

No. 4.

His Majesty's cutter *Mesmaid* - moored off Coepang.
In the Island of TIMOR, Indian Ocean.
June 8th 1818.

My Dear Father -

Nothing gives me greater pleasure than once more
resuming my pen to write to my Dearest Relations & Friends in England,
who have, I hope long ere this, received those which I have already sent.
The last was No. 3. dated from SW Cape of New Holland Aug. 14. 1817. to Sydney
Dec. 10. - sent by the hand of a Surgeon in the Navy. D. Dewar, going home
as a passenger, in a ship called the *Assiet*; of the particulars in which,
(trusting you have received it) I shall make no more mention. - She sailed
from the Post Jackson at the same time as the *Mesmaid*, on 21st of December
we lost sight of each other the same evening.

You will perhaps be a little surprised at the above date of my letter, but
to explain it; we have just arrived here for water & refreshments,
previous to returning to Post Jackson for provisions, stores, & a refit. &c.
I expect to sail from hence, on or about the 12th or 14th inst. - A
Brig, on the point of sailing for Batavia, will convey this to the settlement
there; from whence it will meet with a more speedy passage to
England, than if dispatched from Post Jackson by the way of India. I
have still however, anxious doubts of its ever reaching you; for I know
by experience that commanders of Merchant vessels are ^{not} over particular in
their delivery of letters; and may probably be equally so ⁱⁿ the
present instance. - we must however hope for the best.

The little *Mesmaid* has now been absent 6 months from Post Jackson; which
is a long time to be living almost entirely upon salt provisions; & you must
naturally conclude that fresh meat, vegetables, & fruit, are very desirable;
we have, nevertheless, had but very little of either, although the vessel
has been lying here... 3 whole days. - Application was in the first instance
made to the Governor; who referred us to his Agent, (an Englishman), giving
him directions to procure every thing we stood in need of: - but stock, fruit
&c. are ~~procured~~ purchased from the mountaineers, who collect what is
wrought, & would in a very short time have supplied him with a great quantity,
but he has been so very dictatory in his proceedings, though very ready
to pocket any money; that his conduct has been represented to the Governor
we have nothing more to do with him: - whatever we want, is now pur-
chased about the town, if it can be got, which is but seldom; & we frequently
suffer the deprivation of some necessary articles, rather than trouble this
blackguard to charge us 5 times their prices. -

Coepang, is a poor
miserable town, belonging to the Dutch, though held by only 40 Javanese
Soldiers; not one of which could withstand the wind from a pair of bellows, or
a good wind instrument. - Lieut. King & I waited on the Governor, on our first
arrival, & Mr. Bedwell, & the Botanist Mr. Cunningham, have since been
introduced, & dined with him. - He is a native of this place, is married to a
lady

2)
lady of the same colour as himself, & is very much of the gentleman. This settlement has 2^d been taken from him, by a very small English force; & according to his own accounts, I entertain no very high notions of his courage; but that commodity. I have at this time nothing to do with, on his part; for which he will supply us with water & refreshments, our expectations are fulfilled & we have all that is desired.

To give you a detailed account of all our proceedings since leaving Port Jackson, would fill about 2 quires of paper, & perhaps prove not very interesting. I must therefore confine myself to particular subjects, omitting all past dangers, &c. &c. as matters of rejoicing & congratulation, at having been weathered. — I was, as you may well suppose, exceedingly sea sick, upon embarking in so small a vessel; & have not yet got over it; for we have been so continually in those, & comparatively smooth waters, that I am frequently sick, when we lose sight of the Land; if there is any thing like a fresh breeze, or heavy sea. — After leaving Port Jackson we had some very heavy weather, blowing exceedingly hard for several days together; & not knowing the vessel's seal qualities, whether good or bad, we looked anxiously sometimes, to see how she would behave; & were much gratified, with a result equal to our wishes. — The gales above alluded to, did us no further injury than retard our progress considerably for the time, & oblige us to run for shelter under the lee of Furneaux's Id., after which, finer weather succeeded; & we arrived at King George's Sound, on the South Coast of New Holland, on 20th January 1818. — There is no settlement here; but our principal object was to complete with wood & water, & take some necessary observations for the Chronometers, which being completed in 10 days, we set sail again, for the Northwest coast of New Holland, where we arrived on 10th of February; & immediately commenced to explore a deep opening to the East^w of it, & which Lieut. King has named Exmouth's Gulf, after Lord Exmouth, under whose command he has served in the late war: — The hottest weather, which we felt on any part of the Coast, was experienced here; the whole of the surrounding country as far as the eye could possibly reach, being one dry arid desert of sand & rocks, which retained the immense heat of the sun in so great a degree, as render the air extremely hot & oppressive. — The first time we anchored in this Gulf, cost us one of our best anchors, which we parted from in the morning; & the very next time, the *L* was let go, one of its flukes was broken off by the rocks, & we narrowly escaped being driven ashore upon this desert place; so that the object of the expedition was nearly frustrated at its commencement, & we had only one more anchor fit for holding the vessel, in a breeze; ^{with} which it was thought extremely hazardous to venture upon a barren, unknown Coast, so pregnant with danger; nevertheless, being unwilling to give it up, as so early a commencement it was resolved to hang on as long as the remaining anchor would do its duty, and although we have rode out several pretty strong breezes, & bent the *L* in 2 places, it appears to be as good as ever, & will probably carry us to Port Jackson. It was in Exmouth's Gulf, that we began to know each other, more exactly, with regard to the Service upon which we had embarked; & for reasons, which it does not

does not appear absolutely necessary to mention, (as you might possibly think it a vain boast on my part) I was enabled to render more assistance to Lieut. St. than my Companion Mr. B., & in fact the whole of the duty which should have been equally divided between 2, fell upon the shoulders of one only; it was sometimes more than he could well sustain. However, by perseverance, & a wish to contribute as much as possible towards forwarding the service, it did not look much; & I was the constant attendant of Lieut. King on shore to take observations, which enabled me to see more of the nature of the Country, & its productions, than could possibly have come within my observation, had I remained onboard the Cutter:— So far, ~~with~~ with the approbation of my superior officer, I should have been perfectly contented; but a sort of jealousy was awakened in the breast of a 2^d person, who unjustly supposed me, instead of himself, to be the cause of his ~~not~~ receiving so much attention, as an equality of services would have entitled him to, & which he thinks is due to his acquaintance with a certain noble personage in England; it is therefore, sometimes, squally, with thunder & lightning; the clouds being attracted by the high Land; yet they produce serene weather afterwards, & every thing goes on with its accustomed smoothness, till the clouds again begin to gather.

After getting out of Plymouth Gulf, from the midst of sand, & rocks, a very low shore succeeded, covered with that intolerable pest the many sive bushes which makes landing almost impossible except in particular spots rarely to be found; & the interior covered with a long prickly grass, called Spinifex, which is extremely annoying to the feet & legs, & makes them very sore. Immense heaps of sharp, rusty coloured stones, of ponderous weight, are there seen in every direction, & appear to be placed by the hand of man; but whole ranges of hills being formed in the same manner, were probably immense masses of rock in the first instance; struck & broken into so many smaller pieces by the lightning, which has left indubitable marks of its being very vivid, & destructive in its effects. Upon referring to a map of the world, or of this Country, you will see, Rosemary Island, ^{situated} near the North west Cape:— There are a great many Islands hereabouts, which we were occupied some time in surveying; & among the many Bays in the main Coast at the back of them, Lieut. King kindly offered me the privilege of naming one; which I accordingly did, by calling it after Mr. Nichols; & it is now named on the Chart, Nichols Bay:— Had it been large enough, & of sufficient importance to have borne the name of my patron, St. Rich^d. Bates, I should most assuredly have given that in preference; but being no more than 6 or 7 miles wide & deep, it would be offering no compliment to his rank in the Navy; ~~and~~ I do not give up the idea of being able to

to name some Cape, or Madland, worthy of it, after both S^r. R. Steele & S^r. C. Cole, which cannot fail to be gratifying to the feelings of either. You are perhaps impatient to know whether I have got any thing named after myself; but I must exhort your patience a little longer; knowing you will not approve of a digression from the regular thread of my story.

After examining that part of the Coast & the Islands, above mentioned, the wind came strong against our future progress along the continuation of it; & the season of the Change of the Monsoon, from N.W. to S.E. being at hand, and is generally reckoned the most sickly season of the year, our plan was laid accordingly, (which it would be uninteresting to detail) & we stood off from the Coast, as well to avoid the heavy rains which are to be expected ~~in~~ ^{at} ~~the~~ ^{the} North Coast of the Island. & prosecute its examination from East to West, with the commencement of the S.E. monsoon. - Some very dangerous reefs (near which we passed in the Horatio on an outward bound passage to China) whose situation, extent, appearance, &c. &c. would be of infinite service to the Navigation of these seas; were situated several hundred miles from any land, in almost an unknown part; & they became the next objects of our research. - After looking about for them in the most probable situations which we thought they might lie in, from the various accounts given in books, they were at last fallen in with, the day after Charles's birth day. - These were 3 in number, situated 10 or 12 miles from each other, & I could not but look with a mixture of thankfulness & horror, at the tremendous line of breakers which formed their outline, when I reflected upon the number of vessels that had been wrecked there, & upon the small distance we must have passed from them in the Horatio, sailing at the rate of 10 or 11 miles an hour, in the dark. - The depth of water appeared to be unfathomable at the small distance of a mile from them, for with 220 fathoms of line we could find no bottom; & it was thought useless to veer more. - (A fathom is 6 feet.) Fortunately for us we had fine weather while among them, & having ascertained their exact situations, by numerous good observations, they were lost sight of on the following day, as we proceeded to the Northward; & the 24th of the same month brought us in sight of the North Coast of New Holland; upon the examination of which, we immediately commenced, & have been continually at it till the 1st day of this month, when our stock of water, which we were very fortunate enough to replenish, began to get very short; & we were upon a reduced allowance, when a great deficiency was found to exist in the quantity supposed to be in our only remaining 6 casks; one having leaked entirely out, & all the other ~~being~~ ^{being} several gallons short of the proper quantity. - Any farther delay upon ~~at~~ a coast where it was impracticable to obtain that precious article, was therefore imprudent; & we have put in here for a quick ^{supply}.

supply, to carry us to Port Jackson. — It will probably be upwards of 2 months before we reach that place, and it will be as much as we can do to make the provisions hold out; for bad weather has made such havoc among our dry provisions, particularly the biscuit, that we have for some time been upon two thirds allowance of that article; & as we cannot procure any more here, thoughts are entertained of making the allowance still more limited; but I dare say we shall do very well, & be all ready for the salutary nourishment & repose, which for a couple of months, will probably be found at Sydney. — But to return to the North Coast of New Holland, of which

I have as yet told you nothing: its examination afforded us a little more pleasure than that which we ~~had~~^{had} previously left; although in many places it was very low, & covered with mangroves near the sea. — Traces of Malays, who come here to fish for Trepany (a kind of blubbery soft fish, which sells well to the Chinese) were every where seen, & put us on our guard against that treacherous perfidious race of Beings; whose natural piratical dispositions might, by the small size of our vessel, prompt them to some act of violence. — None of them were seen till several days had elapsed, when we were standing in for an anchorage we had occupied but 2 or 3 days before, & 10 or 12 sail of Malay proas were observed in the same place; some at anchor, & others under weigh. — Having our Long boat towing astern, with which we had been wooding at another island 2 or 3 miles distant, she was immediately hoisted in, our decks cleared of all lumber, & the 3 Guns being cleared away, (a terrible force for a Man of War) they were double shotted; & in case they might think we were afraid of them, & were running away, we bore down for the body of their fleet at anchor under a small Island, & upon hoisting our colours & pendant, they all shewed Dutch flags. I not less than 100 of them were collected upon the summit of the island, to look at us, exactly in the same spot that our observations had been taken ^{on}, for 2 or 3 days before. — We took no notice of their waving to us, but with a fine commanding breeze, we passed the whole of them at 2 to the number of 13, within 1/2 a mile; & having run along the coast & carried the examination 12 or 14 miles farther than was originally intended that evening, we stood off to sea at dusk in the evening, in order to disappoint them if they followed us; & made the land again at daylight next morning. — The wind was then blowing strong in our favour, & we were on the point of entering a fine bay that was seen abreast of us, which promised good shelter & anchorage, when these Mahometans were observed coming down towards us before the wind under all sail. — We had kept in readiness to receive them, during the whole of the preceding night, & now hove to, off the Entrance of the port in sight, to see what they were after, & whether we were the objects of their attention. — They soon came down to the number of 16 sail, having between 20 & 30 Malays in each; and

papering inshore of us, stood directly into the Bay, which we were congratulating ourselves upon having discovered; thereby disappointing our views, & leaving us still in the dark with respect to the tendency of their manœuvres. When they had all passed us, we followed the Steamboat; but by superiority of sailing got ahead of the whole, & crossed the mouth of the Bay, towards another beyond it; in which the anchor was let go at 4 or 5 miles distant from them, a low neck of land being the only separation between us.

All remained quiet during the night; & before the day had dawned they were all perceived under weigh, in the offing; & divided into 2 squadrons; one of which consisting of 8 sail, accompanied by as many canoes with 8 or 9 men in each, stood towards us; & the other squadron proceeded to another part of the Bay. Thinking these movements very singular, & not knowing what might be their intentions, in appearing to follow us up so closely; the anchor was weighed, and with the usual precautionary measures we stood towards the headmost of them, which was the largest, & full of men. — With sea hot irons in readiness for the touch holes of our guns, & every man with his musket, pistol & cutlafs, lying on the deck beside him, we passed within 1/2 pistol shot of her on opposite tacks; while they hailed, & as well as they could, informed us they were from Macassar, fishing for Sperm: They made many signs & motions to us, pointing towards that part of the Bay which they were going to, as if for an invitation to us, to go there; but being well aware of the consummate treachery which will for ever ~~mark~~ mark the character of these ruffians, we paid no more attention, than making signs of noncompliance, in return. In this manner we passed the whole 8; not one of whom (had it been their intention) had the courage to commence an attack upon our little vessel, because they saw we were prepared for them; & for ~~for~~ us to have commenced an attack upon them, would have been both imprudent & unprovoked. — After we had passed the whole, they

all altered their course; collected in a body; & stood along shore to the westward, leaving us entirely at liberty to prosecute the examination of both Bays, without any interruption, except from another fleet, for we were then to windward of our late visitors, & there was not the smallest chance of their being able to beat up to windward.

The survey of the 2 Bays above alluded to, was completed in the course of a few days, & we then fell in with 23 of their canoes, fishing along shore, with 8 or 10 men in each. The vessels to which they belonged, soon afterwards appeared; & it was resolved if possible, to communicate with them; as Lieut. King was in possession of a letter from Col. Raffles, formerly Governor of Java, written in the Malay language to explain to any we might fall in with, what was our occupation; & desiring them not to molest us. — This letter we imagined, would have chased away any ideas of jealousy which might have been entertained on their part, if they supposed we were upon the same expedition as themselves; & which ideas it became necessary to remove as soon as possible; for a misunderstanding between us might frustrate every purpose of our voyage; & from their greatly superior force place us within their power. — With this intention, sail was made, after the Steamboat of them, who was, at a little distance from the rest, and

notwithstanding our signs, holding out the letters, & every thing we could do to induce him to heave to. She would not comply; but spread every stick of his Canoes to come up with the body of his fleet. — Finding it useless at this time to attempt a communication, we stood back again, intending to wait for another opportunity; which shortly afterwards offered, & was effectually made use of, by our standing into a Post where 6 of them laid at anchor, with tents & large fires on shore, curing their Toppans. — Not being so shy of this number, we anchored in the same Post, about 2 miles from them; upon our shewing English Colours & a white flag at the Mast head, they hoisted Dutch, & a canoe shortly afterwards came on board of us, with 2 men who appeared to have some authority over the rest. — our communication was a little embarrassed, from ignorance of each others language, but they immediately understood us, when a chart was shewn them, though they were not sufficient scholars to read the letters. Wine, tea, biscuit, & a few other things, including several pounds of Gunpowder were given to them, & in Return they gave us some fresh fish. — Every thing which came within reach they did not fail to ask for, even the Capt's Issues, out of which they drank; but they were not encouraged in this; for returning into their canoe, invited us on board their prows; this honor was however refused, & they returned in the evening, gratified with their reception, — as we should perhaps have had too many visitors, if we had remained there another day, the anchor was weighed in the morning, & we proceeded on the further examination of the Coast. — None of them have been since seen by us, & we now learn that they leave the Coast of New-Holland in the Month of May; and that the whole body of them consists of About 200 sail, separated into small squadrons of 12 or 14, which keep together for defence from the Natives, who are extremely hostile to them; & invariably collect their strongest force to attack them. — We have, ourselves, experienced the inveteracy which exists between the 2 Nations, by having several times been attacked in our boats, & while on shore taking observations, watering, &c. — The first affair we had with them, was at a short time after we arrived on the North Coast, when, having discovered fresh water upon an island near the Main, we commenced digging wells to collect it into, & a wooding party was dispatched on shore to fell ~~and~~ trees for fire wood. — No traces of Natives were observed on the island; & when the party returned on board to their meals, they left their saw, hatchets, & other tools behind, in readiness for the afternoon. — I chanced to be upon deck, & casting my eye towards the beach, immediately missed some glass, which had not many hours before, been stuck upon poles to assist us in the survey of the place. — Mention was instantly made of it, but no person had brought them off, & on looking minutely among the bushes with our glasses, 5 Natives were observed crouching behind the trees, & sneaking along towards our wooding place. — Having arrived there, they immediately seized the tools, & were impatiently looking about for more, when a musket ball was fired into the midst of them. — This took them so completely unawares, that some fell flat on the ground, while the others retreated with all possible dispatch through thick & thin, towards the interior of the island, & were not seen again for some time. — They were at last discovered among the high grass, by the reflection of the sun in a new crooked saw which they had taken, shining full in our faces. — They imagined themselves concealed; but we distinctly saw all

our wooding tools in their possession; & by way of retaliation & punishment upon these thieves, Mr. Bewick was dispatched in an armed boat to endeavour to find their canoe; while Lieutt. King himself landed with 2 men (all of us armed) to finish the observations we had begun upon. — The latter were just completed, when we were gratified with a sight of our boat coming round a bluff point of land, with a canoe towing astern: a short visit was made to ascertain the extent of the mischief done at the wooding place, & we returned onboard without receiving any molestation, or seeing any natives, although some of them were probably watching us all the time. — Mr. B. had found the canoe in the next bay to us near some natives' bark huts, & there were 10 or 12 natives armed with long spears, standing over her, as if for her defence; but ~~upon~~ they all retreated upon the boat pushing in, & suffered in their number to carry off the canoe. — She was immediately recognized to be of Malay construction, & was probably stolen or taken by force from some of the prowls that had visited this island; for in the night before the Moon was up, our Long boat was seized from astern of the vessel; & on looking round, she was perceived inshore apparently being paddled towards it: — She looked so large in the dark, that she was at first taken for a Malay boat, that might have some design upon us, & all hands were in an instant upon deck; shot flew about her like peas, till it was found to be our own boat, which was not till Lieutt. King, & hands & myself, with five arms & cutlasses, had put off to see what she was; & we immediately brought her onboard. — Upon examining the rope (3 inches thick) with which she had been secured, it was found to be jagged through, as if with a shell, or a very blunt edge tool; & it was immediately concluded that one of the Natives had swam off, under cover of the night, for the purpose of regaining possession of their canoe by stealth; but she had been hoisted up after the evening closed in; & being disappointed in his expectations, the Native thought he would not return empty, therefore took the largest of our boats; and was either towing or paddling her along, for a great splash was heard in the water, upon our first discharge of musketry. — This affair set us upon our guard; & was the first specimen afforded us, of the dispositions of these people: — Next morning, we removed the vessel to another part of the island, to water; & upon letting go the anchor about 10 or 20 Natives were seen on the summit of a piece of rising ground, looking at us with great attention, & appearing to be holding a consultation; of which we were the subject. — In order to terrify them, & punish them for the affair of last night, a round shot was fired among the trees over their heads, which dispersed them instantly, & not one was to be seen till a party went onshore to fill water casks, under the directions of Mr. Bewick. — The watering place was at the ~~the~~ foot of a perpendicular white cliff, of about 200 feet elevation; from a hole in which the water exuded pretty freely, & the casks being rolled onshore upon the beach, were filled by means of buckets. — The party had not been 10 minutes onshore, before 6 or 8 Natives made their appearance on the summit of the cliff, directly over their heads, & commenced throwing & rolling large pieces of rock upon them. — Very fortunately, the ~~the~~ height was too great to admit of their taking a good aim; & the preconcerted signal for the people to retreat to the Boats, being made from the Cutter, before one stone was thrown; Mr. B. happened to be looking at us at the instant, & immediately giving the necessary orders for retreat & self defence, seized a loaded musket that

(wound with Red lake, hope one)

said

9/
I hope that the length of my letter will be a sufficient apology for the
stuff which it contains, I must at length receive your patience, by
assuring you that the conclusion is drawing on apace, forward of
more matter, or soon, to proceed farther:— although yours to me may
not be so voluminous, I shall be perfectly contented if it contains the
welcome intelligence of your being all well, — 3 years is a long time, my
Dear Father, to wait, before I shall probably be assured of it in person,
but it is comparatively short, when I consider the case of Bro^r in India,
I must be awaited with patience:— Nevertheless one cannot help sighing for
Dulee's downum now & then, however useless we may think it.

Charles, do you hear? here's a letter from John — come, come out,
I hear the end of it — Will^m has been up these 5 minutes, & got all the
news. This I suppose is the ~~letter~~ broadside received by Chas.
with his mouth wide open, catching flies with it, in his sleep; if he
is at home; but if not, he will doubtless read it with equal pleasure,
& just come in for the assurance of my unbounded regard, for his and
all your welfare & happiness; & with kindest love to Dear Mother,
Sophy & the 2 Soldiers, accept my Dear Father, the sincere love
& duty — of
your ever affectionate Son.

John Septimus Roe

1848

Secretary
Baltimore
England

Director of
the American Bank Note

TIVAN OOL
MAY 18 1848

John J. Moore Aug 8-1818

[Handwritten signature]

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1848
No 1

[Faint circular stamp]