

Received April 13, 1769.

XIII. *A Letter from the Rev. Mr. William Paxton, Rector of Buckland Brewer, in the County of Devon, to Dr. Milles, Dean of Exeter, F. R. S. and Pr. S. A.*

Buckland Brewer, April 7, 1769.

REV. SIR,

Read April 20,
1769. I HAD the favour of yours, and with great chearfulness comply with your request, as far as faint words can express what, in reality, is beyond the power of description.

On Thursday, the 2d of March, about four of the clock in the afternoon, a cloud, of a most uncommon blackness, gathered in the west-north-west, and, taking its course to east-south-east, diffused a most prodigious darkness, accompanied with a very copious shower of hail. It passed immediately over the church tower (remarkable for the height both of its situation and structure), and, bursting with incredible fury, poured forth an amazing body of fire, which threw down the south-east pinnacle on the church, and entering (as I suppose) at the breach, shivered a table on which the commandments were written, scorched and discoloured two tomb-stones,
broke

broke the windows, and shattered the walls and roof to a great degree. The south-east corner suffered most; where it chiefly forced its way, and tore up the ground on the outside, where it found vent. There is something very extraordinary in the dispersion of the stones of the pinnacle to every point of the compass, and to different distances; some of which were 700 pounds weight. I picked up one that weighed almost 8 pounds, at the distance of 60 perches from the church; and doubt not but others, and perhaps larger stones, were carried further: it may be worthy remark also, that several of the stones, some of which were not small, though they appeared close and firm, yet, on a very slight impression of the fingers, mouldered into powder. The explosion, on the opening of the cloud, was as instantaneous as terrible, and equalled the discharge of at least a hundred cannon at once.

It is matter of great wonder, that not only the church, but that every house in the village, which trembled to its foundation, was not reduced to atoms, or lighted up into a general blaze; and yet, stupendous mercy! not a man, woman, child, or beast, received the least hurt. I am,

S I R,

Your very obedient,

humble servant,

William Paxton.