

## Letter 11: Disease, gold rush, bush ranging and urban myth

Candesh  
Nov 21<sup>st</sup> 1853

My dear Sister,

I received your kind letter yesterday of the 28<sup>th</sup> August and was most surprised to hear that you had only received one letter from me since my arrival in India. I assure you I have sent several which ought to have reached you long ago as I see yours only take about three months in coming here. One Mr Weeding kept back in order to ask me whether I still desired to have the estate divided as he thought I had proposed it in the said letter, but there was no reason for his doing so as I had merely spoken of the division if it became necessary to divide it and not to express any wish on my part to actually divide it. Receiving the sad intelligence in your letter as the death of poor old Trim which I was really very sorry to hear of. I have told you that (missing text) have another dog something like him which I (missing text) also named Trim, so that as poor old Trim's star has set in the South so new Trim's rises in the East. I was glad to observe in your letter that you do not mention any of the young people being attacked by **the prevailing influenza or fever which must be very severe and ought to be guarded against with the greatest care**. You do not say anything about Cousin Tom so I hope he is better and if so, I daresay he can get a good appointment in these busy times. In my last letter to you which I sent about two months since I enclosed one to him from Mrs J Baggallay which was sent to me by mistake.

**There has been a good deal of cholera in Europe and in India of late but it is now happily on the decrease**. I am just now staying in the house of a Mr Atkins who resides in my Districts; I came to see an Apothecary and get some medicines for a bilious attack which now all but gone. I have got the work that generally falls to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Assist. and find quite enough to do having sometimes two or three cases for trial come on the same day. The weather is nice and cool now and tent life rather pleasant than otherwise. I pitch my tent at the large towns and stay there for some 14 or 15 days and so move all through my districts which are about 50 miles in any length though not nearly all inhabited or cultivated. I see you had a Grand Jubilee but do you **know I begin to think you will want the convict labor if all the working men become such grand gentleman with their lumps of gold**; however I daresay you will have more emigration to VDiemensLand (sic) than formerly. **I hope those fellows who attacked the escort were captured and punished according to their merits**. My last letter to you contained a great deal of instruction about buying horses for myself and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant but your subsequent letter shows that it is more advisable to buy them here since the price of animals has risen so enormously among you; in fact I don't know but what it would be better to send you some of our little Arabs if you can get £100 & £200 for them. I did not hear from England by the last mail but the one before brought me word that Mr Weeding had gone into Shropshire to see old friends and seemed of younger days. Mrs Weeding did not go; & you know she is not over fond of Mrs Barkley and others; but by some means or other I am very good friends with all parties. I can quite imagine that Weedington is beginning to look rather old and broken down if it is not occasionally repaired. I suppose Mr Vincent is going on all right (....) his wife; I always thought she was a nice little woman but I suppose she must have done something to displease him. I think it must have been the name of Major Swanson (not Swanston) that you saw in the Railway list; there is no fear Captain Swanston getting into the Army again unless he can pass off as a boy; I should

think some one examined the Ship's books to find his death authenticated or not. **There is in Australia a fellow who ran away from the Town I am now writing at.** He was employed by a large Firm in Bombay as their Cotton Agent in Candesh and being apparently a most gentlemanly man he mixed with the very highest society; but having got into debt he bolted one fine day with a lot of other people's money and has been since heard of in Australia. His name here was Archibald George Constable (missing text) what it may be now I can't say. I never saw him but I believe he is a very stately looking fellow but an awful coward and rascal.

I heard the other day from the Collector that I am likely soon to be promoted to second assist. in which case I shall have to leave this post, for which I shall not be sorry as the climate is most trying in Candesh. I hope this will find you in possession of all my other letters for tho' I own I am a very bad correspondent yet I am not as bad as all that. I do not know what you know about India; but if there is anything I can tell you I shall be delighted. You know there is nothing of the grand show of wealth that there used to be. One does not see an elephant from one years end to another; all that one sees now are half naked people and broken down old sand walled villages. **The days of pomp have gone by and a Rajah down in Bombay now is looked upon as rather a donkey for the expense he is going to, to keep up the appearance of Royalty.**

I think I must now conclude & with best love to Sisters and Brothers Nephews & Nieces

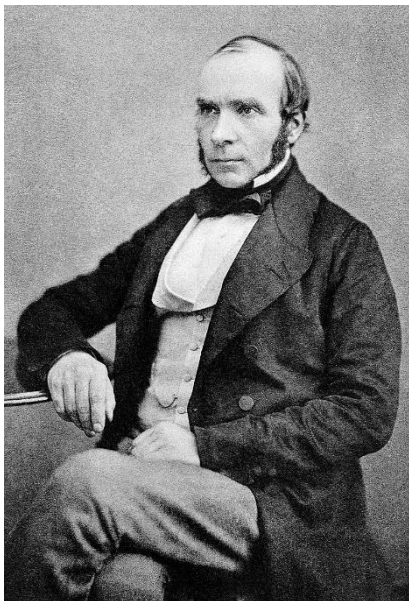
Believe me

Your ever affectionate Brother

TWeeding

**"the prevailing influenza or fever which must be very severe and ought to be guarded against with the greatest care"**

In the current global pandemic, Thomas' words seem almost prophetic.



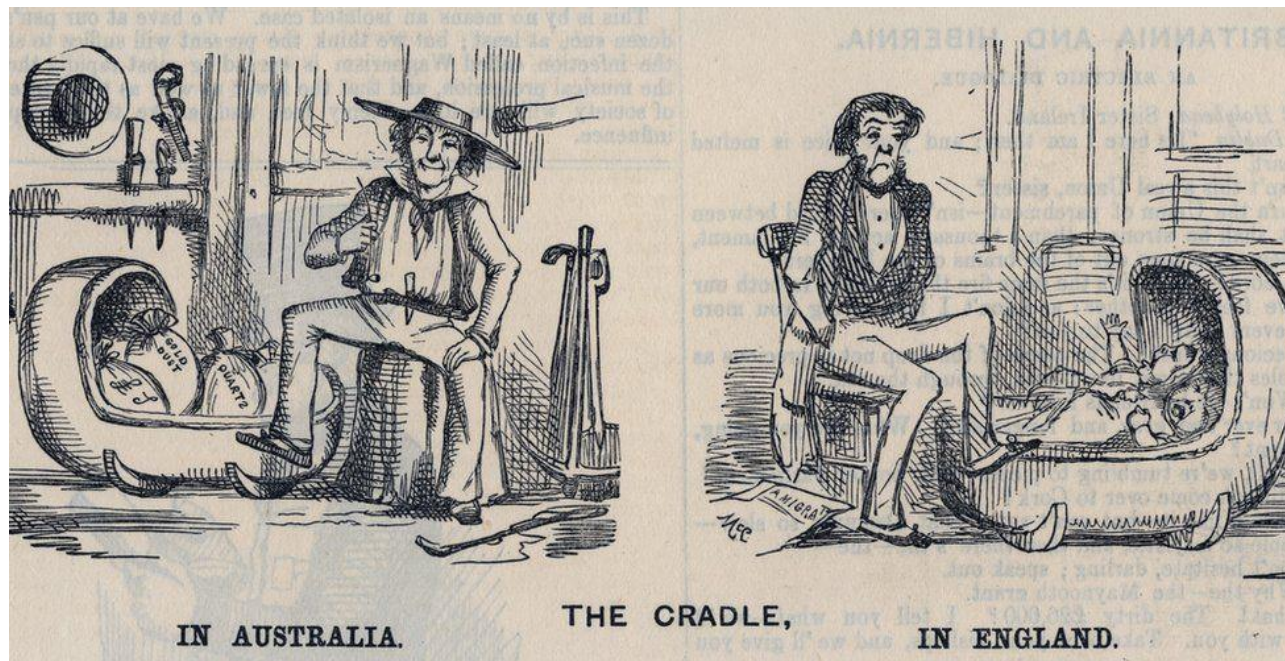
*John Snow*

**There has been a good deal of cholera in Europe and in India of late but it is now happily on the decrease**

Most epidemiologists agree that the first cholera epidemic in India (1817 to 1824) was caused by the movement of goods and people through the British colonisation of India and increased presence of the British Army. The third pandemic (of which Thomas writes here) began in 1846 and persisted until 1860. Interestingly, just a year after Thomas wrote this, the English physician John Snow made the connection between contaminated water and the spread of the disease.

**“I begin to think you will want the convict labor if all the working men become such grand gentleman with their lumps of gold”**

By this stage stories were filtering back about domestic servants who had decamped to the goldfields then returned to start life with their new found wealth; needless to say, the landed gentry of Australia (also known as the ‘Squatocracy’) looked down their noses at these Nouveau Riche arrivistes.



British Punch's take on newly rich Australians (a 'cradle' is a wooden device used to wash gold on the fields)

**I hope those fellows who attacked the escort were captured and punished according to their merits.**

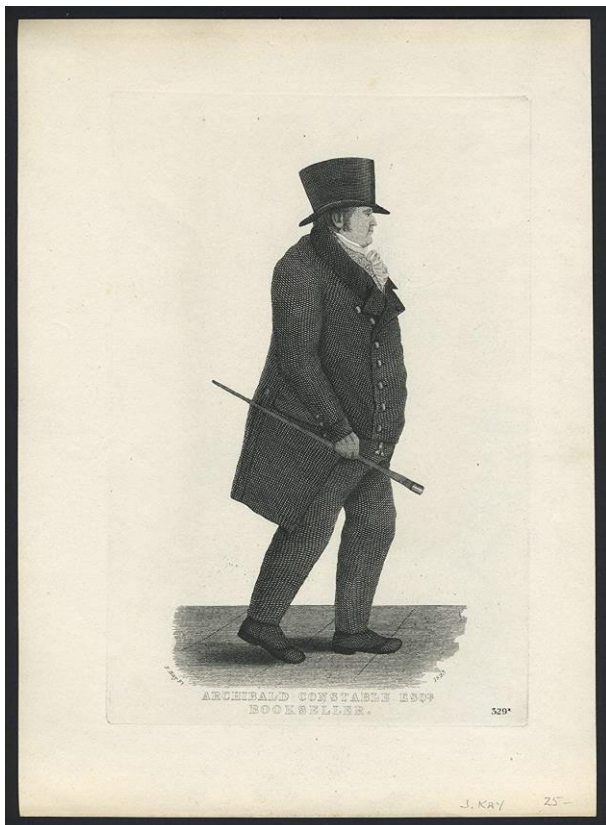
Despite living in India Thomas is remarkably well informed about current affairs in Australia. Here he is referring to the robbery of Melbourne's Private Escort Company whilst they were escorting a cargo of gold from the diggings at Heathcote, Victoria and Kyneton in July 1853. The gang of bushrangers who committed the robbery were led by John Grey and escaped with cash and gold to the value of £10,000, a staggering amount at that time. Things went wrong for the gang when one of their number, John Francis (a former Hobart convict) was arrested on board the *Madagascar*, bound for England with his ill-gotten gain. Francis escaped punishment by turning on his comrades and becoming a Crown witness against the gang, including his own brother who committed suicide whilst in custody. Francis himself escaped punishment by this ruse, but the remaining three members of the gang were hanged in October 1853, meaning that by the time Thomas was writing, the gang had indeed been "captured and punished according to their merits". Except, of course, John Francis.

Popular legend has it that a number of unknown gang members escaped capture on the *Madagascar* and sailed for England. The ship was lost at sea, leading to rumours that these (supposed) gang members had murdered the ships' crew and passengers in order to steal the gold. Weirdly, this is pretty much the plot of Steve Beck's 2002 supernatural (and very grisly) thriller *Ghost Ship*.



*Speaks for itself – scene from Ghost Ship (2002)*

**“There is in Australia a fellow who ran away from the Town I am now writing at...”**



*Engraving of Archibald Constable Sr*

Thomas is referring to Archibald George Constable, younger son of the famous Edinburgh publisher Archibald Constable. From the little evidence available, Constable seems to have moved in high society on a budget of nothing. In 1844, he was being held as an insolvent debtor in the Castle of Lancaster, but previously his address had been 1 Belgrave St, Belgrave Square, or lodging at the Adelphi Hotel – by no means the abode of the poor or indigent. By 1852, with his bankruptcy behind him he obtained work as Agent for Ritchie & Stewart, who had invested heavily in cotton cultivation in India (which is how he comes into our story). At the time Thomas was writing, Ritchie & Stewart were experimenting with steam driven cotton gins, and by all reports doing well. Then, in March 1852, a warrant was issued for Archibald George Constable’s arrest for having embezzled 19,178 Rupees from his employers. As Thomas notes, he avoided arrest by absconding from India, but from this point on little is known of his career, other than that he died in 1882.

**The days of pomp have gone by and a Rajah down in Bombay now is looked upon as rather a donkey for the expense he is going to, to keep up the appearance of Royalty.**

By the time that Thomas is writing, the Rajahs (princely rulers) of India were largely subjugated by the British. However that didn't stop the Rajahs and their families from making conspicuous displays of wealth. In literature, this is very well captured by writers such as EM Forster (*A Passage to India*).



The Rajah of Travancore's princely transportation