

Letter from Erasmus Darwin to James Watt, 1794/06/11

Darwin writes to Watt after the death of his daughter, Jessy who died in early June, 1794.

My dear friend,

I have not felt so poignant a grief of some years, as I feel now for the very affecting loss, which Mrs Watt and yourself have experienced! – a young companion of such uncommon beauty, of such amiable character, and of such ingenious and active mind as are rarely equal'd, never perhaps exceeded! – Mrs Darwin has wept two or three times for the sufferings of Mrs Watt and yourself, tho' she only knew your daughter by my description.

There is nothing I can say to console you, which your own strength of mind has not already suggested, and by which you have endeavour'd to alleviate your own grief and that of Mrs Watt.

“When I sail'd along the coasts, and contemplated the desert situations, where Troy, Thebes, Palmira and other great cities had flourish'd, and were now extinct, said Sulpicius to Cicero, I sigh'd indeed, but shed fewer tears, than you do for one delicate and frail women”. – I see nothing in this remark, but that we are all mortal, and as we necessitated to bear our evils; we should endeavour to bear them with fortitude.

Another argument with which Sulpicius endeavours to console Cicero is from the badness of the times, - which is well applicable to the present appearance of things – Had she lived he sais in these ominous times, might not unhappyness have been her share? Where could you have found a man worthy of her, and with whom you could safely have intrusted her happyness?

Now I beg you will present mine and Mrs Darwin's best compliments to Mrs Watt, and tell her that if it can any way alleviate or divert her mind, and your own, from the sorrow, which you labour under, that we shall be glad to see you to make what stay may be agreeable to you with us at Derby, and will do all we can to make our house agreeable to you.

I am, dear Sir,

your affect. friend

E Darwin

Derby Jun 11-94