

## TO CONWAY, Monday 30 August 1773

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Arlington Street, August 30, 1773.

I RETURNED last night from Houghton, where multiplicity of business detained me four days longer than I intended,<sup>1</sup> and where I found a scene infinitely more mortifying than I expected;<sup>2</sup> though I certainly did not go with a prospect of finding a land flowing with milk and honey. Except the pictures, which are in the finest preservation,<sup>3</sup> and the woods, which are become forests, all the rest is ruin, desolation, confusion, disorder, debts,<sup>4</sup> mortgages, sales, pillage, villainy, waste, folly, and madness. I do not believe that five thousand pounds would put the house and buildings into good repair. The nettles and brambles in the park are up to your shoulders; horses have been turned into the garden, and banditti lodged in every cottage.<sup>5</sup> The perpetuity of livings that come up to the park pales<sup>6</sup> have been sold<sup>7</sup>—and every farm let for half its value.<sup>8</sup> In short, you know how much family pride I have—and consequently may judge how much I have been mortified!—Nor do I tell you half, or *near* the worst circumstances.<sup>9</sup> I have just stopped the torrent—and that is all. I am very uncertain whether I must not fling up the trust;<sup>10</sup> and some of the difficulties in my way seem

1. He wrote to Lord Nuneham 17 Aug. 1773 that he intended to set out for Houghton 'on Thursday [19 Aug]' (CHUTE 463; see also OSSORY i. 139-40).

2. HW describes the devastation at Houghton also in his letters to Lady Ossory 1 Sept. 1773, to Mann 2 Sept. 1773, to Mason 3 Sept. 1773 (OSSORY i. 140-1; MANN vii. 510-11; MASON i. 103), and to Thomas Walpole 4 Sept. 1773.

3. For the famous collection of pictures at Houghton, see HW's *Ædes Walpoleanæ* (*Works* ii. 237-78); they were sold by Lord Orford to Catherine the Great in 1779 (MANN viii. 502).

4. 'My Lord has contracted debts of every kind, and when the bills are all come in, I think they will exceed forty-four thousand pounds, independently of the debts of his father and grandfather, which leaves him infinitely poorer than a

beggar' (HW to Thomas Walpole 4 Sept. 1773, FAMILY 95).

5. 'A crew of banditti were harboured in the house, stables, town, and every adjacent tenement' (HW to Lady Ossory 1 Sept. 1773, OSSORY i. 141).

6. I.e., fences.

7. 'He has sold the perpetuity of the livings of Harpley and Bircham, and was on the point of selling that of Massingham' (HW to Thomas Walpole 4 Sept. 1773, FAMILY 95).

8. 'I have already increased one, as you will see by the enclosed, above an hundred and forty pounds' (ibid. 96).

9. 'He has been plundered in the grossest manner by every species of dependant; and some of his *friends* I doubt have not spared him even since his misfortune began' (ibid. 95).

10. Chiefly because of Lady Orford's