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978-1-108-05948-0 - Letters Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807: Volume 1

Anna Seward

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Letters Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807

The literary career of Anna Seward (1742–1809) had many frustrations. Erasmus Darwin once printed her poetry under his own name. Horace Walpole accused her of having ‘no imagination’. And despite her evident talents, she was unable to find a patron willing to support a woman. Yet her letters reveal the breadth of her interests and the strength of her literary criticism. In addition to writing to newspapers and magazines, she counted many eminent figures among her correspondents, including James Boswell (who begged for a lock of her hair) and the young Walter Scott. This six-volume selection of her letters, edited by the publisher Archibald Constable (1774–1827), first appeared in 1811. Volume 1 covers the period 1784–7. Showing the first signs of her long-lasting acrimony towards Samuel Johnson, whom she saw as a bully, it includes some of her anecdotes of him, alongside her own equally expert criticism.

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Letters Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807

VOLUME 1

ANNA SEWARD



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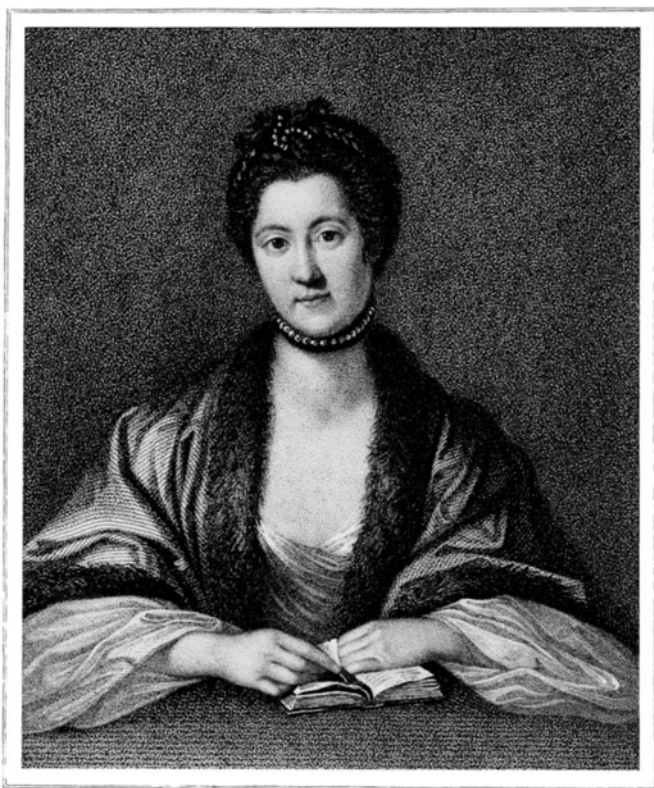
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ANNA SEWARD

Engraved by A. Cardon from the original picture painted in 1762

by Kettle in the possession of Thomas White Esq: Lichfield.

Edinburgh. Published by Messrs Constable & Co. March 1811

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LETTERS
OF
ANNA SEWARD :

WRITTEN BETWEEN THE YEARS 1784 AND 1807.

=====
IN SIX VOLUMES.
=====

VOLUME I.

EDINBURGH:
Printed by George Ramsay & Company,
FOR ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND COMPANY, EDINBURGH;
AND LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
WILLIAM MILLER, AND JOHN MURRAY,
LONDON.

1811.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following letter, which was found among Miss SEWARD'S papers after her death, will account sufficiently for the present Publication, and renders it unnecessary for the Editor either to enter into any explanation of his motives for undertaking it, or to offer any apology for its appearance.

*Posthumous Letter from Anna Seward
to Mr A. Constable.*

“ SIR, *July 17, 1807.*

“ IN a Will, made and executed since
“ I had the pleasure of seeing you in
“ April last, I have left you the exclu-
“ sive copy-right of Twelve Volumes

“ quarto, half-bound. They contain co-
“ pies of letters, or of parts of letters,
“ that, after I had written them, appear-
“ ed to me worth the attention of the
“ public. Voluminous as is the collec-
“ tion, it does not include a twelfth part
“ of my epistolary writing from the time
“ it commences, viz. from the year 1784,
“ to the present day.

“ I wish you to publish two volumes
“ annually ; and by no means to follow
“ the late absurd custom of classing let-
“ ters to separate correspondents, but
“ suffer them to succeed each other in
“ the order of time, as you find them
“ transcribed.

“ When you shall receive this letter
“ its Writer will be no more. While she
“ lives she must wish Mr CONSTABLE all
“ manner of good, and that he may en-
“ joy it to a late period of human life.

“ ANNA SEWARD.”

It was in this manner that these letters
came into the hands of the Editor ; and,

in obeying the direction of their accomplished Author, he is happy to believe that he is, at the same time, contributing not a little to extend her reputation. Miss SEWARD has hitherto been known and admired almost entirely as a writer of poetry. Her attempts in prose have not been considered as equally fortunate; and, it is to be feared, that even in these familiar epistles, several affectations of style, arising mostly from too free an use of poetic imagery, may tend somewhat to obscure their real merit. But when this peculiarity is got over, the reader, it is presumed, cannot fail to be struck with the many intellectual and moral excellencies which they display.

He will perceive throughout, in their Author, an independent and vigorous mind, entering with animation into every subject which is presented to it—full of elevated views,—and uninfluenced by common notions when they were not

brought home to its own perceptions of truth.

In her Critical remarks especially, Miss SEWARD will always be found ingenious and instructive; and, if she sometimes errs in praising her favourite authors with too little discrimination, the error is of that generous kind which marks the warmth of her character, and could proceed only from an enthusiastic admiration of every thing which seemed to her to bear the stamp of genius.

In Politics her opinions are free and spirited; and whatever opinion the reader may entertain of the counsels adopted by this country in consequence of the French Revolution, he cannot but admire the sagacity with which she has predicted many of those unfortunate results which we have since been doomed to deplore.

The ardour of Miss SEWARD's affections is no less conspicuous in these letters than the force of her understand-

ing.—Her long years of dutiful attendance on a father's infirmities ; her steady attachment to her friends ; her mournful remembrances constantly recurring, of those whom death had separated from her ; and the fatal blow which at last withered her existence by depriving her of one of the oldest and dearest of those who remained : These circumstances, which are here exhibited with much nature and feeling, cannot be contemplated without exciting a lively interest in her character ; and certainly constitute one of the chief attractions of these memorials of it that are now offered to the public.

The celebrity of this Lady procured her visits and letters from some of the most distinguished individuals of her age—and her long life gave her an opportunity of becoming acquainted with most of the illustrious literary characters who adorned the latter half of the last century. There are accordingly interspersed in these volumes many interesting anec-

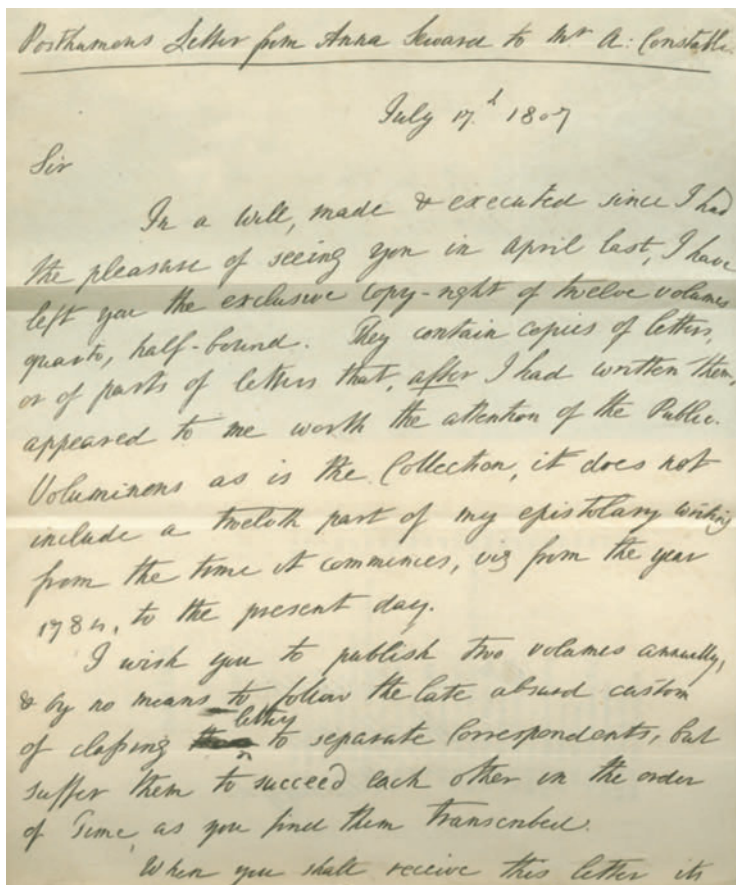
dotes of eminent persons, which will probably be not the least attractive part of the Work.

It will be observed, that in one particular Miss SEWARD's directions have not been exactly obeyed. It was thought more satisfactory to the public that the whole of these letters should be laid before it at once, rather than that they should be published as she seems to have wished,—in detached portions. Neither must it be concealed, that some of the letters contained in her bequest have been omitted:—such chiefly as relate to the characters or connections of living individuals, and touch upon circumstances, which although very naturally introduced into letters among friends, were evidently not designed for the world. Some minute critical discussions have also been left out, distinguished indeed by all the acuteness of the excellent writer, but which would have swelled beyond proper limits a work that to many readers may already

appear too long. In every other respect the Editor has been scrupulously faithful to the trust with which he has been honoured.

Miss SEWARD was born in the year 1747, and died on the 25th of March 1809. Her poetical works, accompanied with some part of her early literary correspondence, and a biographical memoir, have since been edited in three volumes, by WALTER SCOTT, Esq. to whom that part of Miss SEWARD's writings had been committed, by a bequest similar to that under which the present Publication appears.

Edinburgh, March 28, 1811.



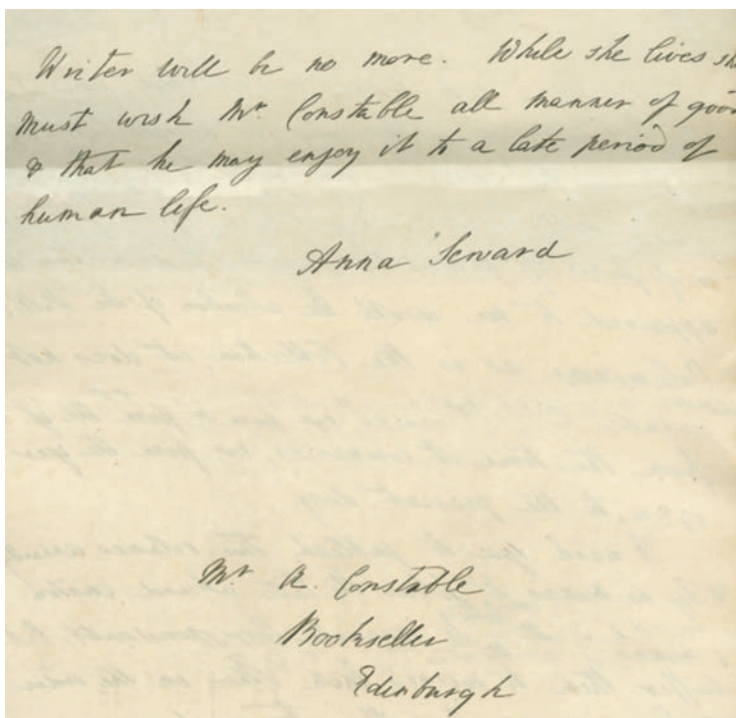
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Writer will be no more. While she lives she
must wish Mr Constable all manner of good
& that he may enjoy it to a late period of
human life.

Anna Seward

Mr R. Constable
Bookseller
Edinburgh

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