
D 2968/2 Letter from Rev Robert Haining to David Grant in Edinburgh describing the voyage to South Australia in the 'Orissa', 8 November 1841

Transcribed by Helen Davies, Volunteer at the State Library of South Australia

Ship Orissa 8th Novr 1841

My Dear David

I despatched a letter to your brother Robert from Rio Janeiro about the middle of September I think, which I hope he has received by this time – Jessie also wrote her sister Helen from the same place – We have had a long and tedious voyage, from England, indeed probably the longest on record for some years back, the average of voyages now to this distant quarter of the globe being about the space of four months and many ships run it in 90 days whereas we have been already out nineteen weeks and have/ still a fortnights sail from Adelaide – The part of our voyage previous to our arrival at Rio as I mentioned in Roberts letter was particularly unpleasant, from various reasons, exceedingly unfavourable weather for some weeks after our first starting, then sickness in the ship, quarrels with the Capt about provisions, dissensions among the passengers themselves which are not yet allayed and which both Jessie and I against our will were drawn into at first and might have been involved in still, had I not, feeling the unpleasantness of my situation as a Clergyman in the midst of it, at once determined to make a vigorous effort and declared my determination to steer clear of all their dissensions and party spirit in future – I encountered of course a good deal of ill nature and expostulation from the one party at first, I mean the one we had been most intimate with, but I remained firm to my purpose and at length gained my end, and I am happy to say that both Jessie and I are now/ on the best terms with every person in the ship and indeed the only persons in the Cabin who can say so – It is an ill regulated ship altogether for the Capt though a very good sort of man and anxious to do what is right, has no firmness or decision with him or much of the mischief that has ensued might have been prevented – He has a set of bad fellows among his crew also, and they have been several times on the borders of open mutiny, and threatening some of the passengers who had given them offence and who through fear slept with a brace of loaded pistols beneath their pillow, – perhaps unnecessarily, for it appeared to me to be to be more talk on the part of the rascals, than any serious intention of doing them harm Had the Capt put the first who misbehaved in irons as he ought to have done, it would/ have prevented any such thing in future but he never went farther than threatening to do so which always encouraged them to repeat their offence –

We spent a few days very pleasantly at Rio – the town itself has nothing very remarkable about it but the immense number of slaves who are constantly posting along the streets, sometimes about a dozen in a train, carrying heavy loads on their heads and either keeping time or encouraging themselves in their labour I don't know which, by a curious kind of monotonous cry – They are in the proportion of/ about eight to one, to the whites and have been detected in several conspiracies for a general massacre, the last attempt being made about seven or eight month ago – The inhabitants dress just the same as the English but the native Brazilian ladies have a curious custom of walking the streets without any bonnets on/, sometimes without even a parasol, intense as the heat is in that climate – I saw a fat old dame, one day, walking along in this style though splendidly dressed otherwise, and black foot boy behind her as gaudily dressed in livery [*...overwritten by*] but the whole set out, grand as it was, was completely

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spoiled by the poor little fellow's bare black feet appearing below his finely laced trousers, shoes and stockings being articles I presume which the lady's acconomy, with all her anxiety to be grand, found too expensive to furnish to slaves – As it was she stalked along with the air of a Dutchess as all her country-women do, the young ladies, if there are any, walking always in front and the matron like a duenna behind alone – To see the ladies you have only to take a walk through the town in the afternoon or rather I should \say/ towards the evening – They are all sitting at the open windows at that time along with their mammas or brothers for the old gentleman of the family apparently never shews himself then and are \as far as we could see/ ~~apparently~~ very busily engaged in doing nothing, no not even in talking which is something remarkable where ladies are concerned – Some of them though dark in complexion are however very pretty – The buildings in the town of Rio are very mean-looking – The public ones and even the palace are all painted like some gewgaw and very much resemble the prints of Chinese houses which you have seen – The harbour is one of the most splendid in the world and both it and \the town/ are surrounded on all sides by the most singularly shaped mountains you ever saw – One of them which rises from the very waters edge called the sugar loaf, resembles that article exactly – The country is very beautiful also, being just a con- -stant succession of these mountains some almost one entire rock you would think while others are covered to the top with trees that are entirely new to you and then the narrow valleys between them form almost a complete garden planted with palms, orange trees, bananas and every other sort of fruit peculiar to the country

We left Rio I think on the 11th Septmr eight weeks ago now, with what the Capt supposed a sufficiency of fresh stock to last to the end of the voyage but he has been far wrong in his calculations for it is all gone more than a fortnight ago and we are now again reduced to salt junk and our preserved provisions which are nearly equally bad – It is a mercy we are so near the end of our long journey or I believe we would be starved out right – The voyage however has on the whole since leaving Rio been more agreeable for both Jessie and I have enjoyed very good health since and the weather has been much cooler, in fact absolutely cold occasionally though the Summer is now far advanced in this southern latitude – It will be the very heart of summer when we arrive at Adelaide and something new to eat our Christmas dinner, at that season of the Year, roasting with heat while you at home are starving with cold – Our passage from Rio has been a very stormy one, in fact almost a constant succession of heavy gales with calms between – One night before we came to the Cape the storm was so dreadful that the ship was obliged to be stript of every sheet of canvas except our small sail to keep her steady and hove to as they call it, that is her face turned to the gale and allowed to drive about at her pleasure – Had the Capt attempted to proceed in such a gale, in all probability one would soon have gone to the bottom – The night before last it blew a perfect hurricane for a short time the people could scarcely keep their feet on the deck for the wind – You have no conception of the tremendous seas in this quarter – those we encountered in the English channel stormy as it was are a mere bagatelle to them – The wind has been blowing very strong for some days past and to day there are occasional heavy squalls of wind with hail showers and the waves are in consequence running mountains high as it is said – you would think every one that is approach-

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-ing would engulf our frail bark altogether – I assure you few have been more thoroughly seasoned to the sea than we have been for in place of having only one storm or two as is generally experienced in the course of the voyage to Australia and sometimes not even that, we have encountered nearer a dozen from first to last – Our Capt is however a very cautious man

some think too much so, and he is always ready in time for it, come when it will so that the ship has not carried away the smallest stick or suffered any damage whatever much as we have encountered – The ship is rolling so at present that I can scarcely write and must account for all my blunders and blotches – At times ~~the~~ a tremendous \sea/ comes sweeping over the deck which is called shipping a sea, and gives her such a thump you would think her sides were stove in altogether – Some ridiculous scenes occur on these occasions – A luckless wight happens to be standing at the very place where it comes over and is drenched in one moment to the skin and then perhaps in his efforts to escape, looses his footing on the slippery deck and goes rolling down into the lee scuppers where ~~the water~~ whole water is collected & gets a second ducking & in place of meeting with sympathy he is generally saluted with a shout of laughter from all his fellow passengers who always on the watch for such an emergency immediately rush forth to see who has caught it as the saying goes – It is not less ridiculous also at the cuddy table during a gale when the ship is rolling – Away goes one thing, smash goes another, every thing on the table is taking by bail – you catch perhaps at a glass with one hand to save it and a and at a plate with the other and then there comes down upon you a mountain of a ham or a dish with sauce, and covers you with grease all over – Such scene are of frequent occurrence – in this stormy ocean – The Capt's stock of crockery is almost exhausted and he says he will soon have to tumble all the dinner into one dish & let us eat together like a parcel of pigs – I must finish for the present but will keep this open till our arrival at Adelaide –

21st Nov^r – Here we are at last just arrived off the bar of the port of Adelaide to our very great satisfaction this morning about seven oclock but will not, at least the ship will not get in ~~to~~ the harbour for some days for want of water though we intend to be off this afternoon to take ourselves, a distance of some seventeen or eighteen miles yet, which we travel partly by water and partly by \land/ carriage the harbour being eleven miles up the creek and then the town of Adelaide was inland from that again – The bar where we are at anchor now is just at the mouth of this creek or narrow channel which turns off at right angles to the Bay of St Vincents and is only about 150 yards wide more resembling a river than any thing else – We have great reason to be thankful we have got over our long voyage of 15 or 16000 miles in safety, and in good health as we are at present, after the numerous dangers to which we have been exposed – I am perfectly delighted with the appearance of the country and with the climate which to use a strong expression is almost heavenly – The town is romantically situated at the foot of a beautiful range of mountains called mount Lofty wooded to the very top and the scenery around is very pretty – The people are just in the middle of their wheat harvest and a most abundant one it is, – It is only the middle of summer properly, or scarcely \even/ that yet, but then they sow their crops in winter if it may be so called, when there is rain, and they are ripe in the early part of summer – They have now about ten thousand acres in cultivation and are planting vines also in great abundance with every sort of fruit tree – Every

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thing is very cheap here though in comparison of what it used to be – I bought the finest lamb this Monday from a butcher who came on board at 4½ ^dpence/ per lb he has as good beef as you could get at home, also at the same price – bread is only 1/- \4lb loaf/ and in place of 2/6, fresh butter 1/- in place of 3/6 – coffee 10^d \per lb/ – fowls 2/6 a pair and every thing in the same proportion – I wish you could come out here I don't think you would ever repent of it – Several people were on board from the town this morning and they say they would not go back to the old country again for the world – The postmasters salary I understand is about 3 £ ? a year here – & of course I cannot say anything of my own prospects yet but a Mr Hamilton from Edin^g *[Edinburgh ?]* who came on board to day said to me he had no doubt, I would be well

supported and he voluntarily offered himself to be a subscriber to my church – I shall however write in the course of a month by the Ship Fania ? which goes direct to London and the Capt of which I know and shall then be better able to give you information as to this point Jessie is in excellent health now and intended to have written but the ship by which we send this just on the point of sailing for India in fact she made the attempt this morning but the wind was too unfavourable and she is only now waiting for a change – She desires ? her kindest love to her father and you all in a body (for I have neither space nor time to particularize).in which I most sincerely join – She will write by the very first opportunity – I have been obliged to write in a hurry and may have omitted something. I ought to have mentioned but you will excuse it on account of the bustle in depart^{re} & on landing after a long voyage – I might have put it off for a few days but we thought you would naturally be anxious to hear of our

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[Cross hatching on parts of Page 4 is difficult to read. To read the 11 lines written at right angles across the original version of this page, turn it anticlockwise]

arrival – Ask your
Sister to tell the Miss
Bains with my
them in a week or
a moments time
– write me a long
give all the news.
and Mr Runcell [or Runllman]
them soon – and are
present and be-
affect. brother in law

Robertsons and the
love – I will write
two but I have not
to do it to-day
letter soon and
Tell Dr Cleeson
I shall write
well for the
lieve me Your

R .? Haining

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