

Lonely Grave - Thomas Whyte - Letter 6

6 Collins Street
Melbourne

June 28th, 1851
(Received 28th November)

Dear Robert,

I am in receipt of your truly welcome letter of February 7th as well as the duplicate of February 15th with the enclosures, which made me very happy indeed, and gladdened me more than anything in this many months past; the “Golden Spring” arrived here on the 25th and the “Tropic” the next morning – they have not begun to unload yet but will commence without delay when I hope all the goods will come safe to hand.

I have passed the entries to customs house but they have stopped the case of clocks as they are entered as foreign goods from the Customs in London. Of course if you sent them from bond it is all right but I merely mention it in case you did not. I shall be better able to judge when I see them. You have invoiced the pipes at 12s. a gross. This is surely a mistake but I will see they come to hand. I write this at present as the mail closes on Monday and wish to thank you for your kind and prompt reply to my letter, for it is indeed very kind to send me such a nice little assortment even before my orders had come to hand – they are all the very sort of goods that are wanted and will sell, I could not have picked them better had I been there myself, it is with the greatest sincerity I thank you for this kindness. I shall do my best with them as soon as they come to hand and commence remitting you regularly, we shall now do a large business together and there can be no doubt a profitable one to both of us.

I wrote you on June 1st and also on the 14th which I hope you have received with all the news of the diggings and the gold discovery. Since then things have been going on about the same, mostly every day some report of finding gold in this district, and then being contradicted again – the people here are still in strong hopes of it being found and are yet persevering.

There has already been some of the people that left here for Bathurst return, and the accounts they give are anything but satisfactory – they have returned here poorer than when they left and have all lost by the trip, for although they all got gold, still “it took a tarnation quantity of silver to get it” – the consequence is that gold fever is greatly abated and there can be no doubt that with the return of spring we shall have a trade as good as ever. In the meantime it does nothing but rain day after day with the most unpleasant weather, not like winter at home, for there has been no snow fall since I have been here, but nasty continued rain, which stops all business and traffic and keeps me from going away, and if we discover this, there will be no place in the world like Melbourne, with our wool and gold, we will have the reality of the fabled “Golden Fleece”.

There is nothing now talked of here but gold, gold and until something definite has been done it will be very dull. It is amusing to see the excitement of some people, at once they advertised their stocks to be sold by auction and then with the proceeds, joined with five more like themselves, buy a dray and bullock team, flour, groceries and provisions for six months, a couple of good thick blankets apiece, picks and shovels and crates and away they start from Melbourne overland to Bathurst. Now you must remember this is not like England, there are no made roads in this country, nor any bridges, you follow the track of someone who has gone before you and when you come to the creeks, which at this time of the year are all overflowing, drive the bullocks right into the stream and the whole lot of you swim over together to the other side; the underpart of the dray is made watertight, so that everything is perfectly dry, and as for clothes and such like things, they are not thought of. It will take them about five weeks from here to Bathurst as the men walk all the way by the side of the bullocks and sleep in the open air, so you see it is no joke, even the journey there; and when they arrive at Bathurst it is not like California for climate, but a cold bleak country and at this time of year (which is winter here) almost always raining. So much for the "diggings". I shall write you again per first mail with any further news from the same quarter.

It is now twelve months since I left you and it seems a long time since I saw you all in 22 and had the last look at the railway carriages at Gravesend. I long so much to hear from you all with all the news of home, at times I am very down in spirits and this cold rainy weather does not do much to improve it, for although I am gradually getting better and stronger, still this weather is trying for me and keeps me weak and dulls my spirits. I sincerely trust Jessie and my dear children are well and anxiously I look to hear from them every post to cheer me up again.

Give my kindest love to Agnes and Anne and the wee ones whom I hope are all well and happy. You no doubt long before this time will have seen some of the parties from Melbourne who have described this place fully to you and made you more conversant with Melbourne than all my letters, and I hope you will have now right ideas of its business capabilities.

I wait anxiously to hear from you and hoping soon to have that pleasure, and with my kindest wishes,

I am

Your affectionate brother

Thomas