

Judge Blyden's Estate Antigua November 1847.
to Mr & Mrs J. Murray.

MS 466
note
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30th December

Dear Friends

You will think me very delatory in fulfilling my promise by not writing to you before now; but I hope you will forgive me as you know my fault in that respect. but I would have wrote sooner if I had not been aware that you would see the letters I sent to Jane and Mr. Loving or at least hear the contents of them. — The particulars of our Voyage across the Atlantic I need not here insert further than we had a most favourable one, and living like Indian Kings all the way and arrived in the Harbour of St. Johns on the 24th of June about eight in the evening being 34 days on our passage from the time I left Liverpool. On Friday morning the 25th we went on shore, the first person I called upon was William Turnbull he is standing in a Drapers Shop (or dry goods store as they are here called) I could not have known him by appearance he is so much altered since I saw him last at Home; after chatting some time we went across the street to Sandy Dalgleish who is standing in a provision and Grog Store nearly opposite (he was laying at the time but recovered in a few days) and after chatting with him a while no less than Robt. Hogg landed in he being in St. John that day: so nothing would do but he would get me a horse and go out with him to the country to where he then resided being about four or five miles from Town: so off we set and met John Scott by the way who lives about a mile and a half distant from Hogg's. — A person is much struck at first with the appearance of the country at first sight but still more so with the novel appearance of the inhabitants, we have them here of all the shades from the jet black to the snow white. I took a range through the market the day after I landed being Saturday which is the principal market day and I assure you I was very much amused to see their droll figures and hear their childish conversation. I verily thought that Punch must have some agents in this part of the world for what you see portrayed in his novel Newspapers is to be seen here in reality both in figure and colour. I stopped with John Scott, his brother Archie, and Robt. Hogg for the first fourteen days when I got a situation as overseer on an adjoining estate about a mile from J. Scott's and about the same from Archibald's lying directly between them: it contains about 400 acres of land 1/3 of which is in pasture and bush, and the rest in cultivation which consists chiefly of cane with a little potatoes Yams and Corn ground. The estimation that I gave of the height of the cane in my letter to Mr. Loving (which you would see) was not correct as I had not then seen any such maturity

The strong stalks or shanks of good cane will measure about 4 or 5 Feet and from 1 to 3 Inches in diameter with cross knots every 3 or 4 Inches similar to a bamboo cane stick, it is astonishing to see the quantity of juice contained in them when ripe, the top is similar to a strong muscled shooting forth a spinal arrow with a pale pink tufted top about 3 or 4 Feet long the leaves thus making the whole length of the cane from root to top 8 or 9 Feet ~~and~~ sometimes more when standing straight. - But the system of making Rum from that is taken of the juice when boiling and all the dirty washings up about the coppers are conveyed by a pipe into a cistern in the still house when a little water is added, then set up into casks when a little molasses are added to sweeten it and assist the fermentation and after standing a few days until it get flat it is then run off into the still and after being fully charged which contains about 700 gallons the head is put on and cemented with cows dung, the still-run always preferring this kind of plaster as being the best for that purpose, the still head is shaped similar to your chemical retort for analyzing &c the vent or worm that leads from it passes through a cistern of cold water into the cellar where it is received into a cask pure clear Rum when it is put up into a puncheon. Out of 700 gallons of liquor we generally receive from 35 to 40 Gallons of Rum from 20 to 25 proof which is put up for exportation, and about 12 Gallons from 25 to 30 proof for home use, what is left is called low wines unfit for any use and it is set up ^{in casks} and stilled over again, what is left in the still is run off when cold into a trough where the sheep, cattle, and goats come and lick up the very dregs and seem very fond of it. - This constitutes most of our system of Rum stilling and is about the average quantity of Rum take from 700 Gallons of liquor although it may vary a little according to the degree of heat kept at the still during the time of stilling. The Negroes are very fond of new stilled Rum, I have seen them drink it 20 proof from the worm and they are to be very narrowly watched when taking it up for drinking or stealing it, and they consider it quite necessary to take some occasionally indeed they hold it of great value. We have just finished the crop last week by grinding a piece of cane that was left over from July not being fit for cutting at that time. We have made 169 Hog-heads of sugar about 100 puncheons of molasses and 13 puncheons of Rum exclusive of what has been consumed on the estate. - Our population consists of upwards of one hundred Negroes old and young and between forty and fifty Portuguese there upwards of one thousand emigrants imported from the Island of Madeira since April last to Antigua. These were compelled to leave the place of their nativity on account of the famine that prevailed in Madeira as well as many

Other parts of Europe in the beginning of the Year, and the Negroes getting so independant since they were made free, these found a ready market for their Labour in the West Indies, but they are much deficient to the Negroes in the system of cultivation of the soil not being trained up to it, the Hoe is the only implement used in this country to all kinds of labour a Hoe and small bucket is all the Negroe requires for field labour, their wages are small in comparison with the wages in England but the work they do is also little in proportion. The wages has been 10^s per day of 9 hours although one man in Scotland would do as much work as two or three do at some things, but they sometimes make two times that money when working by job. There has been a restriction of 35th per cent on field labour or more in some cases this last week owing to prices of sugar being so low in England and also the heavy failures which has taken place lately in Britain which has taken place a very serious effect upon the colonies the Royal Bank of Liverpool which failed sometime ago has been very much felt here one of the directors being one of the chief partners for the Estate on which I am living as well as many more on the Island that is one of the Messrs Shands of Liverpool Also our West India Colonial Bank has gone down at Barbadoes and a branch of the same has stopped payment here, I had eleven of their notes but was fortunate enough to get them of my hand the week before it stopped, if it be a failure I understand the Scott's will lose considerably by it, things wears a very gloomy aspect here at present and if there is not some immediate remedy resolved on by Government her Colonies in this part of the world must inevitably go to ruin. Such is the general opinion in this part of the world at present. You will be surprised when I tell you that Robt Hogg is now living Manager on the Estate the previous Manager got another situation in the Island of Mountserrat Hogg succeeded him in the month of October last and is now my Master he being Manager and me overseer on the same Estate I receive £90 per annum for my Salary ^{with} the perquisites which you would see enumerated in Mr. Irving letter with a brief sketch of my duties as Overseer I could have had more as Overseer on a neighbouring Estate by £40 a Year but there was not the prospect of future advancement the gentleman only having one Estate on which he lives himself and keeps a Manager and two Overseers however Mr. Hogg promised to give me £100 a Year if I would stop and if the Attorney or director for the Estate would not advance it to that he would do it out of his own pocket. I do not know Mr. Hogg's Yearly Salary but I believe it will nearly double mine and other privelleges in proportion but it is reported that there will be a reduction of all hands. Although these sums may appear large yet take the price of everything into calculation they will not go half so far as the same amounts

in England. Provisions of every kind has been very high I commenced house keeping on the 16th of July when I entered upon my situation that being the usual custom in this country, Bread is nearly twice the price that it is at Home Butter 2/ per lb. Cheese 1/4. Ham 1/4. Mutton 1/6. Pork 1/8. Beef salt 1/8. Fresh can seldom be got at any price as it must be used the same day it is killed for nothing will keep longer than 24 hours that is not salted Eggs a penny a piece Chickens from 1/ and upwards and other kinds of fowls in proportion. Fish both salt and fresh but fresh cannot at all times be got but some things are still higher that is everything of manual construction I have paid 3/ for getting a crystal put into my watch, the regular charge being a dollar or 4/. I think that a good tradesman is about the best business here, it is best for a person to emigrate to this country about eighteen or twenty years of age as they have to serve a sort of time to whatever they follow after they come here. I think the planter the most healthy occupation, it is similar to a Farmer at home the Manager is provided with a horse by the Estate and a Groom so that he has nothing to do but call for his horse if going over such a short distance he must ride, the Overseer is also allowed one if he is going off the Estate. The land is exceedingly fertile and it is astonishing to see the rapidity of growth in showery weather, but when we have dry everything begins to look as if burnt or singed except the trees or deep rooted shrubs. Although now in the depth of Winter in the northern latitudes everything appears with us as if it were the middle of July many of the fruit trees now bearing fruit of these we have various descriptions that grow spontaneously without any aid from human hands these are so productive in general weather that the tree sends forth a fresh blossom before the fruit drops. I have made several enquiries from the Negroes about the different description of fruit & how often the tree bears in the year but they are so extremely ignorant they cannot tell but will answer just as the rains fall indeed the greater part of them cannot tell their own age they readily take their cues from great events such as a great earthquake the emancipation and such like.

All the Liddisdale people here are well at present George Dalgleish arrived here on the latter end of August and has got a situation in Town James Goddard died here on the 26th August and Archibald Scott was married the day following Archie has become a mighty man in the world. Please give my respects to Mr & Mrs Irving and Mr Wood and that I received the answer to my last also the two Newspapers since. Remember me to Sister Jane and tell her that I will write shortly also to your Brother Walter and all enquiring acquaintances. This leaves me in good health God be thanked for it, hoping it will find you all enjoying the same great blessing I hope you will not be long in answering if your spare time is not too much employed nursing the young stranger you have got added to your family since I left Newcastle. Excuse my hasty conclusion as well as bad grammar for you will look for every thing being perfect now when you are a Downy.

Meanwhile I remain Yours sincerely

Andrew Thorburn