

TO LEIGH HUNT

Livorno, Sept. 3, 1819

My DEAR FRIEND,

AT length has arrived Ollier's parcel, and with it the portrait. What a delightful present! It is almost yourself, and we sat talking with it, and of it, all the evening. * * * It is a great pleasure to us to possess it, a pleasure in time of need, coming to us when there are few others. How we wish it were you, and not your picture! How I wish we were with you!

This parcel, you know, and all its letters, are now a year old—some older. There are all kinds of dates, from March to August, and "your date," to use Shakspeare's expression, "is better in a pie or a pudding, than in your letter."—"Virginity," Parolles says, but letters are the same thing in another shape.

With it came, too, Lamb's works. I have looked at none of the other books yet. What a lovely thing is his "Rosamund Gray!" How much knowledge of the sweetest and deepest part of our nature in it! When I think of such a mind as Lamb's—when I see how unnoticed remain things of such exquisite and complete perfection, what should I hope for myself, if I had not higher objects in view than fame?

I have seen too little of Italy, and of pictures. Perhaps P. has shown you some of my letters to him. But at Rome I was very ill, seldom able to go out without a carriage; and though I kept horses for two months there, yet there is so much to see! Perhaps I attended more to sculpture than painting, its forms being more easily intelligible than that of the latter. Yet, I saw the famous works of Raffaele, whom I agree with the whole world in thinking the finest painter. With respect to Michael Angelo I dissent, and think with astonishment and indignation of the common notion that he equals, and, in some respects, exceeds Raffaele. He seems to me to have no sense of moral dignity and loveliness; and the energy for which he has been so much praised, appears to me to be a certain rude, external, mechanical quality, in comparison with anything, possessed by Raffaele, or even much inferior artists. His famous painting in the Sixtine chapel, seems to me deficient in beauty and majesty, both in the conception and the execution. He has been called the Dante of painting; but if we find some of the gross and strong outlines which are employed in the most distasteful passages of the "Inferno," where shall we find *your* Francesca—where the Spirit coming over the sea in a boat, like Mars rising from the vapours of the horizon where Matilda gathering flowers, and all the exquisite tenderness, and sensibility, and ideal beauty, in which Dante excelled all poets except Shakspeare?

As to Michael Angelo's *Moses*—but you have a cast of that in England. I write these things, heaven knows why!

I have written something and finished it, different from anything else, and a new attempt for me; and I mean to dedicate it to you. I should not have done so without your approbation, but I asked your picture last night, and it smiled assent. If I did not think it in some degree worthy of you, I would not make you a public offering of it. I expect to have to write to you soon about it. If Ollier is not turned Christian, Jew, or become infected with *the Murrain*, he will publish it. Don't let him be frightened, for it is nothing which, by any courtesy of language, can be termed either moral or immoral.

Mary has written to Marianne for a parcel, in which I beg you will make Ollier enclose what you know would most interest me—your "Calendar," (a sweet extract from which I saw in the Examiner,) and the other poems belonging to you; and, for some friends of mine, my Eclogue. This parcel, which must be sent instantly, will reach me by October, but don't trust letters to it, except just a line or so. When you write, write by the post.

Ever your affectionate

P. B. S.

My love to Marianne and Bessy, and Thornton too, and Percy, &c., and if you could imagine any way in which I could be useful to them here, tell me. I will enquire about the Italian chalk. You have no idea of the pleasure this portrait gives us.