

Papers of Thomas Stewart Traill NLS GB233
Notes by David Alston 2013

NLS GB233/MS 19332

f21

Gilbert Robertson to Doctor Traill, St Ann Street, Liverpool
Plant Brothers, Demerary 23 Oct 1832

My Dear Sir,

I am much gratified by the receipt of you esteemed favour of the 15th Augt last per ship Johnstone and I am rejoiced to think that you still hold me in remembrance considering your many important avocations . . . you will perceive from the manner in which I write that I have but poor use of my right hand, in fact I lost the entire use of both hands for sometime after the severe calamity that befell me on the 8th of January. I trust my escape on that occasion was truly miraculous having been battered under the ruins of the old wooden dwelling house on this place. I happened at the time to be reclining on the sofa at the side of the house when it was thrown down in an instant by a violent whirlwind which blew from the opposite direction; fortunately the sofa was turned upside down which saved my life otherwise I would have been killed by the beams & wreck that covered me. I remained in this state for about fifteen minutes before I could be released jammed by the timber in such a way that my neck, shoulders and hands were dreadfully squeezed and I suffered the most excruciating pain for a week, being obliged to remain in one position. It is strange that I escaped without any bones being broken and with only a slight scratch on my face but nevertheless my whole frame received a most severe shock for instantly after the accident my arms hung powerless by my sides and remained so for several weeks which my medical attendants think was caused by a degree of concussion of the spine next to the root of the neck. I still feel my neck very stiff & a dead kind of pain (not severe) in it as well as in my shoulders, arms and hands particularly as changes of weather occur, there is always a considerable heat & redness in the palms of my hands, together with a pricking sensation in them, & in the tips of my fingers. It is a sad misfortune to have so little power in my hands circumstanced as I am having the duties of a manager to perform. I have tried friction, sundry applications & the cold baths but I am not yet sensible of much change for the better . . . I ought to be truly thankful to the Almighty for blessing me with such a strong constitution which has withstood so many ailments for the last thirty years.

. . . perhaps you may think of something that may be of use to me. What do you think of electricity?

. . . I certainly approve of your accepting of the Chair of Medical Jurisprudence in Edinburgh College. It is a desirable city to live in for a man of your pursuits but the parting with so many dear friends in Liverpool will be a painful one particularly to your dear wife & young folks . . .

My son Henry has been with me for the past eight months, he is an amicable youth & I am glad to see he is a favourite with all who know him here — as regards myself personally his affectionate solicitude while I have been confined to a sick bed for so many months provided the greatest comfort that I could possibly enjoy but I lament to say that the bent of his mind is decidedly against following the profession for which he very nearly qualified himself. If he would only agree to follow the medical profession he might ere now live respectably settled in this colony but all the arguments of his friends here have been unavailing which makes me very unhappy on his account as no situation has yet offered here to suit him and I suspect he

must return to Britain soon & try to get some employment that will afford him a subsistence. He is expert at his pen and is at present doing some work for Mr Rainy who is much disposed to forward his views as far as lies in his power.

The slaves are at present quiet & orderly in this Colony but I much fear a rigid adherence to all the exactments contained in the last orders in Council would create much mischief. I am making a good coffee crop on the place (the Brothers) for Mr McInroy . . .

The father of the present proprietor purchased it in 1817 with 130 people & added 27 more making in all 157 & there is now 221 making a clean increase of 64 in fifteen years after deducting the deaths. I mention the circumstance to you as one that I reflect upon with pleasure and I have reason to think the increase is equal to that in Great Britain during the same period. I may also note that in four years out of the fifteen there were no deaths at all.

If Andrew Watson made up his mind to visit Britain I suppose he will be with you by this time. His brothers are in excellent health and all very industrious but t will be a good many years before they can arrive at independence if times don't mend here.

. . . Henry begs to be affectionately remembered to you & yours . . .

NLS MS 19332

f23

Harry Robertson to Miss C Robertson, Kiltearn

Glasgow, 23 Feby 1793

Dear Christy,

My last promise to you at the Storehouse of Fowlis was to write you. I therefore sit down to do it very hurriedly. I send you as a token that I do not forget you, a pair of gloves & cissors . .

. Compts to the House bye Ladies & Christy Rainie¹ & Taenessielag people.

I am, dr Christy, your affectionate brother, Harry Robertson.

NLS MS 19332

f24

Harry Robertson to Miss Christy Robertson, Kiltearn, by Novar

Demerary 26th Novr 1795

My Dear Christy,

I embrace this opportunity of a companion of mine going to London to write you a few lines which I hope will find you and all other friends well. I wrote Annie a long time since but I have had no reply from her. I suppose her silence arrises from the expense of postage but let that never hinder you or her from writing me frequently for besides the pleasure of hearing you are all well, any little but of country news (be it ever so trivial) will be very agreeable to me.

¹ Christine Rainy married Hugh Tennent (1780-1864), of Wellpark Brewery, Glasgow, who built Creich Cottage, Fairlie.

I suppose you are now a big woman. I hope you are as attentive as possible to improve yourself in everything within your reach, tho' your Father cannot afford you Inverness Court Education, yet with some attention you'll all cut as good a figure as your neighbours.

I hope all friends at Creech and Loth well please remember me kindly to them all. My uncle and Mr Parker are both arrived and in good health, pray how did you like that sample of our West indians.

John Robertson desires his best compliments to you and all friends. Pray how does the good Lady at the house-bye hold out? Please offer my best compts to her and all the Ladies. Are our cousins Peggy & Christy Rainy still in Rossshire? remember me to them & Mrs Douglas when you see them. I am surprised no body ever wrote me that Miss Aggie Bethune was married, I heard it from a brother of Miss Dallas of Inverness who I saw at Union Island, one of the Grenadines — and I am told Colin McKenzie of Mount-Gerrald was bold enough to encounter Miss Fraser of Belladrum and has succeeded; he is I hear become a soldier again; who are his officers? — he would be better follow his calves & let that trade alone.

Is Mr Jn Robertson still at Drum? Compts to him & Mrs R.

My compts to the family at Teanefilag, Teanonid etc. I have only to add with love to Annie, Betsy, & my dear boy Hughie, not forgetting poor Wm Ross, that I am, My Dear Christy, your most affectionate Brother,

Ha Robertson

care of Messrs McInroy, Sandbach & Co

Merchants

Demerary

via Barbadoes

Since writing the foregoing I have received a letter from my Father with the distressing accts of the death of my dear Rose and Mrs Douglas all of which has so much deprived me of the use of my pen.

NLS MS 19332

f38

Mr Sandbach, Gateacre, July 19th 1811 to Mrs Watson

Mt dear Christy,

Allow me to take the liberty to introduce my particular friend Dr Traill to you . . .

[Goes on to refer to their coming marriage at Kiltearn. The letter was probably carried by Traill who already knew Christy well.]

NLS MS 19332

f40

S Sandbach to Dr Traill at Kiltearn, 4th Aug 1811

My dear brother [congratulates Traill on his marriage to Christy]

The Demerary arrived here on Tuesday. There are several passengers on board — The Dumb Briton with his mother & three other children are come in her and a Capt Vanbran of the Dutch Navy, a very pleasant man.

. . . There is not a line from Gilbert or Hugh to anyone by the Demerary, I suppose they were both in Berbice when she sailed.

NLS MS 19332

f51

Sam Sandbach to James Watson, Crantit, Orkney

Liverpool 1st July 1806

. . . Hugh sail'd on the 3rd ult in the Demerary completely fitted for fighting her way with 18 guns and 45 men. We have letters from her dated at sea the 11th all well. In ten or fifteen days more I am pretty confident they will be safe at the destined port unless detailed in capturing prizes to which I should have no objection. I hope in the course of time that Hugh will relieve his brother Gilbert who will retire and transfer his present commission in his favour — Gilbert must now be well on towards independence, altho' the crops for two seasons back have been very short. William left on Friday last for London, from whence he promised to write you . . .

Poor Anne is about to leave us also . . . the parents both wish it so much we cannot object to it . . .

The doctor [Traill] tho not yet in much practice beyond our own family I think must in time succeed . . .

NLS MS 19332

f53

Samuel Sandbach to Mrs Watson 10th Sept 1806

Refers to Traill as his closest friend.

NLS MS 19332

f65

H Robertson to James Watson, Orkney

Liverpool 19th Apr 1806

My dear sir,

I wrote Christy a few weeks ago since which time we have not had the pleasure of hearing from her. We were happy to hear of your & her children by a letter Dr Traill received a few days ago from Mr Yule. I think that Christy will not leave much time in writing to me as my stay in this country is likely to be so very short & I think we should enjoy the pleasure of a frequent communication with one another while it is in our power. I have now fully made up my mind about going to Demry yet it is not a measure of choice with me if I could help it: but what is to be done in this Country without money & strong interest. On the contrary, by going to Demry I have a pretty fair prospect before me & a chance of making an Independence in the course of a few years, but all this depends on my own conduct, & I trust that with God's assistance I will be enables to acquit myself to the satisfaction of all those interested in me. We look every hour for the arrival of the Demerary by which I expect letters from Gilbert which will determine my motion finally. Mr Sandbach wishes to send her back to Demerary in the course of the next month, perhaps I may go out with her.

[Asks Christy to send Orkney pony for him to take to Demerara. Also intends to take out some good to sell. Refers to Dr Traill as being unwell.]

I suppose that Anny will return to Kiltarn in the course of the summer, it is time that she should now go and keep her mother company as the Society in that Quarter is in general by no means an agreeable one. William is still here and only awaits the arrival of the Demerary

before he goes to London. Does Harry² still remember Uncle Pu? Kiss him and the dear little [Radly?]³ and Peter⁴ for me — what would I not give for one day with the dears.

. . . Remember me in the kindest manner to all my acquaintances in Kirkwall.

Yours ever most truly,
H M Robertson

NLS MS 19332

f67

Hugh M Robertson to Thomas Traill, physician, 21 Islington, Liverpool
Demerary, Kensington, 17th Aug 1806

My dear T,

. . . I am now a month in this celebrated Country without suffering any sickness, on the contrary I never enjoyed better health and spirits.

[Refers in detail to problems with mosquito bites and resulting ulcers from which many suffer.]

I observe it is now Fair time in Kirkwall where I have no doubt they are very gay . . . I write to Christy by this opportunity & tell her that notwithstanding all her gaiety at this time I surpass her for I can enjoy a walk in Kensington gardens whenever I please. I have written three times, to Kiltarn, Lpool and Orkney since I came here. I have met in Gilbert a most affectionate kind hearted brother who does everything to make me comfortable and happy. He is distressed at present by the loss of a sweet little girl of his called Ann; she was indeed one of the finest engaging children I ever saw. She was quite fair haired, & at first sight struck me as being very like little Ann Sandbach. She died after 14 days illness of a teething fever although [tear in paper] that this Country could afford was given. [Tear in paper] disease to be the same as what little [tear in paper] I fancy our friend Harry has entered his [tear in paper] by this time.

[Offers to send Traill insects, birds and plants.]

Gilbert and I are going up the Corantyne next month where there is fine shooting. I hope to get some Indian curiosities there.

. . . Write me soon . . . when you want to write anything on snug subjects regarding either of ourselves, you might (to avoid any being the wiser) call yourself Marcus & me Julius. I will add nothing more to this but in the old way conclude with Yours to the end of time Hugh M Robertson.

[Note added at head of letter:]

² Harry Robertson Watson (1801-36)

³ Andrew Watson (1803-37)

⁴ Peter Miller Watson (1805-69)

Gilbt has presented me with a little boy newly imported from the Gold Coast, he is of the Madingo Country. He is about 11 years old, a very good natured smart little fellow. I am training him as a servant for myself. Called him La [?].

NLS MS 19332

f69

Hugh Munro Robertson to Thomas Traill
Demerary, Kensington 9th Sept 1806

My last letter to you was dated the middle of last month & was sent by the ship Harriet, which I hope will have reached some time before this comes to hand. I shall endeavour to make up in some way now for the barrenness & stupidity of the foresail Epistle. I have many things to say but I am quite at a loss what to begin with. It would be superfluous to express to you the feelings of regret I had after parting from the dearest friends of my bosom, well knowing that at best, I cannot enjoy the happiness of their society for a number of years & God knows what vicissitudes awaiting 'twixt that time. There is but little variety in the course of a voyage across the Atlantic to amuse, especially when a vessel never touches anywhere as was our case. Indeed we were a very happy party; everyone seemed desirous to contribute his share to pass the time agreeably. Dr Jones is an excellent good hearted man; Mr Littledale is a gentleman of very easy & agreeable manners & very liberal education; if you at any time get acquainted with him in Lpool, i am sure you will find him an agreeable acquisition to your Society. Nothing worthy of notice happened during our passage except our meeting the Favourite Schr of which I have given a full detail to Mr Sandbach. I dare say a certain young lady of our acquaintance wd have heard from or of her Friend in [Gozu?] by this vessel. I believe I mentioned in may last that I was not much struck with the appearance of the country, that is with the beauty of it, but I must say that scene that presented itself when we were coming in to the river was very delightful. It was about 5 o'clock p m & the rays of the sun darted horizontally over the town which is interspersed with groups of beautiful trees & shrubs, then the country on each side the river in the highest state of cultivation as far as your eye can discover — the river is about 2 miles wide at the entrance & gradually gets narrower further up but in no place that I have seen is is less than 1 & 1/2 miles broad. I forgot to mention that Mr L had a thermometer on board with which we everyday ascertained the temperature of the weather =. I always took down i a journal book what they were & I think you may depend upon their being correct for it was an excellent thermometer & we took great care in our observation.

In the latitude of the Azores it stood at	67°
Madeira	74 1/2
of the Tropic of Cancer	76
of Demerara	82 ad 83 1/2

The climate in lat of the Azores is the most delightful you can imagine, it is just such as you might suppose the blessed souls in Elysium enjoy. It was moonlight when we were in the lat & the night scenes on the water were beyond the power of my feeble pen to describe; I refer you to a poem written by your friend Little to Lord Strangford when he (Little) was cruising of the Azores in a frigate. In this lat I first saw turtle. In lat 36 the weather began to get very sensibly warm & in lat 33 saw the flying fish for the first time. I got hold of one of them and put it in rum to send to you but it somehow did not keep well. They are about the size of a herring & when they fly their wings first resemble an umbrella when it is drawn up; as soon as their wings get dry they must dip into the water to refresh them & then fly up again. We saw no dolphin of which there are many marvellous stories told.

[Eats shark 'as delicate eating as any fish I ever tasted'.]

I came from town by land to Kensington & I cannot say much for this "Paradise upon Earth" as I have heard it called . . . how can a country be truly grand & pleasing when it is dead flat or where for a range of fifty miles there is no other variety than the names of the different estates.

. . . Fevers are very prevalent here even among old settlers; how a Johnny Newcome like me has escaped so well I cannot account for.

I was in Stabroek for the last eight days — it is certainly the Devil's own habitation — the heat is sometimes intolerable there; while at Mahaica we enjoy a fine cool breeze . . .

[Asks Traill to send a good thermometer. Describes lightening and thunder.]

There is an appearance on many of the negroes here which strikes me much — it is an excrescence on the navel, of a conical shape exactly & ending in a sharp point perfectly smooth — I felt some of them — they are quite soft to the touch & vary in size from a hip to a jargonell pear & these excrescences do not in the least affect the health of the wearer.

You would be astonished to know how common the venereal disease is among the Negroes — not an estate almost but has some of its people labouring under one of its stages; in fact a person runs a greater risk in this Country than among the fair nymphs at home, unless they are very wary.

[Describes yaws.]

I believe I mentioned to you before that before that Gilbert presented me with a boy — he was just bought when I arrived here — so that I will have the complete training of him myself, I can make him do anything I please, he is really a fine creature — he has always a complacent smile on his countenance & seems (& I think really is) quite happy. I have got him smartly rigged out — he is very desirous to please & I really think the poor little ? has conceived an attachment to me already.

[Describes fireflies and other insects]

I am informed of a very tame snake being in possession of a gentleman a few miles up this river [This is Mr Edmonstone.] . . .

I am going along with Gilbert up to spend a few weeks on the Corantine Coast where his new property is situated.

I was delighted to hear from Mr Smith that you seemed in pretty good spirits . . . My dear friend, you must not let Crosses prey too deeply upon your mind — remember that you are a Man endowed with feeling & rationality & that it becomes you to make use of these gifts which were given not to be lulled into inaction but to rouse & fortify the mind against all trials.

Hugh Munro Robertson to Thomas Traill
Stabroek, Demerary Jan 23rd 1807

Mt Dear Traill,

. . . . Before I proceed any further allow me my dearest Friend, to tell you with what delight I received the account of the happy change in your affairs. Indeed there is not a circumstance that could afford me more heartfelt pleasure. I feel as if there was a great burden lifted off my own mind now, for believe me Traill (I hope you know me too well to suppose me insincere) that whatever adds to your welfare or happiness, always encreases mine. I feel it on the present occasion particularly. I always had the same suspicions on this subject as yourself. If you remember I always used to say that you looked upon matters to be in a much more desperate way than they really were & that a little time would bring then to a satisfactory issue; but considering the serious aspect that matters then more, I thought it would only be insulting your feelings to speak more fully what I thought on the subject. I take it that you are now united by ties that will defy any mortal hand or power to untie. I can easily guess the author of the last letter. Your meeting was rather romantic. May God bless you both & bestow on you the happiness that two virtuous attached minds deserve. I am truly rejoiced to hear of Loutit's luck — he has acted like a man. Give him my warmest congratulations & sincere wishes that he & his amiable girl may enjoy much & lasting happiness. They are to be sure not rich but they have each a share of merit which tho' the world will not think them much the richer for, yet it will supply them with more solid comforts than riches can bestow.

[Discusses cold baths, prickly heat etc]

NLS MS 19332

f74

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill

[Has sent soil samples, skin of snake, Indian weapons. Describes trip with Mr Smith and Mr McBean to Colossorabba Creek in Demerary where a carpenter died for whom Smith was the executor. Describes Sandhills encounters with Indians in canoes.]

NLS MS 19332

f80

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill
Demerary Dec 25th 1807

[Sends box with tiger cat skin, small wild duck ('may first assay in the preserving of birds'), rare nuts, Indian 'jingling bundles' used in funeral rites. Describes comet. Death of 'a most excellent young man, a particular friend of mine. His name was Scobie. He was uncle to the Misses Ritchie.']

NLS MS 19332

f84

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill
Kiltearn, Berbice May 5th 1809

. . . I sit down to alleviate the sorrow of my feelings by unbosoming my mind on a subject whereon I know you will sincerely sympathise with me. I mean the decease of our dear

lamented friend Mr Watson for in him I have lost a most valuable friend as well as relative. . .
.my poor dear sister . . . you who knew hi, so well . . . I understand that Mrs Wilson and the
boys are moving to Kiltearn . . . purchase his fiddle and doubles barrelled gun . . . as a
memorial.

NLS MS 19332

f86

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill
Kiltearn, Berbice June 4th 1809

. . . Kiltearn, where G and myself have been for two months past & are to fix our residence
principally in future . . . the situation is pleasant . . . G intends to visit Britain next year; he
looks well and enjoys good health, yet after 12 years residence I think it is time for him to
take a turn home. He desires me to offer you his most affectionate regards & to say that he
cordially sympathises with your distress.

Mr John Bethune & Mr Wm Munro are both well; so are Tom & Wm McCulloch & all others
from the vicinity of Kiltearn. Mrs James Fraser is going home next week accompanied by her
brother-in-law Mr Evan Fraser. Mr J F himself remains behind.

NLS MS 19332

f88

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill
Demerary June 10th 1811

Geo Rainy — a good worthy fell & ? myself much satisfaction by his continuing in this
Colony

. . . I dare say you must have passed a pleasant time at Kiltearn last summer but the parting
with your uncle was surely a trying one for both; his attentions to my dear unfortunate sister
are such as to call forth the warmest thanks.

[Gives thanks from himself and Gilbert.]

I have made up my mind to visit Britain soon, perhaps next year — at all events the year
after.

[Asks for a copy of 'The Lady of the Lake'.]

NLS MS 19332

f90

Hugh Munro Robertson to Mrs Traill
Demerara, Mahaika June 18th 1811

Letter by Dr Chapman . . .

[HMR proposes 'taking on the expenses of my favourite dear Boy . . . so my dear Andrew
goes to Drummond . . .

. . . next year he will be nine years old, a very good age to go to some academy or other . . . I have been thinking the Fortrose Academy an eligible situation . . . the rector Mr Bonniman is an old class fellow of mine at Aberdeen . . .

[Hopes to send £50 a year. Send arrowroot for the boys.]

G is at present at Kiltarn but I am looking daily for him; he was well by accounts I had a few days ago; poor fellow he has been a good deal harassed one way or other for some time but [?] to say that he is getting his affairs [?] & if only he makes a valuable crop all will be good. Gilb Rainys heirs seem very clamorous but they have no right to be so yet; G wrote Mr Parker a full statement of matters . . . which I hope he has not concealed; it points out everything in the most satisfactory way, G is even now in advance more than he ought to be for the concern & till the debts of it are paid, legacies must [?] over; the deficiencies of crops & badness of prices have occasioned all the delay. I am glad to say that Geo Rainy enjoys good health.

NLS MS 19332

f92

Hugh Munro Robertson to Mrs Traill

Demerara Mahaica Oct 8th 1811

Congratulates Christy on her marriage.

Poor William McCulloch was very ill for a few days last month but he has got quite well again.

Gilbert went to Berbice but went with Geo Rainy.

NLS MS 19332

f94

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill

Stabroek Oct 21st 1811

NLS MS 19332

f98

Hugh Munro Robertson to Mrs Traill

Demerary 12 May 1812

Letter of introduction of Rodk Reach going home because of his health and likely to be in Liverpool. His sister is Mrs Macfarlane in Kirkwall.

NLS MS 19332

f102

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill

Demerary Apr 17th 1813

Long letter: describes trip with Shand to Barbados and Antigua.

. . . A few days ago I was witness to an awful but necessary example of punishment in the execution of six Negro ringleaders of an [?] in Berbice, their plot was laid with a degree of

policy & subtlety that would have done credit to a more enlightened action in a better cause; complete extermination of the whites, but for a timely discovery, and that by a most trivial accident, the hand which now writes this account would be mouldering in the dust or, what is more likely, would have been food for the birds of prey . . . every day brings up some fresh circumstance to show that the plot was not confined to Berbice but that it extended to Demerary . . . it is worthy of remark that no domestik (sic) negro has hitherto been implicated in the plot.

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f104

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill

London July 3rd 1815

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Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill, Liverpool

Dunkeld Aug 17th 1815

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f108

Hugh Munro Robertson to Mrs Traill

Demerara Apr 12th 1817

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f112

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill

Stoney Hill, Antigua, Sept 20th 1817

NLS MS 19332

f114

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill

Stoney Hill, Antigua, Sep 21st 1817

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f116

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill

Stoney Hill, Antigua, Sep 27th 1817

Describes volcano and foetus found in female mule.

NLS MS 19332

f118

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill

George Towne, Demerary, Jan 31st 1818

. . . Harry⁵ is well and gives much satisfaction to Mr Simson who acts the part of a fond father towards him. Tell so to my dear sister . . . It is likely that I shall soon fix my residence in the Town.

Mr Shand has made important arrangements with affairs of his House in this colony, which I trust will turn out in every way to their advantage . . . Mr Staunton to retire . . . my prospects

⁵ Harry Robertson Watson (1801-36), son of HMS's sister Christy.

of success far beyond what I had any reason to expect . . . Frank Shand is a man of great worth and merit

By a late letter from Gilbert . . . I hope he will be able to return home in Aug

NLS MS 19332

f120

Hugh Munro Robertson to Dr Traill

Demerary March 17 1818

Latter taken by Mr J Chapman

Harry is now by me & quite well.

Encloses letter for F Haywood.