
The first part of this letter is to inform you that I cannot comply with the request contained in your last letter of July 21. It is that you might not be dependent on me for any further pecuniary assistance at the present moment. The affairs are in a state of the most complicated embarrassment, arising to which I am surrounded by circumstances in which even diminished fortune of the very limited resources which cover me on personal or public accounts to you the actual state of my case called it impossible to meddle from among them to decipher without entering into the depth of the necessity of my situation, which the most liberal and liberal or immediately require one to consent to my mind to state the question in such a manner that any enquirer knows what other course to pursue. This letter, though without what purpose to consider that I am justified in withdrawing my consent to your request. I cannot comply, but I will be an additional consolation to me to have sworn that I ought not.

I have written you within a few years the amount of a considerable fortune, which the amount of the surplus of the surplus of nearly from time to time of my life and time, and in such a manner that it may be considered on your part, that money for any advantage that it was to have been thrown into the sea. Had I known a greater than the misfortune of the fortune of the same fortune, the fortune of the fortune, it is said to your imagination, I should have been more than ever conjecture. The court however has more than in the case of a similar one and in such a manner that in the case of a similar one and in such a manner that in the course of events, the course of events, the course of events, the course of events, the course of events, the course of events.
now man to have promised what you allege. The enormity of one on the
subject of promises. I have but one instance wherein anything
incontrovertibly. And the conditions were, first that I should be able to
perform any engagements & secondly, that the great sacrifices at which
alone it could ever be performed by me would be made available to
you in any adequate & decisive advantage to yourself.
Such for instance as the confirmation of the said real property. Had I
granted advance the money, according to the terms proposed by me, its
application to this purpose alone, would have been secured.

In October 1819 you wrote to say that the verdict of a jury had been
obtained against you for something between $600 & $2,000; & that if you
had 500 you believed that you could compromise the claim found upon
that verdict. My first impression was - that I would do everything that
I could to serve you, as much as that I certainly expected under a belief
of the emergency of your situation. But that every thing was nothing
in fact. So far as nothing a now makes, you do after this decision in
a court of common law, the affair remains in the same situation. Nothing
is more unlikely than that, if your opposite have can then a legal
claim to that now increasing sum they will compromise that claim for
a fourth of the whole amount which has accrued. Nothing is more certain
with the brevis of a liability for the entire sum to those claimants
in whose favor the property may be finally adjudged. The affair
comes to me a sum of $500 for which it is absolutely necessary. You still seek
large the amount of $500. You would take anything in the shape of it
that would compel me to make the great sacrifice of paying it from the
(if it be an unavailing & infallible) of paying it from my income
without - you must allow me to say that you beg to the proportion
from by your accommodation to the rights or even your own estimate
advantage. If you had bills on my income for the sum, how much you
borrow money on them? My credit, sought among those friends have
they, except with whom I was with and a pecuniary favor, certainly would
not suffice to raise it, & your own name is worth as little or less in the
money market. That any bill would sell for something, I do not doubt.
And then you had paid this money - the 400 - what would be done
with it. What is become of the goods advanced by Horace Smith. Put your
hand on your heart & tell me when it is. In a letter written after your
receipt of the sum you state with the most circumspectitious force of expression
and as if you were anxious to leave yourself no retreat to justify that
you have been deceived a single farthing. This I must say was only equal for
immediate effect: & not for the purpose of ultimately collecting, I wrote a
kind of that system you desire of subscribing at intervals to the present
Col. Saffron after this I were to involve myself in the chance of destruction
to myself & my creditors of what is greatly needed, to enable you to
have to them I am the only source of help of money, & depend on
extortion if they would money they produced would admit of some
compromise, I am prepared to meet the moment that attempts should fail.

In Philex today when dying, I was visited with threats upon the money
which was bought to save the lives of the water which was brought to him to
the wounded soldier who stood beside him. It with all have been generous
to but only had he proved it on the ground, as you would least. With
the wicks of my once prosperous fortune.

So much for the thought which you work desire from my conception of you
again. As such - exclusive of the circumstances which make conception
absolutely impossible - we have it. I have creditors whom claims amount
nearly to 2000. Some of them are very rich & unfortunate - others suffering
perhaps more than you suffer from the delays which my unprovided
condition of hired income has compelled me to suffer; others threatening
to institute a legal process against me, which, put to speech of the

ous respecting connected with it, would make my name to an obligation
from which you must excuse me if I endeavour to procure it. If
A amongst them creditors that I am the consistent from whom
lead money to meet in the lawyer claim on your of 25 per cent
of the interest on which you pledge yourself, but have neglected to
pay. In all or any one of these objects the cause of my income
over my suspensory here, is not really due.

X In case the of your bankruptcy any such action as bankruptcy happening to you
in a circumstance which sometimes confounds the most. Few know concern. When in
blankly itself in an embarrass or business & connected for a reason wholly ignorant
of trade, how much you regret my folly in not been thus deeply.
If you are acquainted with me on the subject why, instead of casing Langdon's account
already half paid for your sake into deeper ruin, do you not secure the £200 from
your own sources of income if you entertaining accomplishments might carry
them from the traveller for the payment of a small sum succeeding this amount.
Your answer to Mather's would tell at least for 400 - half the case is thought
lacking when the knowleddge contains the highest fraction of our matter.
You have wanted you more largely than dependance on a person whose
precarious situation I again pronounce makes that dependance a cause to both.

A mere as you growing sick to her in want, in whose life, after the last
prolonged want of the last two years, his own seems slowly to be worn up. If you
letter from that they brought such as your services, nation to service
myself fail to produce on a challenging as effect on her frame - that on one-
occasion, under the effect of circumstances, a disorder was produced in the
latter stage of that, similar to that which destroys our little girl two years
ago. The utmost medical skill divided are prolonged by the utmost
which it occurs, until the utmost ninety efforts of medical skill it
can, it was cast out to height. At any one that occasion, all my letters
caused me the liberty of interesting with letters a communication and more
judge likely to the last ment. That doctrine I have written in the
letter to which this is a reply. It is correspondence the first which
let's me, of you which consider any further discussion of a simile
relative with that which in which you have lately been engaged with.

There are, after the full at planation which I have given of my pain
of the melancholy circumstance which I have conversed. Nor want the
A correspondence with you thought on a simile unsubject one to another.
It was wholly improper, I ought leave to the determinations among you
manifestations against with yours that I should not only you but present.
He has not, nor ought
to have the disposal of money, if the kind poor thing. He would
give it all to you. If you wish to observe such a letter I send a
man of (such high genius) can be at no loss to find subjects in science
to a slave such a daughter. Do not let me be thought to absent,
but I can only convey to this your letter. On the contrary, for the
his plan to use; such as the same preferring to write containing such
Shelley to Godwin
Pisa August 7, 1820
from the Bodleian Library collection no 709.
COLLECTION OF

CATALOGUE NUMBER

AUTOGRAPH OF

Shelley

CONTENTS

PARKE-BERNET GALLERIES · INC
30 EAST 57 STREET · NEW YORK
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, DRAFT A. L., 7 August 1820, to William Godwin.

Pisa. Aug. 7. 1820.

The purport of this letter is to inform you that I cannot comply with the request contained in yours dated July 21. & that you ought not to depend on me for any further pecuniary assistance at the present moment.—My affairs are in a state of the most complicated embarrassment: added to which I am surrounded by circumstances in which any diminution of my very limited resources might involve me in personal peril. I fear that you & I are not on such terms as to justify me in exposing to you the actual state of my delicate & emergent situation which the most sacred considerations imperiously require me to conceal from Mary; be it sufficient without entering into the subject now present to my mind to state the question in such a manner, that any entire stranger who should chance to peruse this letter, might without reference to them [deleted] these circumstances perceive that I am justified in withholding my assent to your request.—I cannot comply... but it will be an additional consolation to me to have shewn, that I ought not.
I have given you within a few years the amount of a considerable fortune, & have destituted myself, for the purpose of realising it of nearly four times the amount. Except for the good will which this transaction seems to have produced between you & me, this money, for any advantage that it ever conferred on you, might as well have been thrown into the sea. Had I kept in my own hands this £4 or £5000 & administered it in trust for your permanent advantage I should have been indeed your benefactor. The error however was greater in the man of mature age extensive experience & penetrating intellect than in the crude & impetuous boy. Such an error is seldom committed twice.

You tell me that I promised to give you £500 out of the [deleted] my income of the present year. Never certainly. How is it possible that you should assert such a mistake? I might have said that I could, or that I would if I thought it necessary, I might have been so foolish as to say this; but I must have [p. 2] been mad to have promised what you alllege. Thus much at once on the subject of promises. I never but in one instance promised anything unconditionally. And the conditions were, first that I should be able to perform my engagement; & secondly, that the great sacrifices at which alone it could ever be performed by me should be made available to you [deleted] some great [deleted] adequate & decisive [deleted] decisive advantage to result to you; such for instance as the [deleted] a compromise of the suit now pending. Had Mr. Gisborne advanced the money, according to the terms proposed by me, it's application to this purpose alone, would have been secured.

In October 1819 you wrote to say that the verdict of a jury had been obtained against you for something between £600 & £2000; & that if you had 500 you believed that you could compromise the claim founded upon that verdict. My first impulse was—that I would do every thing that I could to serve you; as much as that I certainly expressed under a belief of the emergency of your situation. But that every thing was nothing; [these italics and the semicolon deleted] in fact I could do nothing. A year passes over, & after this decision in a court of common law, the affair remains in the same situation [italics deleted] stationary. Nothing is more unlikely, than that, if your opponents have [deleted] can shew a legal claim to this ever-increasing sum they will compromise that claim for a fourth of the whole [deleted] amount which has accrued,—nothing is more absurd than to pay the sum in question, if they have [deleted] can not that [deleted]
shew this legal claim, with the reserve of a liability for the entire sum to those claimants in whose favour the property may be finally adjudged. The affair seems to me a mass of improbabilities & absurdities. You still press [deleted] urge the request of £500. You would take anything in the shape of it that would compel me to make the great sacrifice of paying it from the [the last 5 words deleted] (if indeed now it be not impossible) of paying it from my income, without—you must allow me to say—that [deleted] a due regard to the proportion borne by your accomodation to the loss [these 3 words deleted] to my loss [deleted] immediate loss or even your own ultimate advantage. If you had bills on my income for the sum, how would you procure money on them? My credit, except among those friends from with whom I never will [these 6 words deleted] whom I never will ask a pecuniary favour, certainly would not suffice to raise it, & your own name is worth as little or less in the money market. That my bills would sell for something, I do not doubt. And when you had procured this money—this 400, what would be done [p. 3] with it? What is become of the £100 already advanced by Horace Smith. Put your hand upon your heart & tell me where it is.—In a letter written after your receipt of this sum you state with the most circumlocutory force of expression, and as if you were anxious to leave yourself no outlet for escape, that you have never received a single farthing. This of course was only meant for immediate effect; & not for the purpose of ultimately [deleted] leading into error, & is only a part of that system you pursue of sacrificing all interests to the present one. Suppose after this I were to involve myself in the chance of destruction, to defraud my creditors of what is justly theirs, to withhold their due from those to whom I am the only source of happiness & misery, & send you these bills. The weakness & wickedness of my conduct would admit of some palliation if the[y and would deleted] money they produced were reserved for the attempt at compromise, & retransmitted to me the moment that attempt as it must, should fail. I [deleted] Sir Philip Sidney when dying, & consumed with thirst gave the water which was brought to him [these 6 words deleted] helmet of water which was brought to him to the wounded soldier who stood beside him. It would not have been generosity but folly had he poured it on the ground, as you would that I should the wrecks of my once prosperous fortune.

So much for the benefit which you would derive from my concession of your request. The evils—exclusive of that circumstance which

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From Kendall, 1970
makes concession absolutely impossible—were to me immense. I have creditors whose claims amount nearly to 2000; some of whom are exceedingly importunate—others suffering perhaps as much [both words deleted] more than you suffer: from the delays which my impoverished condition & limited income have compelled me to assign; others threatening to institute a legal process against me, which, not to speak of the ruinous expense connected with it, would expose my name to an obloquy from which you must excuse me if I endeavour to preserve it. To all [both words deleted] Amongst these creditors was [deleted] is the annuitant from whom I procured money to meet your [deleted] Hogan’s claim on you, at 25 per cent, & the interest on which you pledged yourself, but have neglected, to pay. To all, or any one of these objects the excess of my income over my expenditure, is most justly due.—

In case too of your bankruptcy [these 4 words deleted] any such reverse as bankruptcy happening to yourself, a then [deleted] circumstance which sometimes surprises the most prosperous concern, & is infinitely probable in so [deleted] an embarrassed a [deleted] business conducted by a person wholly ignorant of trade, how would you regret my folly in not now being severely [these 3 words deleted] just but having [both words deleted] [p. 4] If 400 be necessary [this clause deleted]

If you are sincere with me on this subject why, instead of urging plundering a person [these 4 words deleted] seeking to plunge one already half ruined for your sake into deeper ruin, do you not procure the 400 from [deleted] by your own exertions [deleted] active powers? A person of your extraordinary accomplishments might easily obtain from the booksellers for the promise of a Novel a sum exceeding this amount, Your answer to Malthus would sell at least for 400. Half the care & thought bestowed upon this [deleted] honourable exertion of the highest faculties of our nature, would have rewarded you more largely than dependence on a person whose precarious situation & ruined fortunes make that dependence a curse to both?

Mary is now giving suck to her infant, in whose life, after the frightful events of the last two years, her own seems wholly to be bound up. Your letters from their style & spirit (such is your erroneous notion of taste) are accustomed [both words deleted] never fail to produce an appalling an effect on her frame; [lower part of semicolon deleted] that [deleted] on one occasion, united to other circumstances
[these 4 words deleted] agitation of mind produced through her a disorder was produced [both words deleted] in the little only [both words deleted] child, similar to that which destroyed our little girl two years ago. The utmost medical skill [these 3 words deleted] disorder was prolonged by the alarm which it occasioned, until by the utmost [illegible word deleted] efforts of medical skill & care it was restored to health. Mary [deleted] on that occasion Mary at my request gave me the liberty of [these 5 words deleted] authorized me to intercept[ing deleted] such letters of information as I might judge likely to disturb her mind. That discretion I have exercised with the letter to which this is a reply. The correspondence therefore rests between you & me; if you should consider any further discussion of a similar nature with that which [these 3 words deleted] in which you have lately been engaged with Mary necessary, after the full explanation which I have given of my views & the unalterable decision which I have pronounced. Nor must [deleted] can the [deleted] a correspondence with your daughter on a similar subject ever [deleted] be renewed. It was ever wholly improper, & might [deleted] leads to presumptions among you serious [these 4 words deleted] imputations against both herself & you, which it is important for her honour as well as for yours that I should not only repel but prevent. She has not, nor ought she to have the disposal of money, if she had poor thing, she would give it all to you.—

If you seek to oppos [this clause deleted] Such a father (I mean a man of such high genius) can be at no loss to find subjects on which to address such a daughter. Do not let me be thought to dictate, but I can only convey to her such letters as are [deleted] are consistent with her peace to read; such as you once proposed to write [these 7 words, followed by a dash, deleted] let them contain[ing such deleted]

AL, 4 pages. Double sheet, 31.5 x 21.8 cm.
Laid paper. Watermark: crowned design, faint.

Provenance: H. Buxton Forman sale, Apr 1920 (no. 709); Newton sale, 30 Oct 1941 (no. 245). In a Parke-Bernet folder. Listed in De Ricci, p. 82 (no. 486).

Published in Letters to William Godwin, ed. Thomas J. Wise (London, 1891), II, 97–101; Ingpen, II, 811–815; Ingpen and Peck, X, 197–202; Jones, II, 224–228 (no. 582), with 5 substantive and 7 accidental variations from the Lewis MS.
Notes: 1. Godwin’s most recent letter to Mary was written on 21 July. For illumination on Shelley’s extensive financial involvement with Godwin see White’s index.

2. The present letter is a draft of a longer document (continued, but not completed, in a fragment in Lord Abinger’s Library) apparently never put in the mails.


From page 124 of Kendall, 1970
Pisa. Aug. 7. 1820.

The purport of this letter is to inform you that I cannot comply with the request contained in yours dated July 21. and that you ought not to depend on me for any further pecuniary assistance at the present moment.

My affairs are in a state of the most complicated embarrass-ment, added to which I am surrounded by circumstances in which any diminution of my very limited resources might involve me in personal peril. I fear that you and I are not on such terms as to justify me in exposing to you the actual state of my delicate and emergent situation which the most sacred considerations imperiously require me to conceal from Mary; be it sufficient without entering into the subject now present to my mind to state the question in such a manner, that any entire stranger who should chance to peruse this letter, might without reference to those circumstances perceive that I am justified in withholding my assent to your request. I cannot comply but it will be an additional consolation to me to have shown, that I ought not.

I have given you within a few years the amount of a consid-erable fortune, and have restituted myself, for the purpose of realising it of nearly four times the amount. Except for the good will which this transaction seems to have produced between you and me, this money, for any advantage that it ever conferred on you, might as well have been thrown into the sea. Had I kept in my own hands this £ 4 or £ 5000 and administered it in trust for your permanent advantage I should have been indeed your benefactor. The error however was greater in the man of mature age extensive experience and penetrating intellect than in the crude and impetuous boy. Such an error is seldom committed twice.

You tell me that I promised to give you £ 500 out of my income of the present year. Never certainly. How is it possible that you should assert such a mistake? I might have said that I could, or that I would if I thought it necessary. I might have been so foolish as to say this; but I must have been mad to have promised what you allege. This much at once on the subject of promises. I never but
in one instance promised anything unconditionally. And the conditions were, first that I should be able to perform my engagement; and secondly, that the great sacrifices at which alone it could ever be performed by me should be made available to some adequate and decisive advantage to result to you; such for instance as a compromise of the suit now pending. Had Mr. Gisborn advanced the money, according to the terms proposed by me, its application to this purpose alone, would have been secured.

In October 1819 you wrote to say that the verdict of a jury had been obtained against you for something between £1600 and £2000; and that if you had 500 you believe that you could compromise the claim founded upon that verdict. My first impulse was - that I would do everything that I could to serve you; as much as that I certainly expressed under a belief of the emergency of your situation. But that-everything-was-nothing; in fact I could do nothing. A year passes over, and after this decision in a court of common law, the affair remains in the same situation. Nothing is more unlikely, than that, if your opponents can show a legal claim to this ever-increasing sum they will compromise that claim for a fourth of the whole amount which has accrued, - nothing is more absurd than to pay the sum in question, can if they have not show this legal claim, with the reserve of a liability for the entire sum to their claimants in whose favour the property may be finally adjudged. The affair seems to me a mass of improbabilities and absurdities. You still urge the request of £500. You would take anything in the shape of it that would compel me to make the great sacrifice of paying it from the (if indeed now it be not impossible) of paying it from my income, without - you must allow me to say - that due regard to the proportion borne by your accommodation, to my immediate loss or even your own ultimate advantage. If you had bills on my income for the sum, how would you procure money on them? My credit, except among those friends from whom-I-never-will whom I never will ask a pecuniary favour, certainly would not suffice to raise it, and your own name is worth little or less in the money market. That my bills would tell for something, I do not doubt. And when you had procured this money, this
400, what would be done with it? What is become of the £100 already advanced by Horace Smith. Put your hand upon your heart and tell me where it is. In a letter written after your receipt of this sum you state with the most circumlocutory force of expressions and as if you were anxious to leave yourself no outlet for escape, that you have never received a single farthing. This of course was only meant for immediate effect ultimately lending into error, and is only a part of that system you purpose of sacrificing all interests to the present one.

Suppose after this I were to involve myself in the chance of destruction, to defraud my creditors of what is justly theirs, to withhold their due from them to whom I am the only source of happiness and misery, and send you these bills. The weakness and wickedness of my conduct would admit of some palliation if they would money they produced were reserved for this attempt at compromise and retransmitted to me the moment that attempt as it must, should fail. Sir Philip Sidney when dying, and consumed with thirst gave the water—which—was—brought—to—him helmet of water which was brought to him to the wounded soldier who stood beside him. It would not have been generosity but folly had he poured it on the ground, as you would that I should the wrecks of my once prosperous fortune.

So much for the benefit which you would derive from my concession of your request. The evils - exclusive of that circumstance which makes concession impossible - were to me immense. I have creditors whose claims amount nearly to 2000; some of whom are exceedingly unfortunate - others suffering perhaps more than you suffer, from the delays which my impoverished condition and limited income have compelled me to assign; others threatening to institute a legal process against me, which, not to speak of the expense connected with it, would expose my name to an obloquy from which you must excuse me if I endeavor to preserve it. Amongst these creditors was is the annuitant from whom I procured money to meet your Hogan's claim on you, at 25 percent, and the interest on which you pledged yourself, but have neglected to pay. To all, or any one of these objects the excess of my income over my expenditure, is most justly due.

In case the—of—your—bankruptcy any such reverse as bank—
ruptcy happening to yourself; a circumstance which sometimes sur-
prises the most properous concern and is infinitely probable in an
embarrassed business conducted by a person wholly ignorant of trade,
how would you regret my folly in not having been now severely just.

If unnecessary

If you are sincere with me on this subject why, instead
of seeking to plunge one already half ruined for your sake into
deeper ruin, do you not procure the 500 from your own active friends.
A person of your extraordinary accomplishments might easily obtain
from the booksellers for the promise of a novel a sum exceeding
this amount. Your answer to Matthews would sell at least for 400.
Half the care and thought bestowed upon this honourable action of the
highest faculties of our nature; would have rewarded you more largely
than dependence on a person whose precarious situation and ruined
fortunes make that dependence a curse to both?

Mary is now giving suck to her infant in whose life, after
the frightful events of the last two years, her own seems wholly to be
bound up. Your letters from their style and spirit (such is your
erroneous notion of taste) never fail to produce as appalling an effect
on her frame, that on one occasion agitation of mind produced through
her a disorder in the child, similar to that which destroyed our little
girl two years ago. The utmost medical skill was prolonged
by the alarm which it occasioned, until by the utmost efforts of medical
skill and care it was restored to health. Mary on that occasion Mary
at my request gave me the authorized liberty of intercepting such letters
or information as I might judge likely to disturb her mind. That dis-
cretion I have exercised with the letter to which this is a reply. The
correspondence therefore rests between you and me; if you should con-
sider any further discussion of a similar nature with that which in
which you have lately been engaged with Mary necessary, after the full
explanation which I have given of my views and the unalterable decision
which I have pronounced. Nor can the a correspondence with your daughter
on a similar subject be undated. It was even wholly improper and might
leads to among yeaself herself and you, which it is important
for her
yours that I should not only repel but prevent. She has not, nor
ought she to have the disposal of money, if she had poor thing, she
would give it all to you. Such a father (I mean a man of such high
genius) can be at no loss to find subjects on which to address such
a daughter. De-net-let-me-be-thought-te-dietate, but I can only
convey to her such letters as are consistent with her peace to read;
such-as-you-nee-proposed-te-write let them contain such-
A Remarkable Letter from Shelley To William Godwin

245 « SHELLEY, PERCY B. • A.L. 4 pp., folio, Pisa, August 7, 1820. An incomplete letter of about 1,200 words addressed to William Godwin.

A carefully worded but firm admonition to his father-in-law by Shelley. The poet could no longer stand the constant importunities regarding money, nor could Shelley stand the effects Godwin’s letters had on Mary Shelley. A few descriptive passages read as follows:

“My affairs are in a state of the most complicated embarrassment ... I have given you within a few years the amount of a considerable fortune ... Except for the good will which this transaction seems to have produced between you and me, this money, for any advantage that it ever conferred on you, might as well have been thrown into the sea. Had I kept in my own hands this £4 or £5000 and administered it in trust for your permanent advantage I should have been indeed your benefactor. The error, however, was greater in the man of mature age, extensive experience, and penetrating intellect than in the crude and impetuous boy ...”

“Your letters from their style and spirit ... never fail to produce as appalling an effect on her [Mary’s] frame, that on one occasion agitation of mind produced through her a disorder in the child, similar to that which destroyed our little girl two years ago ... She has not, nor ought she to have the disposal of money, if she had poor thing, she would give it all to you. Such a father (I mean a man of such high genius) can be at no loss to find subjects on which to address such a daughter, but I can only convey to her such letters as are consistent with her peace to read ...”

From the Buxton Forman collection.

This letter is printed in Ingpen’s The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, vol. II. The following footnote appended to it is of interest: “‘This scurrilous letter,’ as Godwin described it to Mrs. Gisborne, did not close the correspondence, as the extract from a letter written a month later will show.” [This letter is also printed in the same volume.]

[See illustration]