beautiful miniature of herself, looking as fresh as if painted yesterday. That would not give for this miniature? Here I saw the private stair by which she descended to the her oratory, in the chapel; close adjoining is the closet in which she was supping with Riccio, when the murderers, according to the private story, killed him, and in the far corner of the ante-room they show the trace of blood upon the floor (rather disgusting), where he was killed. On descending we visit the ruins of the chapel, or abbey, the main walls of which are standing, and a few of the columns which supported the roof. There I saw the low minaret, the private stair, the oratory, tombstones of old abbots and knights, the bones of some nameless Scottish Kings. I bought one or two poor prints, a cast of the seal-ring of Mary, plucked a bit of Holly from a bush standing within the place of the altar, before which Mary was married to Bothwell, and reluctantly took my leave. There was yet some time remaining, so I set out to climb Arthur's Seat, which rises abruptly behind Salisbury Craig, to the height of eight or nine hundred feet. I attained my wish, and had a beautiful view from the summit, of the city, beneath my feet, and the wide country

around. I descended more rapidly than I went up, though at some little risk to my neck, returned to Dr. Greville's where I dined and spent all the evening. I had engaged yesterday to breakfast with Dr. Graham. I therefore set off early for that purpose, afterwards accompanied him to the garden, examined the ground &c. passed some time in the splendid Palm house. I spent a portion of the morning also with Mr. Nicoll, examining with the microscope his beautiful collection of recent and fossil wood in thin slices, learned how to prepare them &c. — Then arranged my affairs to leave Edinburgh in the morning. In the evening Dr. Greville and myself dined with Mr. Wilson (Glasgow naturalist), the brother of the gifted Professor Wilson, himself almost equally gifted, but with a more healthy tone of mind. We talked us so much that our stay was prolonged until nearly the "tree shot" hour about the town, when we parted, after a pressing invitation to visit him at his country residence in case I ever visited Scotland at a more pleasant season. Taking leave of my kind friends the Greville's, I was early this morning on my way to Melrose. I have been received with the utmost kindness, not only by this agreeable and most excellent family, but among all the acquaintances I have made in Edinburgh. I had purchased for you a collection of *Spizus* &c. sold by Dr. Greville & the pastor Mr. Drummond, with which I was very much pleased and doubt not you would like them much. But Dr. Greville saw it, and afterwards insisted on sending a much handsomer copy to Dr. Murray, which was accordingly placed in my hands for him.

Melrose is about 16 miles from Edinburgh, on one of the routes to Newcastle. We came upon the Tweed along a rugged range of hills, at first a very small stream, we followed it along the sinuous valleys for a long way, until it became a pretty considerable river for Great Britain. At length the valleys grew wider, softer, and in the proper season doubtless very beautiful. A smaller stream joined it at some distance before us, and as its spring vale came into view, the tower, I beg his pardon, Conch was pointed with his whip to the opposite side and said Abbotsford; and true enough the towers of this quaint castle-like house were distinguishable, in the midst of a grove mostly of Scotch oak &c. near the

banks of the Yarrow. We soon after crossed the Tweed, at the place where the "White Lady" frightened the Sacristan, in the Monastery; the scene of which you know was laid at Melrose and the neighborhood. The fine old ruin of Melrose Abbey now came into view, half surrounded by a dirty little Scotch village. Here I abandoned the coach until tomorrow, secured a gig, and was soon on my way to Abbotsford. One or two servants have the care of the house, one of whom acted as my cicerone. You may read more elaborate descriptions than I can give. Suffice it to say, that I entered the hall, with its gothic windows of painted glass, hung round with relics and curiosities too numerous to mention, hung round with the blazoned shields of the border chieftans, armor, battle-axes, and arms; the fire-place copied from some of the arches of Melrose; the grate one that belonged to archbishop Sharp; Two cannon balls picked up on the battle ground of Flodden Field were placed one each side the grate. The oak carvings in this as in all the other rooms, partly executed for the purpose, and partly borrowed from old abbeys &c., are very fine. Crossing a vestibule I found myself in the study, surrounded with books, the furniture just as Sir Walter left it. I sat in his chair, by his own desk; next the library; the largest and most splendid apartment; a fine collection of books, and other curiosities; a marble bust of Sir Walter by Chantrey &c. &c. — Then comes the drawing-room, with its curious furniture, its ebony chairs, and ebony cabinet presented by George the fourth; the urn sent by Byron &c. &c. and some fine paintings both portraits and others. Then we have the armory, with a world of relics and curiosities Rob Roy's gun and Purse, sword of men of war more than I remember. — the dining room, the breakfast room &c. In all the pictures I saw the one I loved for most (although perhaps much less valuable than most) was a painting of Queen Mary's head, after her murder. All the horrid parts of the picture were kept out of view; but the same countenance as the miniature I saw at Holyrood were distinguishable; as a piece of painting it was exquisite. I do not know the artist. The grounds around are in very pretty taste; but I think they have been somewhat over-romanced. The building itself is what Scott called it, "~~and~~ ~~romanced~~ ~~in~~ ~~stone~~ and mortar" a romance in stone and mortar.

35

A visit to Abbotsford gives rise to painful reflections, now that we know Scott's chief incentive to exertion was to be the founder of a family or clan. His long-cherished plans for amassing a fortune were frustrated, notwithstanding his immense labor; the family name and baronetcy are like to become extinct; as the present Sir Walter (who is said to be a block head) has no children, and is well known to quarrel with his wife. Scott's reputation is like on the whole to suffer from his biography Mr. Lockhart, and it is well perhaps that it should; but it were more befitting that such needless exposures should come from another hand than that of his own familiar friend. If it were my enemy, then I could have borne it, &c. &c. Lockhart has also made many enemies, by his studied attempt to throw the blame of the failure in Scott's book-selling speculations wholly upon his partner the Ballantynes. Their executors have made an exposition in which they retort very fairly and throw the blame chiefly upon Scott. The almost superhuman exertions, however, which Scott made in old age for the sole benefit of his creditors, and with no hope of doing anything for himself, were very creditable to him, and should count highly in his favor.

I walked back from Abbotsford, noticing more particularly the beauty of the valley, and the fine Eildon hills which rise behind Melrose from whose summits it is said a very beautiful prospect may be obtained. I then spent the remainder of the afternoon about Melrose Abbey, the most beautiful ruin I have ever seen or expected to see, more beautiful than I had imagined, and just in that state of dilapidation in which it ~~shows to~~ appears to the greatest advantage (as a ruin; for were it entire it would be indeed magnificent. I feel now as if I should never care to see another ruin of the kind; and therefore I shall not visit Dryburgh Abbey (where Scott is buried) as I had intended; although I suppose we shall pass by nearly in sight of it tomorrow. I wish I could bring you some sketch or print that would give you some idea of Melrose, but I fear this is impossible. The exquisite carvings in stone, especially, cannot be appreciated until they are seen. It is said (I forget the lines) that Melrose should be seen by moonlight, and this I can well imagine; but this evening there is neither moonlight nor starlight.

Durham, Saturday Evening, 12th Jan. 1839,

Stopped at the bottom of the Lash Tye on Thursday Evening, sitting in the traveller's room at the George Hotel, Melrose. In the morning I paid a parting visit to the beautiful ruins of the Abbey, where I was so fortunate as to discover a stairway, which gave me access, by means of galleries in the solid wall high up among the ruined arches and turrets, which thus gave me some new and charming views. I had time also before the coach arrived to procure some very pretty lithographs of the ruins, and was soon on the way, on a rather warm misty morning, mounted on the outside of a stage-coach, down the beautiful valley of the Tyne. We passed the ruined ~~and~~ ivy-mantled arches of Dryburgh Abbey, beautifully embowered among the trees, where sleep the remains of Walter Scott, and farther down several seats of nobility and gentry; and soon, leaving the Tyne we crossed a range of hills, and came down into the fertile Tervotdale, so famous in border story. Again leaving this valley we wound our way up the Led water, a tributary of the Tervot, rising high up the Cheviot Hills, just on the line between England & Scotland. We passed Jedburgh, a Scotch village of considerable size and importance, fertile and comfortable of course. Here is an old abbey, which I should have been led to pass by had I not seen Melrose; there we ascended the Led for many a weary mile, until we reached its sources high among the Cheviot Hills. Our course was literally over the mountain and over the moor; for after a tedious ascent, we crossed the boundary line at an elevation of 1500 feet above the level of the sea. We were by this time thoroughly drenched with mist and rain; the wind forbidding the use of our umbrellas. We immediately commenced our descent, and just at dusk stopped for a hearty dinner at Otterbourne, so famous in the history of the border warfare as the place where the memorable Cherry Chase. It was too dark to see the cross erected to mark the spot where Percy fell. Pass we over the ride from this to Newcastle, as we had sitting, think we passed near some places of interest (Shillingham, the residence of the Earl of Tankerville, for example) and arrived at Newcastle about 9 o'clock in the evening. In the morning I delivered notes of introduction from Mother & Grenville to George Wailes Esq., one of the active members of the Newcastle Natural History Society; visited their fine building and really splendid museum, especially rich in fossil remains &c., and also in the British birds; misarrangements for correspondence and exchange

with the Michigan State Survey, was introduced to a botanist or two; visited the Castle, built by Robert, brother of William the Conqueror, if I recollect aright, which has stood firmly for many a year, and may stand for centuries more, on as low of the world's summit; the walls are in many places 4 feet thick; looked about the town; part of it very old and queer, but whole streets of new and splendid buildings are going up all at once, chiefly by the enterprise of a single individual. — Could not stay for visiting a coal mine, and so just as it grew dark took leave of Mr. Wailes who has been so obliging to me the whole day, snatched a hasty dinner, jumped into a stage-coach at 5 P.M., and arrived here at 8 o'clock in the evening (14 miles). We passed on the way Swinley Castle, and Lawton House (the seat of the Earl of Durham, who has made so much noise in Canada) but it was too dark to see them. I called almost immediately upon Prof. Johnston and delivered Dr. Lorrain's letter and parcel; they are remembered each other as fellow-passengers in the coach from Newcastle; he being a Scotch gentleman (looking very like my friend Gonthorpe of the Exploring Expedition) whom I was far from imagining would prove to be the professor in the Durham University. — took my tea and spent the greater part of the evening with him. He told me he was just about to send a parcel to Dr. J. by a friend going next week to America. I must embrace this opportunity to send my letter, now forming a somewhat bulky parcel. But now I must recede some painful recs, not learned to-day, which has shocked me exceedingly; but which you will have heard of long ere this reaches you; — viz. the loss of the noble ship *Pennsylvania*, the death of Capt. Smith, the first and second mate and some of the passengers, I hardly ever know how many. I had grown much attached to this ship, and thought highly of its officers, who had been kind to me; but they were I fear all unprepared for the sudden and awful change which has so unexpectedly befallen them. The ship should have sailed on the 21st of last month, but had been kept back by contrary winds. Only 3 days out of port and it was lost. Now other packet ships were lost in the same storm; viz. the *Alfred* (coming in) & the *St. Andrew* (going out) but I believe with very little loss of life. I felt much surprised in the *Pennsylvania* that I had sent by her (as I had written

you) my books taken with me for reading during the voyage, Home's
works, Wordsworth, Pictorial History of England &c. I also left
in Capt. Smith's hand (as I had informed you) my purchases
made at Liverpool, of which I had previously given you a list
some prints of Chester, Eaton Hall &c. The purchases amounted
including the guard-chain to about £3: little things which I
know you and the girls would have prized, I regret their loss;
but it is well I did not purchase a Boa & Buff for you
as I had at first intended. They are all lost doubtless, and I
am sorry for it; but why should this be thought of compared
with the loss of life! My second letter, written partly at
Chester was also left in Capt. Smith's hands; yet I trust
he sent it by some of the earlier ships. Let me know if
it reached you. If not there will be a hiatus you may
readily detect. I think I shall send this by Prof. Johnston's
friend, but shall hope for time to add a little more, as well
as a letter to my dear Jane, Eliza & Maggie; to
all of whom I believe I owe letters. I am anxious now
to go on to London as soon as possible, where letters from
home, sweet home! I hope await me. Tell the
girls how often I think of them; how much I long to see
them. I shall have so little time I fear I must write very
briefly to them. Excuse especially this scrawl which I have
written at topmost speed. Remember me in all your
prayers, I need not ask this I know you do; and if it be
our Father's will may we meet again, in his good time.

Poor Capt. Smith told me that he was to remain at home
on his return from this voyage, to finish and arrange a house
he had been building. Alas! "in such an hour as we think
not the Son of Man cometh." God grant that we may
be ready, in that time, come when it may, to give up our
account with joy and not with grief. Adieu my
ever dear, and most beloved friend. Kiss Herbert Gray
for me. May a kind and gracious Providence keep him, and
all of you, is the sincere prayer of your attached

A. Gray



Gray, Asa. 1839. "Gray, Asa Jan. 10, 1839 [to Torrey]." *Asa and Jane Gray travel correspondence*

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