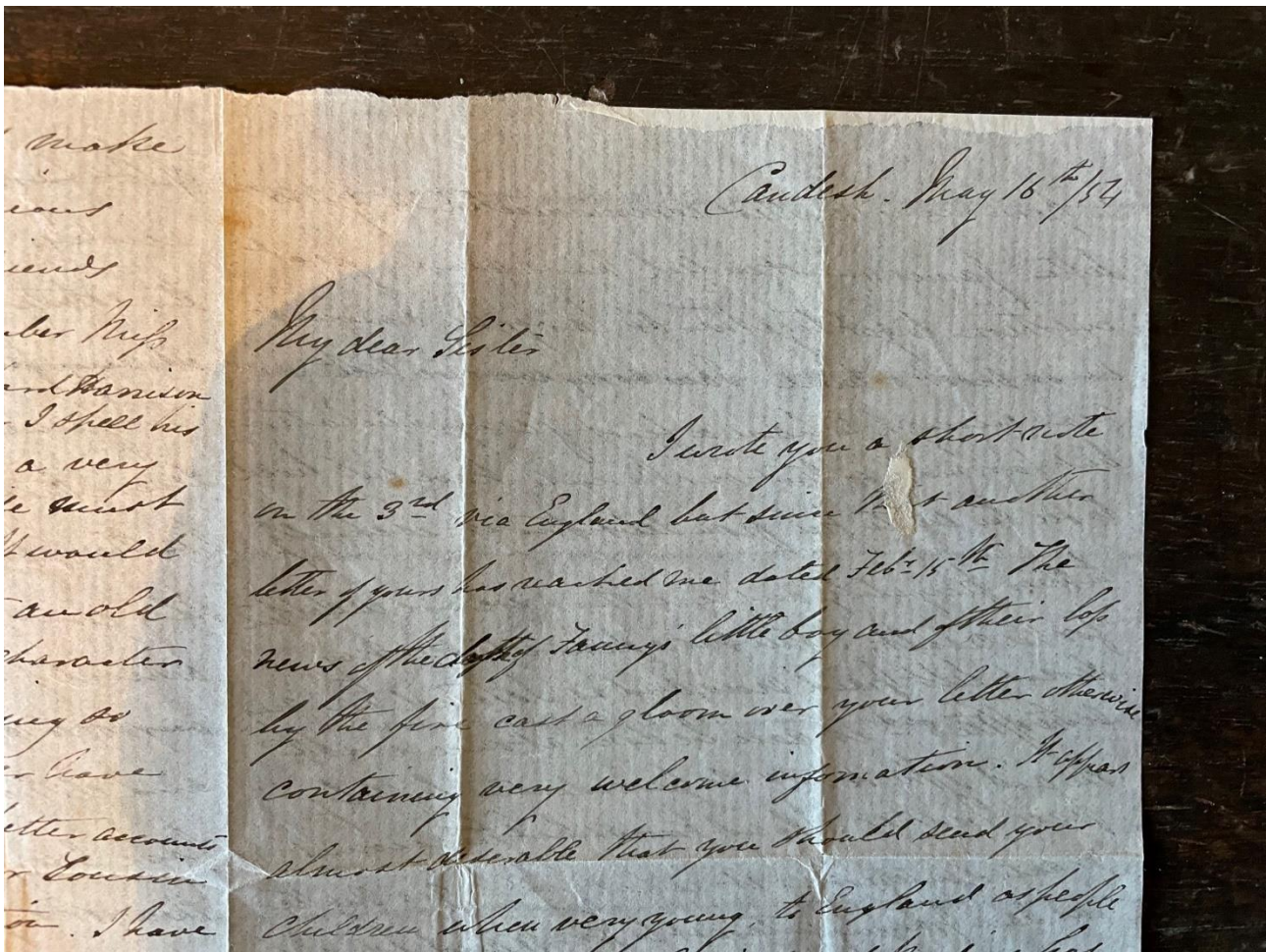


Letter 14: Governesses, embezzlement and cholera



Candesh May 16th/54

My dear Sister,

I wrote you a short note on the 3rd via England but since that another letter of yours has reached me dated Feb 15th. **The news of the death of Fanny's little boy and of their loss by the fire** cast a gloom over your letter otherwise containing very welcome information. It appears almost desirable that you should send your children when very young to England as people do from India. **Our Cousin Sarah Weeding has just set up a school of her own at Ellesmere** and would I am sure take the greatest care of any little relatives, but I suppose I am preaching to the deaf ears of fond mammas. Mr Weeding has been very unwell of late & his nerves have been affected, but there is no doubt but the warm weather and a little rest from business will restore him to his usual health. I am writing to him to inform him of the happy results in pecuniary matters communicated in your letters. James must indeed have made great exertions to get together so large an amount in so short a time. I am sorry we are not near enough to have a feast of congratulation but far more so that our Parents have not lived to see the estate free from debt tho' it is chiefly to their frugality and care that we are indebted for the result. I still more desire to see my direct debt paid now, and as I stated in my note of the 3rd it can be done at once with the aid of the £500 so providently left by poor Mother. I do not know what the amount or rate of interest on it but that is no matter as I am paying interest to Mr W and I do not suppose there is much difference in the two rates. I shall wait for James proposition as regards the future management of the farm. It appears to me that it will be much

more comfortable for him to live on the farm as he is now doing and come to some understanding as to what he can give me as my portion of the annual profits of the farm. One third of the annual profits seems to me an equitable share but this will be better determined when it is known what the probable annual profits of the farm is. Of course there would always remain the ulterior right to divide the estate should James or I wish to do so at any future period. Finally I will wait for James suggestions and only express my desire that this matter be arranged as becomes brothers, of which please to inform James. Also convey to him my congratulations on the arrival of his son. It appears to me that you ought to take great care in matters of food and clothing of your children and let the boys have lots of exercise in the open air to make them strong. I am glad Susan is rescuing her girls from ignorance. I should think they were good looking and hope will marry well. With regard to Captain or Mr Boss I think it must be Captain or Mr Bosh, for tho I have a complete list of the inhabitants of Bombay, I cannot find the name. **I should not wonder if it is the veritable Mr Constable himself.** If it were he and he had a blush in him you would bring it out by mentioning the name of Ritchie, Stewart & Co whose Firm he defrauded of some thousands of rupees. However in case Mr Boss is really Mr Boss do not say anything that would make him be looked upon as a suspicious character merely advise your friends quietly on the matter. I do not remember Miss Niles (sic) whom my old companion Richard Harrison married. What is Joe Mc Cuen (I fear I spelt his name wrong) about - he was really a very good fellow but I fear his line of life must have been trying to his morals. It would be very interesting meeting with an old chum of the kind and I trust my character is sufficiently formed to admit of doing so without any danger if I should ever have an opportunity. I was glad to hear better accounts from the Hunting ground tho' poor Cousin Tom's health forms an exception. I have been in India two years and think my health is rather better than when I landed. Cholera however is all around; the English Judge died of it a short time since in Candesh. **Regularity of living is the best preventive and chafing the body the best cure with the addition of hot water bottles or hot sand bags applied to the spine and if procurable, cholera mixture taken.** Is very hot here, about 110 indoors. I have not seen a European for the last month?.

Many thanks for your kind letters and with best love to Fanny James and Yourself

Believe me

Your affectionate Brother

TWeeding

Our Cousin Sarah Weeding has just set up a school of her own at Ellesmere

Cousin Sarah opened her school at Ellesmere, a small town in Shropshire, England. Like a character from 19th century fiction Sarah was an illegitimate daughter on the bottom rung of gentility. She worked as a governess at various schools but did not leave much trace in the historical record. A year after Thomas wrote this letter, Sarah married a local solicitor, William Randles. The couple had seven children (information from John Goold)



Ellesmere town centre

I should not wonder if it is the veritable Mr Constable himself.

Thomas is referring to the notorious Archibald George Constable (see Letter 11) who embezzled nearly 20,000 Rupees from the Anglo-Indian firm Ritchie & Stewart. Thomas seems to have heard on the grapevine that Constable was now in Australia under the name 'Boss' or 'Bosch'. Sadly no record has been found to confirm this.

The news of the death of Fanny's little boy and of their loss by the fire

Thomas is referring to his sister Frances (Fanny) who married Joseph Story in 1846. Story had a butcher's shop in Hobart Town which burnt down in the 1854 Hobart Fire (started by a gunpowder explosion – see letter 12). The little boy is Walter Story, age 9 months, who died from inflammation of the bowels in January 1854. This was indeed a terrible year for Fanny Story nee Weeding.

Regularity of living is the best preventive and chafing the body the best cure with the addition of hot water bottles or hot sand bags applied to the spine and if procurable, cholera mixture taken.

Whilst this may seem a hopeless cure (which it was) its no stranger than some of the ideas which were then prevalent about cholera. For example, in 1832 the Hobart Town Courier reported that "Cholera is caused by a pestiferous exhalation from the interior of the earth". This tied in with the 'miasma' theory of contagion, which led to the belief that disease could be spread by bad smells. The 'Cholera Mixture' Thomas mentions was widely available as a patent medicine. Needless to say it didn't cure cholera, but with opium and alcohol as primary ingredients, it at least made you feel better about having cholera...



Figure 1 Crampton's 'Sun Cholera Mixture' (Smithsonian Institute)



London slums, 1872, showing the results of disease outbreak on children