

Cambridge; Sunday.

~~[Feb. 1800]~~ [Feb. 1800]

Dear Lamb

~~[Feb. 1800]~~

I have been long anxious for an opportunity of writing fully to you my opinion of that letter of L^d — in what points I agree with you, & where we seem to differ — but it has always presented itself to my mind as a difficulty too great to be encountered save by one at ease & leisure — & this I never am — I am not now but I must write; for if I postpone it much longer you will begin to think me negligent — that would not be the true idea of my state of feelings towards you, Lamb — for if you were conscious of each instance in which I mentally correspond with you, you would confess that I am exuberant in my communications (by the bye these mental epistles are very detrimental to real post-paper correspondence, inasmuch as it fatigues to go over with the hand what has been fully & amply detailed already in the brain). —

Suppose you were to ask me the question "Would you, Manning, if L. had shewn you that letter, have acquiesced in its mission?" "No", I answer, "I would not. — Some things in it I think positively wrong. e.g. his saying that he undertakes her Novels are transcripts of her love letters, & secondly, knowing the manner in which I know people do take things, I think the excessive frankness & sincerity of the letter improper. — But I want to know — Do you blame him for having these sentiments & impressions of the Lady? or for expressing them? Not the former surely — The picture of her, drawn by a friend of yours in my presence, would, I am sure, give her much more offence than what L. says — But I think, & I know you agree with me, that we ought not always to give our opinions of people to their faces; it pains & is of no service, that I see — Mind ye, I say 'that I see' — for I must say, that such a line of conduct comes recommended by a simplicity & an appearance of strict adherence

to 1st principles which plead strongly for it. The matter is this—such a frankness in most people would indicate something else lurking in their minds - a spite - a contemptuous desire to pain—they could not bring themselves to speak so openly (tho their thoughts might be as foul as a puddle) while they had an atom of regard left for the person addressed; but in L. do's writings you read his sensations undisguised, unrepressed, ungarbled - to a man that understands L. it must be the same thing to be unable to bear the expression of his thoughts & to be unable to bear to imagine his entertaining those thoughts. Now I do say that if Miss H. had imagined all that L^d confesses (& from her questions to Miss R. it appears she did imagine something - perhaps ten times worse) she ought not, she would not have been enraged - If then she be anything more than disgusted, it is because she does not know the singleness & integrity of L's heart. But I must do the Lady the justice to say that altho this letter be now the pretended basis of her anger, yet in fact it has I believe arisen to its present unruly height from other stimulants - from the interference & insinuations of some friend or from some real or imagin'd neglect on L's part since her answer to that letter.

There is a certain degree of blame attaches itself to this business. Let us divide it into 10 thousand parts & give one part to L^d - He will then have his share to the full. That is my opinion. What business has Miss H. to go about exhibiting a private correspondence of this kind? - L. does not go round to his friends & acquaintance babbling forth her follies - he never did, & he never does. - If he did employ his sister to transcribe the letter, we ought to consider who Olivia is - not a rattling pert minx, but a good girl, that w^d copy the letter at her Brother's request, & think no more about the matter. As to Southey's implication in the business - it is sufficient to state Southey now corresponds

with L. as a friend - whoever deems Southey a man of character & integrity is satisfied by this that he does not consider L. as a guilty man - however erroneous & faulty he may have judged his conduct - & this, whatever sentences S. may have uttered. You know, Lamb, from the expressions I used at your house, my conviction of L's integrity, & my respect for his character - & I know that when you ask your heart & head What sort of man is L? your answer agrees with mine. But you also know that there is not that complete identity of sympathy between me & L. as to make me blind to his faults. Moreover I have that coolness & mathematical precision that render me as difficult to be imposed upon as one of brighter intellect or (if that be possible) stronger judgment. - Well; I have considered this affair fully & I do lay my hand upon my heart & say that L's conduct in it (the erroneous I think) has been such as to produce in me towards him no diminution of respect of honour or of love. That you may entertain similar sentiments is the wish of

Your very affectionate
Friend

T. M.