

Letter from Erasmus Darwin to James Watt, 1796/06/21

Darwin writes to Watt after hearing of the death of Watt's eldest daughter, Peggy.

Derby June 21-96

My dear friend,

I have received a most severe pang from hearing both from Mrs Galton and Mr Keir of your second great misfortune in the loss of your daughter at Glasgow. Life is a forced state! I am surprized that we live, rather than that our friends die. The letter of Sulpicius to Cicero is ingenious, but is written to a man of the world rather than to a philosopher, as he endeavours to excite the vanity of his friend rather than to sympathize with his misfortune. What is there in the world to excite men of the age, at which you & myself are arrived at, to make us wish to continue in it? - & what in the apparent prospect of public affairs of this nation? - activity of mind is the only circumstance, which can prevent one from thinking over disagreeable events, which "already exist, or are likely soon to exist, in England as well as in the other countries, devoted to this bloody war! Activity does not always produce pleasure, but I think it always prevents or lessens present pain; & is therefore perhaps the only resource, which a philosopher can fly to in the hour of affliction.

I am much oblig'd to you for your last ingenious letter; & when the second Vol. of Zoonomia acquires a new edition I will by your leave insert a plate of your design for a whirling bed & I much admire the mouthpiece.

Mrs Darwin begs to join her condolence to yourself & Mrs Watt

with dear Sir

your sincere friend

E Darwin