

Beech House,
King Street,
Blaenafon,
Monmouthshire.

28th January 1842

My Dearest Elizabeth,

I have finally arrived at my new home, exhausted after the long and tiring journey. I am utterly astounded by the Blaenafon that I have found before me today. It is almost unrecognisable from the place that I left nearly fifty years ago.

The beautiful green valley that I remember from my childhood has vanished. Tragically, everywhere I look there are mines and roaring iron works. The air is filled with dense, black smoke and fumes from the blazing furnaces. The smoke does make me cough, just like my pipe, but from these dark, poisonous clouds there is no escape. The noise of the steam engines and the crashing of the hammers is almost unbearable. Day and night, day and night they clatter, without a break.

At one time there were nothing but sheep and rabbits roaming the mountainside but now the hustling, bustling town sprawls across the landscape. In the community I remember every face was familiar. We all knew each other, but now faces and voices seem so strange. In the two days since my arrival I have tried to reacquaint myself with old friends, but this task has proved almost impossible as the many streets are like a maze to me. There are so many streets now and they all lead to unfamiliar places. The crowded, dirty buildings cast a shadow over the once idyllic countryside.

As I sit here now, writing this letter I can hear the rough folk stumble out of those disgraceful public houses I walked past. In this new town of Blaenafon there seems to be a terrible culture, 'work all day, drink all night'.

Oh, listen to me! What a grumpy old man I have become! I should tell you about the good things in Blaenafon too. Ty Mawr, the home of the Ironmaster, is very grand, and St. Peter's Church on the other side of the road is a fine building too. There is even a school next door, which one does not see very often in these wretched industrial towns.

Perhaps I should not judge the townspeople so harshly. The work here is filthy and terribly hard, and even tiny children have to work underground and at the furnaces. Poor lambs! There seems to be a chapel on almost every corner, so not all the folk here can be as rough and ungodly as the ones I have met so far. I suppose that in time something good will be made of this place, but I am sure that I will be dead and buried by then.

Your dearest friend, William