

16th. Nov 1812 William Lincolne in Witham to Mary Napier

Witham Nov. 16th. 1812

Many, many thanks to my dear Correspondent for the readiness with which she acquiesced in my request – a request prompted by feelings I am now well assured she duly appreciates. Your compliance encourages me to hope that you do feel some interest in my happiness and the reflection that my Correspondence is not disagreeable to you shall continue to afford me a train of the most pleasing ideas, and I will deem it a delightful presage of my being yet happy in the full engagement of your affections. You are influenced by considerations with the propriety and importance of which I cannot but fully coincide and the one you quote if I mistake not from a Volume in my possession, and which I highly value as a compendium of great good sense on this interesting subject, is enough indeed to check a too precipitant step. Permit me in return to insert a passage for your perusal and which I am confident will be found as correct a transcript of your views as it is I trust of mine.

“Of all the pleasures that endear human life, there is none more worthy of the attentions of a rational creature, than those that flow from mutual returns of conjugal love. An happy marriage has in it all the pleasures of friendship, all the enjoyments of sense and reason, and indeed all the sweets of life; and to make it so, nothing more is required than religion, virtue, prudence and good nature. When two minds are thus engaged by the ties of reciprocal sincerity, each alternately receives and communicates pleasures that are inconceivable to all but those who are in this situation; hence arises that heart ennobling solicitude for one another’s welfare, and that tender sympathy which alleviates affliction, and that participated pleasure which heightens prosperity and joy itself.”

To realise such felicity as this is I think as much as can be made of life, that You and I may happily experience it, is all I can possibly wish for us both – however my present fond hopes may terminate!

The week I hope will not elapse without enabling me the pleasure one afternoon of joining your family Circle as affording a fairer opening for that sort of elucidation of “Sentiment” you speak of than any other – till then, adieu! & believe me to be with increasing esteem,

Your most affectionate Admirer

William Lincolne

(Prov:3 – 5th & 6th)

The letter was handwritten on 2 sides of a folded sheet of paper, before being folded twice more and sealed with red wax, addressed to ‘Miss Napier, Grand Junction Wharf, London’ and postmarked in Witham on 17th November 1812.

Mary Napier had not yet accepted William Lincolne's marriage proposal, but she had clearly given William permission to write to her and he did so frequently, at least once or twice a week. He could not often get away from his work for his uncle to travel to London to see her. They used the correspondence to find out the other's thoughts, beliefs and feelings.

The quotation is taken from the section on marriage in "The Beauties of History, or Pictures of Virtue and Vice" by L.M. Stretch, a compendium of tales and biblical stories that illustrate the various states of human life, good and bad. Originally published in 1775, parts of the book often turned up in ladies' magazines and books of manners in the 19th century. William and Mary seemed to rate it highly.

The reference to Proverbs 3 is to the lines directing you to lean on God rather than your own understanding, and trust Him to make your path clear.

Transcribed from the original letter by Helen Wolvey, 3 x great granddaughter of William and Mary Lincolne, in 2018.