

Letter to Mr William Campbell, Carsphairn, New Galloway, N.B.

Ramsgate Tuesday evening, Dec 30th 1814

My dear father,

I am unwilling to let any opportunity of acquainting you with the details of our perilous journey, without devoting an hour to relieve anxiety with regard to my fate. I am more particularly anxious at present, as it is a new thing for you to have any part of your family separated from you in the situation in which I am now placed and also because the situation is new to myself – and then some pregnant with wants. There is one reason still behind which will operate on mamma's feelings still more strongly than either of the above, namely the stormy weather that has now passed away. After such an ?exordine I doubt not that you anticipate my arrival hence in safety. I forget whether in my last I mentioned that all our baggage was seized at the Custom House London and was only recovered after infinite trouble, expense and anxiety. There was some irregularity in not entering it at the Custom House, into which we were led by our brother, which subjected it to seizure. It was seized on Wednesday seeing tet and not recovered till the following Monday. Our vessel sailed from London on Wednesday last the 14th inst. and we embarked at Blackwall, in very stormy weather afternoon on the day following. At 3 same day we weighed anchor, and dropped it again about 16 miles further down the Thames at Gravesend before 5. Mr Hall accompanied us so far. He went on shore there with the Captain who had to also put at the Custom House of that place and we saw no more of him. The Captain returned with a tale of dismay on his lips - namely that the same officer who formerly seized our baggage at London was at Gravesend ready to come on board and overhaul it again. The Captain's fears rather than his reason invented the tale. He determined however to make no delay and gave orders for the ship to get under weigh immediately. The wind blew so fresh as to baffle all their attempts and we were compelled to stay there till the following tide. The anchor was then got up, and after we had dashed away 15 miles we stuck fast upon a sandbank. When I awoke in the morning, I imagined we were going on in our progress most cheerily. How I was astonished when I got on deck to find that we were lying upon dry sand. We were assured no danger was to be apprehended, but rather we ought to thank the constraining elements which had given us so ?easy a birth. It blew a very heavy gale all the day (Friday) but we were not to be assailed. The tide flowed in the afternoon and we floated off along with it. Still it continued to blow fresh - and in a short time after the anchor was heaved on a good bottom. Scarce was it lowered and the deck cleared when we were aroused from our confident security by the any of, then we sail drives. In despite of the thwarting elements we were soon secured by the addition of the chain, cable and anchor. Thus we rode out the night with both our cables in play. In the fray however our windlass sustained considerable damage, and the captain did resolve to get into this harbour to repair it. This was no very easy task, not on account of the damage we had sustained, but on account of the high wind, and the swell of the water.

On Saturday morning the ship again got under weigh and in the afternoon we were glad to bring to in Margate sands, in a safe anchorage. As the gale rather increased than abated, there was no possibility of moving before the afternoon of Sunday. In a very short time we were again compelled to trust to the strength of the chain cable – and lay off North Foreland till half past 8 last night. The wind by this time had abated considerably and rather changed in our favour. Formerly it had been from the SW. It had now become more northerly, and the

Captain with great attention seized the change by the forecast, determining if it continued fair not to touch at Ramsgate but to proceed onwards to Plymouth – where we are to join convoy – and there make his repairs. In a very few hours we glided over our intent of above (20 miles – when the breeze returned to its former point, and the Captain turned with it, and led us in perfect safety into this harbour about 3 this morning. We shall lay here at least three days and if the wind do not change in our favour we shall not trust ourselves to its mercy. In one word we shall remain here on the watch and seize the first favourable opportunity of proceeding on our way after we are made once more able to contend with it. As far as I am able to judge the captain is a skilful and a cautious sailor. He in fact is very stout and sails uncommonly well. Our accommodations scarcely deserve so admirable a character. We are all six stuffed into one small cabin and contrive to stow our items into four beds. Mrs A – little and Maggy and around accessing two on the one side -ity and I am then on the opposite, and Miss A all swings in a hammock in the centre. – the hammock is removed during - - as a night accom- bed - -. Alternately a parlour, a dining – The two beds on the one side – by a partition, and the hammock is divided - myself by a plaid converted into a temporary screen. Among all these conversions – and some of us will ever be converted into sailors. We have all been sick and may all expect another return whenever we go to sea. When the vessel is under sail let her toss as much as she will, let her turn as fleet as the winds, if I can keep upon deck, I fear no attack; but when she rolls at anchor or is rocking in a calm even then fresh air is scarcely able to keep my dinner in my stomach. I am by no means ill; some of the others are much worse, and I have not only the positive consolation of not being superlatively sick, but also the comparative comfort of not being so sick as others. I have never been at all alarmed for our safety, for although the wind blows fresh, I trust to our merciful and beneficent Pilot who rides on the wings of the wind and who measures the waters in the hollow of his hand. In fact, except when she made one mighty plunge, I have scarcely ever dreamed that I was walking on the surface of the deep. The most perilous part of our voyage is now past as the mouth of the Thames is very much ?interes-caled and obstructed by sand banks. Once we are past Dover we shall nearly out of all such danger, and you will see by the neap that we are very near that place. This seems to be a very delightful place. The wings of the town stretch along the high cliffs of the shore and have a very agreeable effect. These cliffs are all of chalk and perfectly will agree with the idea we all have formed of the white chalky cliffs of England. This place is much resorted to during summer by sunbathing parties and thus must be a busy and gaudy town. There is a considerable portion of shipping in the harbour, but after the view we have had of the commerce of London we shall not be persuaded to give proper ?hitherto to the commerce of any other port. As we are to remain here at least till Saturday evening I shall be able to give you a description if any things remarkable, if any things unremarkable, be found here before I conclude the epistle. I beg however you will not be over anxious on our account as I hope everything will go on well with us as hitherto.

Wednesday evening

I very often distress both myself and my correspondents by choosing too large a sheet and too small a hand. In the present case I scarcely know how to proceed to a conclusion. Another day has passed in health and quiet and such days however agreeable to one party afford but little room for anecdote. The recital of a case of a punctured artery might very well deserve a full half sheet – tho' no party would ever be so trifling as to say that. I dined today on roast beef and plum pudding. Now at sea, and sick, and lose such dinner by such sickness then indeed I

would perhaps be forgiven if I measured so lamentable a tale. With all your indulgence I am not certain you would pay postage willingly, even I to say nothing else but that I had dined, and felt no fears of losing my dinner. In a day of peace and quiet such as this has been there certainly will be a blank in my journal, unless like other travellers I acquire as I proceed the mark of making such blanks the most interesting part of my narrative. Such a fill up has occurred to me this afternoon, but a few lines to the dark eye brows of a village beauty would neither edify nor amuse you. In fact I do not believe they shall ever receive existence. But when I begin to publish perhaps I shall be compelled to bring them into the world for the mere purpose of removing any agents of ?shleen my dried and salted chapters may have produced. This is a very neat and comfortable place of pretty considerable extent and situated on the shore of a very pleasant country. To the south the lower there is pretty extensive circular bay – but I am not certain that it ?passes anchorage; indeed I have not seen our ship in it since our arrival here. The harbour is very neat, and truly pretty. The bay too affords a very beautiful prospect and the high grounds of France may be seen in the background. Nothing in the whole town has afforded me half the pleasure I have derived from a view of the butcher’s shops. The neatness and elegance of these, added to fineness of the meat might very well ?serve a Scotchman instead of dinner. The present time is indeed a high festival in this country and something may be deducted from their present appearance, before we can form an idea of their general character. But even after making very great deductions, I am much afraid an English palate would be disgusted rather than exalted by our Scotch butcher markets. The people themselves look as if they breakfasted, dined and supped on neatness and cleanliness. Their plump and rosy visages, at least, would make a sinewy Scotchman wonder. I should like very much to take a walk of a few miles into the country to make a few observations on the peasantry, as this is only the second place I have touched at in England and I can say nothing with regard to any other places. Perhaps I may be able to have this wish gratified tomorrow or at least before we sail. We are now regretting that we are not at sea, as the wind is favourable, and we might by this time have been in Plymouth. But the wishes of freshwater sailors must not always be gratified, else the seamen might probably have enough to do to secure their own safety by establishing ours. The windlass and all are to be ready on Saturday afternoon and the sixth Sunday morning since our departure from Castlemilk will very probably see us again under sail. A few days of favourable weather will carry us to Plymouth, and 4 or 5 more ought to carry us to Bordeaux.

Thursday evening

The dilatory manner in ?? has presented to a conclusion probably equally have astonished ? you. If the short description I have given of our accommodation, do not p.. my apology, I hope the following of our general routine of employment will remove that astonishment and that displeasure. Precisely at eight I get out of bed, and I presume you will not refuse me half an hour to three? At half past eight the two young ladies began to arise, and are scarcely ever ready to sit down to breakfast before ten. Eleven always has rung before we rise from the breakfast table, and Mrs Hart still in bed. By the time she gets dressed we take a walk till the cabin be cleaned out, and then at time dinner is announced. After we have devoured that I generally empty the ?? cabin by a distraction and do not return as long as daylight shines. It is only then that I know it in my power to write to anybody, and even then I am often engaged by the young ladies at cards. Ten and supper over we are compelled to extinguish our lights at ten. Thus have you a detail of my present ? events from 8 in the morning to 10 at night. You

will have remarked that there is no time allotted for study, or for tuition. In fact there is none, and mainly occasionally only learning a few sentences from a French grammar. Tomorrow we are to hold our Christmas carols and expect to sail either in the morning or on Sunday morning. I have not gone any distance into the country some high grounds continuous to this town, we have a view of considerable extent. It seems almost a continual plain, terrible in the extreme, but by no means either romantic or picturesque. We are only about 20 miles from Canterbury, which city I would most certainly have visited if my purse had not been so light. I have got only 3 Louis' and must keep them to be expended in France. The Louis are in value about 16/8 – and are of gold very neatly stamped. One of the other indeed is a Napoleon – but is eatly of the lower value and merely bears a different stamp. They do not seem to like memorly such fine gold as our guineas. English money bears considerable discount in France, and I have to purchase my francs at 18/9 in London. Accounts are kept in France in francs equal to ten pence of our money. These are in silver. They have five franc pieces value 4/2 of which I have one. It is a large silver coin, of course larger than three shilling bank tokens and less than a dollar. A Louis or Napoleon is equal to 20 francs. My fee of forty guineas will be equal to about a thousand franc, and of course will be handed me in that form. Mrs Hart says she does not mean to be absent above eighteen months, and that we shall return sometime in the summer of 1816. This winter will be very short before we reach Thoulouse. Mr Hart informed me that very probably he would make a short visit to Italy before he returned – that he meant to give us an opportunity again paying our way to London – and I hope we shall visit some more parts of England. He has given me, if possible, still stronger assurances of his future and made them in the most agreeable manner to this. He wishes above all that to have me in St Mungo, as he said it would be very agreeable to the family to have one who has been so long with them whom they know so well – and who will have travelled with them in their immediate neighbourhood. I assure you I look upon St Mungo's as my own. Both the patron and the present incumbent are equally zealous in my favour, and I think the latter is very certain of being transported in some future day. These stories have been all told you before I believe, but a good tale is not the worse to be twice told tho' I suspect you will think it not very agreeable to pay twice for the same thing. Miss Hart's health the avowed object of our present journey is in my opinion certainly improving – the gratification of Madame Hart's curiosity perhaps the real object, allowing of much slower progression. We have already begun to feel the want of our and I am confident our ills in that respect have not yet seen their highest point. This caution is a virtue in almost every situation commendable and in all necessary. I feel the want of her only as it inferes additional ills on my situation - but all the females in our party have lost in her a friend as companion – and a valuable instructress – I may say a guide. The oldest in the family has much need of a guide as the youngest. Mantit is incapable of supplying his own wants and of course all that he ought to do is thrown upon my shoulders. I never grumble, and this may perhaps be one reason why these ills are increasing daily. I wish much we were all once finally settled, and then possibly we may be more comfortable: tho' I am told there is not such a word in the French language as a synonym for comfort. There must be very little of it indeed, and I be not able to pass a few months of my pilgrimage there.

Miss Hart is sitting at my elbow, and telling me to haste, as the coffee is just ready – and I shall not be able to write after that because she has something for me to do after. Goodbye then just now – for my writing table is also the tea or rather coffee table. - Coffee is now finished - and Miss Hart has no employment for me. I must then bid you adieu. I have written

on the other side of in lines to Jane and Agnes. Offer my love to mother – and all at home. I am your truly affectionate son, James.

? never shall totally forget it. You are all ?gale who arrange with Jane you have more accomodations than usual for these things – and I hope you will profit by them.

My ever dear Agnes,

What are you doing? Still improving in all your employments I hope? That stiff arm of yours I hope is now quite well, and all things going on nicely. I wish I had you and Jane here, to let you hear how prettily the little boys and girls speak. We do not eat frogs yet, but we have beef to breakfast, beef to dinner, and beef to supper. If you would come to us in shape of a little bird you could have as much beef as you could devour. There are many things much better for sweet little girls than too much beef. There are books, and needles and pens and paper which I do not wish you to eat but to use properly. If you do so you will become lovely. Farewell my dear sisters. Give my love to your father and mother and Sarah and John. I ever remember you even when riding on the sea – and I ever remain your very affectionate brother, James.

(Stamped Ramsgate)