

To those that *sought* them, only pleasing made;  
 No greater honours anxious to obtain,  
 But still, *your* fav'rite berries to remain.

## TO MARY BERRY, Monday 2 February 1789

Address: To Miss Berry, Somerset Street.<sup>1</sup>

[Berkeley Square,] Feb. 2, 17—and 71.<sup>1a</sup>

I AM *sorry*, in the sense of that word before it meant, like a Hebrew word, *glad* or *sorry*,<sup>2</sup> that I am engaged this evening;<sup>3</sup> and I am at your command on Tuesday, as it is always my inclination to be. It is a misfortune that words are become so much the current coin of society, that like King William's shillings they have no impression left; they are so smooth, that they mark no more to whom they first belonged than to whom they do belong, and are not worth even the twelve pence into which they may be changed<sup>4</sup>—but if they mean too little, they may seem to mean too much too, especially when an old man (who is often synonymous for a miser) parts with them: I am afraid of protesting how much I delight in your society, lest I should seem to affect being *galant*—but if two negatives make an affirmative, why may not two ridicules compose one piece of sense? And therefore, as I am in love with you both, I trust it is a proof of the good sense of

Your devoted

H. WALPOLE

1. The Berrys had taken a house there in 1786 (MBJ i. 150).

1a. 'The date is thus put alluding to his age which in 1789 was 71' (B). Mary Berry also numbered the letter: 'No. 1.'

2. HW is alluding to biblical exegesis such as is typified by John Gill's *Exposition of the Book of Solomon's Song* (first published 1728, 4th edn 1805). Dr Gill comments as follows on the phrase 'rafters of fir' in i. 17: 'The Hebrew word, here translated "rafters," is in Gen. xxx. 38–41 and Exod. ii. 16 rendered "gutters". . . . R. Aben Ezra observes that [the phrase should] be read thus, "Our canals are of marble stone."' See *post* 27 March 1791.

3. Probably to General Conway and Lady Ailesbury, who were much affected by the death (12 Jan.) of Lady Ailesbury's niece, Miss Caroline Campbell (see HW to Lady Ossory 6 Feb. 1789).

4. 'On the accession of George III . . .

shillings were estimated to have lost a sixth' of their weight (George C. Brooke, *English Coins from the Seventh Century to the Present Day* [1932], p. 223). Except for £100 of shillings which were struck for distribution by the Duke of Northumberland when he went to Dublin as Lord Lieutenant in 1763, no more were coined until 1787, when shillings and sixpence to the amount of £55,459 were struck. At that time the average shilling in circulation was estimated to have lost one fourth of its original weight. Much of the coinage of 1787 was melted down by forgers and reissued in lighter weight (Edward Hawkins, *The Silver Coins of England*, 3d edn, 1887, pp. 410–11). Cf. *The World* 26 Aug. 1789: 'So much base silver . . . is circulating that, without the utmost scrupulosity, hourly imposition may happen.' See also *The London Chronicle* 1–3 Oct. 1789, lxvi. 323.