

**NOTES FROM
MINTO
MANUSCRIPTS**

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Notes from Minto Manuscripts by Nina Minto

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NINA MINTO

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INTRODUCTORY.

THE correspondence of my grandfather may be divided into two portions : the first collected from the Minto MSS., containing letters addressed to his family, by himself or by others, on matters affecting him ; of these letters none are earlier in date than 1762, none later than 1776 : the second portion composed of several volumes of letters, private and official, written to my grandfather by various persons between 1772 and 1785. These were all in his own keeping at the time of his death, and were sent to Minto a few years ago by my mother, along with some other MSS. of a later date, which had also belonged to him.

The letters bound in volumes have been generally collected under three heads:—Family Letters; Foreign Miscellaneous Letters; English Miscella-

neous Letters. There are, however, two or three volumes entirely occupied by the correspondence of particular friends, as Mr. Liston, Sir James and Lady Harris, and others ; and there are volumes of official correspondence with the Office and with his colleagues at foreign Courts ; among whom were Lord Stormont,¹ Sir R. Keith,² and Messrs. De Vismes,³ Wroughton,⁴ Morton Eden, and Osborn.

All these were collected in their present form before the French occupation of Dresden in 1796, and were at that time, in consequence of my grandfather's sudden departure, thrown into a cellar of the house he had occupied, along with other property belonging to him. There they remained for upwards of thirty years, during more than twenty of which he believed them to be lost ; for it was not till after the Peace that he received information, by means of a letter which reached him in India, of his having had good friends at Dresden, who, having saved his property from falling into the hands of the French, were now desirous to restore it to him. As it comprised plate, pictures, china, and other things far more valuable *as plunder* than manuscripts, he was as much surprised as pleased

¹ Minister at Vienna and Paris.

² Vienna.

³ Stockholm.

⁴ Warsaw.

by the communication ; nevertheless, with his habitual carelessness, he took no steps to recover his losses till some years later, when, in 1826, he was prevailed on to let my uncle Frederick, who was then a mere lad, proceed to Dresden in quest of the long-lost property. There, accordingly, in a cellar, perfectly intact and uninjured, were found some of the most valuable contents of the *ci-devant Hôtel du Ministre Britannique*, which in the moment of flight had been abandoned to their fate.

The only paper which my grandfather had been anxious to recover, was a private memorandum in Mr. Pitt's handwriting, containing instructions for his guidance, and this, on regaining it, he sent to the Foreign Office.

The mixture of order and disorder in the arrangement of these papers is extraordinary. It might be supposed that some one, acting on a suggestion that all the letters should be classified under specified heads, had thrown the contents of desks and drawers into so many several heaps, and had then, without further selection, proceeded to bind them together. Along with letters from royalties, generals, and statesmen, are found the most trivial notes. Letters of introduction to insignificant persons are preserved as carefully as those from

Mirabeau, Romantzow, and Nelson. More than a third of these bulky volumes might be burnt without loss, and yet enough would remain to give a finished picture of the society in which my grandfather spent his youth.

The letters of 1775 and 1776 are so numerous and so abundant in personal details, that one feels on intimate terms with the writers and the correspondents.

Strange that it should be so! that, after so long a silence, the dead should speak again,—should be restored to our knowledge in all the freshness of their youth, introducing us to sorrows which they themselves long outlived, and to sentiments forgotten sooner still. But if these thoughts be startling to us, what would *their* feelings have been could they have foreseen that the follies of the moment were to be handed down to generations unborn? What would the flirting *dame de cour* have said could she have guessed that the indolent Englishman, who rarely troubled himself to answer her notes, would preserve them for the amusement of his descendants? And what would have been felt by the mother and sisters, who believed themselves to possess all his confidence, had they been told that to us would be given the clue

they never found, to the thoughts and affections of one of those dearest to them? That Minto—that generation—has long since passed away, and we, now sojourning here, wonder whether they in their day knew as much of each other as we know of them. Truly, even in this world, all hearts are laid open, all secrets made known; even here, a day of judgment is for ever going on!

NINA MINTO.

MINTO, *March* 1861.