

Letter to William Campbell 3rd Dec 1814 (Misc 325)

London Saturday evening 3rd Decr 1814

I hope that this night, my dear parents, you will have learned that I have escaped safe and sound all the dangers of a voyage of five hundred miles. For not writing you a detailed account of my progress I dare hardly plead lack of time, for I might have dedicated an hour or two from my respond among the blankets for that purpose – but I can assure you I have had little idle time upon my hands – and still less convenience for writing. Besides by sending you the newspaper I did I thought that would relieve you of all anxiety on my account, and I had delayed giving you a detailed account of our journey until I could mention something satisfactory respecting our future movements. I may now inform you that we embarked on board the Comet smack at anchor on the evening of Friday the 18th of Novr and were perfectly dazzled by the elegance – nay splendour of our accommodations. They were the finest I have ever seen on board ship. I am not certain but I might likewise add on land too. We could not get out of the harbour that night, but when I got on deck next morning, I found we had left Leith a mile astern. The winds were variable during the whole of the day – and produced little ?bad than sickness among all the fresh water sailors. I was squeamish certainly but escaped much more easily than I could have expected. At the close of the day we were only alongside the Bass – but next morning at nine we were off Newcastle. We continued our journey with various rapidity all Sunday and Monday – and at 9 pm on that day cast anchor in ?Overly bay. On Tuesday evening we again cast anchor off Gravesend only about 22 miles from London. Owing to excessive fog – and want of wind these miles cost us twice the number of hours. It was only about nine on Thursday evening that we made the wharf – where we disembarked during morning. After we entered the Thames I can assure you I entered a new world. You have up to thousand of ?grains of masts, but even that impression does not convey a proper idea of the scene around. Perhaps you have often admired the dexterity of a coachman, who could lead his carriage through crowds of men and bullocks and carriages, but had you been on board of us, your higher admiration would have been excited by the dexterity with which we threaded our way through among vessels as crowded as ever you see coaches or carts. Unless you could see the scene you would never believe our account of their number. We were all struck with amazement at the multitude of vessels lying in Yarmouth roads – but tho' all these had been annihilated by the wand of a magician in a single moment, from among the multitudes on the Thames this would scarcely have been missed. We travelled along the streets of this mighty metropolis at least five miles before we reached our lodgings – and I believe we might have advanced far before we had reached the confines of the town. The number and splendour of equipings, the crowds of wagons - and men – quite astonished me. At every hundred yards almost our coach was obliged to stop, to let a waggon and eight – or a coach and four move out of our way. Nothing however except the narrowness and dirtiness of the streets, amazed me more than the wealth and splendour of the shops. All the busy tumult of Glasgow and all the gilded trappings of Edinburgh united, would make but a shabby prototype of London: tho' I must confess that either of the former far

surpasses the latter in neatness and cleanliness and elegance of the streets. All the homes here are built of brick and painted with soot and muck. There is many of that sweet variety of architecture in the common buildings of London that pleases in Edinburgh or Glasgow; but certainly neither of the latter can at all compare with this place in sumptuousness of public buildings – or in wealth and splendour. I dare not attempt to mention even the names of the public buildings that deserve to be described. They are almost innumerable – and generally of free stone. The royal palaces I have seen are ? shoddy dirty, mean looking places – but Westminster Abbey, St Paul’s too are grand beyond compare and I am told that the inside of every and of the public places are far beyond in richness and beauty even their external aspect. The newer part of the town is certainly much more clean ? and neat – but still the brick walls can never be compared to the beautiful freestone of Edinburgh. I was in the House of Commons on the last night of meeting and was miserably disappointed. I have heard many, many far more eloquent debates in our own Society in Edinburgh. Only one or two members could speak with anything like fluency or eloquence or care.

Sunday noon

I have had no opportunity of seeing the interior of any of the public buildings hitherto – and I believe and dare not expect that the few days we are to remain here will produce any opportunities more convenient than the past done. It is by no means difficult to gain admission – and twopence, fourpence, sixpence and a shilling are the established fees. If ever John come to this place, I would advise him to come here soon; and on board the Comet. The fares are from a guinea and a half to four guineas. Everything is provided except towels. If he can find a companion to share with he will have the best accommodation for 3 guineas, if he sleep alone it will cost 4. The Captain keeps stores of spirits and malt liquor on board which if called for will be charged extra of ?canone. There is as much small beer as you choose to see allow - but perhaps it will be necessary to save credit occasionally to treat the Captain with a glass of grog – or a glass of ale. You will find lodgings exorbitantly high here but be sure just content himself with summer apartments.

You will see by the three different dates of these short pages, that, it is only by fits and starts that I find an opportunity to inform you of my welfare. I may so tell you in case I should not be able to get the whole of this sheet blotched that we are to sail from this place for Bordeaux in the Dee. I suppose you will be struck by the name of the vessel; but mother must not suppose that Bordeaux and Craigen callie are the same. The Dee is an American built schooner ? taken lately - and now purchased by her present captain and another married man. She sails in ballast – joins convoy at Portsmouth – and can run at the rate of 10 miles an hour. Our handwriting for this present season will probably be at Thoulouse. Mr Hart seems behind on account of his affairs with the East India Company. We left our governess in Edinburgh so of course there are only Mrs Hart and her two daughters and maid, Montgomery, myself and an Italian servant we have picked up in town. I presume we shall not be less than ?three years abroad – and Mr Hart says he is determined to make the tour of Italy before he returns. He is to join us as soon as he

possibly can – but I believe we are none of us very sorry at leaving his bad temper behind, tho' we should like to have him as a head. He has to pay sixty guineas for our passage to Bordeaux - and perhaps we shall find some little difficulty getting from there to Thoulouse, a distance of about 120 miles. You must not of course expect to hear from me for a long time – perhaps I may say two months – but then you will not be over anxious on my account. The same almighty hand that keeps the land solid and supports those who go down to the sea in ships - I can assure you I never felt the least fear while on board the Comet. I never once considered it possible I could sink. It may be three or four months before I can give you my address – and even when fixed you will not expect frequent communicating from me as the postage of every single letter you receive will be under an half a crown – and you will have to pay the postages of them address to see as far as Dover, else I shall never receive them. It requires nearly a fortnight for the dispatch of a letter from the south of France to New Galloway - I shall write many long letters and shall expect the same length in return. I and not make what is become of father as it will be nearly a quarter of a year before I can receive a reply to the query. I was very much disappointed in not meeting with him before I left Edinburgh.

While in Edinburgh I mentioned to Mr ?Fallie that promise of last summer with respect to an addition to my fee. He said he remembered it perfectly and would assuredly speak with Hart on the subject. The latter has never made the least mention of it hitherto. He however seems very anxious for my success in life, and has renewed his promise of patronage with all possible kindness – and in a manner very flattering if true. In short, he seems to wish that I may one day become the pastor of St Mungo. I am sure, I wish his wishes success. Then I will certainly be detained in my thirties by this continental trip, I hope I shall be able to lay a fine stack of amusement and information which will last as long as life. I have not heard word of ?Cameron since we sailed from Leith, but I understand while in Edinburgh that the family had all landed safe in France and were commencing the land journey. It is rather a striking coincidence in our fate, that, he sailed to this place from Leith in the same vessel in which we did; she carried us in her next voyage to London. The Captain told me that he was very sick. I too had a good vomit, but lost only a few meals – one or two by the vomit – and the remainder by not being inclined to eat them. Upon the whole we had a delightful passage and if the one before us be equally pleasant we shall have great reason to be grateful to Him who makes a path on the ocean for wandering pilgrims.

If ever John get out to India, I beg leave to inform him, I will be obliged to provide a witness – blankets and sheets and towels for his passage, But he will have all these things time enough.

Montgomery and I are going to Drury Lane theatre tomorrow on Mr Hart's ?pinder, and anticipate much pleasure. We are just returned from dining with an old Castlemilk acquaintance – and very good man, a Mr Kay. I called a few days ago on Mrs Johnson and her sister Miss Lockhart/Gillespie, and found them in a very elegant house. They asked me to breakfast next morning, but I could not go. If I can possibly finds us much time I must again wait upon them. I have no other acquaintances that I know of, among

more than a million of people, all assembled within a diameter of six miles from this place. I am called myself as a partial student in the Hall as I passed through Edinburgh and, now, want only four months attendance to send me to my trials. I hope Hart will have a plan for me before my return. I am confident he wishes this. Perhaps I may be able to complete my studies before May 1817, and it may not be late the year following. I leave all this to Providence. Hart has provided for me hitherto, and I am not yet begun to distrust his power – or his goodness. I wish for your sakes my ever dear parents how soon I may be in a situation to afford you some little aid. My present poor pittance, especially in a foreign country, will do little more than meet my necessities. The day will come I hope when I shall not be compelled to reiterate this hated proposition – then, however, my dear parents, you will all of you take particular care of your health. You are both now arrived at that age where the frailties of humanity begin to appear and surely it becomes you not to tamper with them. I look forward to my establishment in the Church, with joy, when I allow myself to believe that I shall see you he..ated occasionally, at least, at my humble house: and I beg you will do all that you to crown these hopes with full enjoyment. I hope you will remember me kindly to and his wife. I know not what fancy I have taken to that but I should like much to open my mouth in his hearing. I am not certain that I want (to be) able to gratify him much – but if I could secure his approbation for all your happy withings, I would not regard them a straw. You must depend upon tomorrow for completing this letter. I am now sitting in a room without and can scarcely say whether my feet are of lack or ice. Good night to you all.

Tuesday morning

Yesterday was not a very busy day, but as I have no fire in my room I must confess I cannot sit long at a time to write. They charge here 1/6 and 2/ a day for a single bedroom fire. Montgomery and I went last night to Drury Lane Theatre and saw the very celebrated Mr Kean in King Richard the third. I have seldom seen nature on the stage before. I am not going to give you a criticism upon his acting, but can assure you I never was more pleased. We have this morning received an order from Mr Hart to have all our baggage ready to send on board tomorrow morning. We will, no doubt, soon follow. We continue our happy voyage. Our accommodations are not nearly equal to those in the Edinburgh packet, but we must just put up with them. I do not remember to have omitted to say any thing that sufficient interest to you. I have not purchased any linen here. I leave that till I see what France may produce. I am much afraid the surly Lord Newall will not allow us to take any books with us. We have a trunk full of them here but he threatens to prohibit them. My studies of course will be confined for a long time to the French language and the want of English books may probably make me apply more closely to the French. I intend writing a good deal and I hope while we are stationary, that I shall have convenience for these things. I know not whether they mean to get a governess or hire in masters. It will make no difference to me. They have had no masters while here – the elder has taught the younger – but indeed there has been little improvement going on among any of us. I am quite astonished to see how little either Mr

or Mrs Hart require an improvement in general and how foolishly they exclaim about particular deficiencies. They are neither of them great head p?

Until you hear from me again I wish you all happiness. I hope you will give yourself not unnecessary uneasiness on my account. Be kind enough to remember me to all who care for my happiness. I shall strive to bring Agnes a dish of faggots for that ?hirfing or arere of hers - and I hope they will cure it. My love to all. I can say hold up her head well and Agnes does not grin now.

I remain then – my dear parents and sisters – your true and affectionate – and wandering James.

8 Dec 1814