

4 December 1812 William Lincolne in Witham to Mary Napier at Grand Junction Wharf

Witham Dec. 4th 1812

That the inauspicious state of your mind since our last interview did not prove an effectual bar to your acknowledging mine of the 25th ult. demands my cordial thanks – for although not without a bitter infusion it has relieved me from that distressing suspicion your silence had occasioned. I am really hurt at being compelled to recur once more to a most mortifying circumstance – but it is somewhat explained by the drift of my remark respecting the weather (and which you introduce with such exquisite sarcasm) having been certainly misunderstood – were it advanced in the shape of an “apology” I wonder not at its appearing to you, as it would truly have been – flippant – in the extreme – but the only explanation I then thought it necessary to make you dismiss with too little ceremony – it was not a mere subterfuge – but at a distance I should suppose of full six miles, in itself of greater force than you imagine and connected with other impediments I met with formed such a combination of untoward circumstances as I hope to convince you it was far more my misfortune to encounter than my crime not to have overcome. I therefore repeat with conscious integrity and stake my credibility on the correctness of my representation – that it was out of my power on the morning in question to reach Whitefriars earlier than I did – nor have I brought the matter to this point from an impression that it is of trivial importance – no – I cannot view it thus, for I certainly am well assured that the wanton neglect of a positive engagement, or permitting the interference of any contingency it were possible by promptitude and energy to overcome, would belie my former professions and mark a languor of feeling justly fatal to my hopes. If, on a former occasion, I appealed to your candour, I now do more – I invoke your justice. I am too susceptible not to feel your severity and permit me to intimate that you should have considered the disappointment I endured in a palliative light.

I will now in turning to a more agreeable subject endeavour to shake off that gloom with which I have been hitherto oppressed – and to indulge the hope of meeting Mr Napier at Witham will have that exhilarating tendency – as – sanctioned by You – no proposition could be more grateful to me. I cannot conceive of any investigation being “too scrutinizing” – it is what I am particularly anxious for – as I have nothing to conceal -from such a step I have everything to expect, and as this Post will commence a Correspondence between those to whose judgement and counsel we mutually feel it incumbent to pay the greatest deference – into their hands I now commit our future intercourse, only venturing to intreat that your influence may not be wanting if necessary to urge Mr N’s early compliance with a request that will be made him, as the interval must necessarily be attended with extreme solicitude to us.

I could not read without emotion your affectionate tribute to parental kindness – ah! – indeed I am well convinced of the responsibility incurred by him who should withdraw you from such a protector! – from a circle commended to you by so many endearing associations!

My dear “ “ “ “ you may still deem it right to maintain a cautious reserve, and to repress – if not my sanguine anticipations – at least my aptness to record them – but I love you tenderly and therefore I will – I must – subscribe myself affectionately yours

W. Lincolne

P.S. You will recollect my relating to Mr N. an anecdote of Mr. Fuller – since which I have embraced an opportunity, in conversation with Mr. Newton, to introduce the subject and found that I certainly did represent the circumstances in too strong a light – as they had been discussing in a friendly way some minor points of difference on Baptism, & what Mr. F. said was “I am too old to change my opinion, but if I were to change, I believe I should come over to you”. Now what I omitted is very important. It gives quite a different complexion to the words – they exonerate him from the imputation of inconsistency, at the same time they are honourable to his liberality. I am happy to correct this misstatement at the same time I am sorry to have given occasion for it.

This letter is formed of a folded single sheet of paper, written on 3 sides and with the address on the folded-over 4th side. It was addressed to Miss Napier, Grand Junction Wharf, Whitefriars, London, sealed with red wax and stamped “WITHAM” in black, with a red circular postmark dated 5th December. William Lincolne covered the pages in small, very slanted but legible and regular handwriting.

Their previous meeting in London had not gone terribly well because William had arrived very late and left rather abruptly. It is not known what the “impediments” were that prevented him from arriving on time, but he is clearly stung by Mary’s tart sarcastic comments on his lateness and is anxious to clear himself of dilatoriness and impoliteness. Now Mary’s father, Mr William Napier, was to come to Witham to meet William’s grandfather, Mr Thomas Isaac, who had brought him up and educated him after the death of his father when William was only 9 years old. It was the “judgement and counsel” of these two men that would decide William and Mary’s future together. William’s feelings for Mary are openly and frankly expressed.

Mr Newton and Mr Fuller were two dissenting clergymen who had differing opinions on Baptism. The topic seems odd for a love letter, but both William and Mary were very devout non-conformists and both came from pious families. It is not surprising that religious topics formed the basis of much of the conversations in their respective homes.

Transcribed from original letter by Helen Wolvey, 3 x great granddaughter of William and Mary, in 2019.