

## Extracts of Letters discussing Climate and Health

**1801**

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds; in pencil: 1. Portsmouth 1801]**

*Page 6:* The Ethiops mineral\* I began to take when Ned was in town did me great good & I have been as well since so ever I was

[Ethiops mineral\* was a black solid of Mercuric sulphide, used medicinally as an anthelmintic (deworming) and tonic. See *The Compleat Family Physician: Being a Perfect Compendium of Domestic Medicine* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1800)]

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds, October 17, 1801]**

*Page 1:* I think you woud [sic] like this country very much there is nothing to complain of but that it is a little too hot. There is perpetual summer the trees & grass have almost constantly the fresh verdure of May. A few weeks of dry weather dries up the grass which is always short but it does not make it very brown & one night of rain with this heat turns up a fresh crop & every place is like green velvet: upon the trees this drought has no effect, as it has with you. Philosophers have a way of accounting for this, but I do not well understand it myself. This freshness is not preserved by dews or fogs for we have neither. The trees are large & tall & the whole place is like Parks & gardens with every beauty that can be in a flat country, Neither plants nor trees have their leaves eaten by insects nor curled up by them as yours are with what we call blight: they are perfectly clean & fresh and most of them bloom all the year. –

*Page 3:* Medical people begin to find that Europeans do not require to have their dishes seasoned so highly as they used to have them – The spice being to the natives what our wine is to us, it is not necessary to take both.-

*Page 8:* I begin now to get settled & feel at home the weather is become cooler than it was – It is like a fine warm Summer in England, I do not think it too hot. When we came the land winds prevail'd which are very hot & unpleasant. This Climate affords many Pleasures & if there were not some drawbacks we shou'd be all coming here – The Moon light nights are charming – [word crossed out] I long somtimes [sic] to have you with me to see one – The when the fine warmth of the night & the sea-breeze cooling the air invites us to sit out on the terrace before the house – The moon so bright shining on the trees, the grasshoppers chirping & the Sepoy tinkling his little wild tune on a sort of guitar on the one side of the garden – The Sea roaring at a distance (which I hear as I lie down in bed). The [word crossed out] Tubereuses & sweet flowers smelling pleasantly and all these without the least fear of catching cough or cold.

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**[From Mary Symonds to her Mother, Esther Symonds Madras October, 14 1801]**

I have now the pleasure to say that we like it very much and I think it will agree very well with us upon the whole Betsy has since she embarke[d] at Portsmouth had better health than I have

known her to have for years before and I was never better in my life. Mr Gwillim has indeed been a good deal teased [?] but he has no serious illness he suffered a good deal from Sea sickness on his passage and since he came here he has had the Prickly heat which is a very violent Eruption and itches violently but all the People here congratulate him and say it is considered as a most favourable symptom and that persons who have it at first generally enjoy very good health here, besides this he had an accident which was very troublesome to him his servant set a jug of boiling water on the ground behind him when he was dressing he stepped [sic] back suddenly and it fell over his leg and scalded him very badly but Betsy immediately applied [sic] a great quantity of oil to it and when the Surgeon came to see it he thought it looked so cool and well that he chose to continue the same application and it healed very fast but he was obliged to keep himself on a Couch for a fortnight he is now quite well and has no other complaint but the bites of the gnats ants and other little insects which abound this month but we are now every day expecting the rains to set in which destroy all these little plagues and we are told that we shall then have four months of fine cool weather just like fine spring weather in England. I think this is a most beautiful country here are a variety of fine trees and a delightfull [sic] verdure we drive out every morning from five to seven o'clock at which time it is quite fresh and cool

## **1802**

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds, January 23, 1802]**

*Page 3:* The months of Nov[ember] Dec[ember] & January are what is called here the [words crossed out] Monsoon, that is the rainy season. The surf of the sea is very great on this Coast & therefore during this Period it is thought unsafe for any Vessels to lye [sic] near the Coast.

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds, January 23, 1802]**

*Page 4:* we have now been here 6 months you will expect to hear something [sic] of the Climate. When we first landed 26th: of July we had land winds with Sea Breezes in an Evening, but it was thought late for the Land winds to continue. The Natives count the season of the Land Winds a healthy time & I believe it may be so to all people who are careful & patient they prevail April, May, June & July. This wind is a strong breeze & in the degree we had then very pleasant to me at first but we soon found the effects they are said to produce, sometimes the one & sometimes the other They give sometimes [word crossed out] people a dryness of the skin as if sand had been blown on it, & I found it impossible to keep my hair from curling to a [word crossed out] perfect frizz, at other times as it blows over you it draws out so great a profusion of perspiration that you get your clothes quite wet (5) but what is remarkable is that this wind which is in itself so hot makes every thing else cold, of course this sweat is as cold as Ice, & what is the consequence of being in cold water may be easily guessed it gives cramps in the legs [word crossed out] spasms in the back & neck, & young men who go to sleep in liquor, in the open air, which from impatience & fool-hardiness they frequently will, get occasionally such cramps & spasms as are never cured. This effect of producing sweat is most common in sleep & therefore all prudent people shut up the windows on that side whence this wind blows & in day time close the Venetians to keep out the light which is the best way of keeping out the heat. The Sea breeze generally sets in of an Evening and is which is delightfully refreshing. We none of us found any

bad effects. In September & October the heat of the Climate is considerably abated but they told us we shou'd suffer much from the flies which wou'd swarm in every thing but I found the account much beyond the truth.

*Page 7:* I have now given you a list of our anoyances [sic] in the insect way & I suppose I shall have no occasion to add to them as Sep[tember] & Oct[ober] are the months in which they come, In Nov[ember] they all disappeared & even the grasshoppers are much quieter – In these months, the air is generally cooler but not so fine a sea breeze at night we have too occasionally heavy showers of rain which gives a freshness to every thing & makes the day very pleasant. We have had only one thunder storm since I came here which was at this time. I do not think it was more violent than I have seen in England, but it lasted great part of the night. No accident happened that we heard of Lightening [sic] seldom does harm in these hot countries. Before the Monsoon it Lightened every night as soon as it was dark the sun set. The clouds have the most fantastick [sic] forms & the lightening [sic] shoots from different parts of the Sky in the most beautiful manner. It is perfectly harmless & therefore even I look at it with the greatest pleasure, indeed we are so much used to it in going about from house to house of an evening (8) that I look upon the sight of it as great part of the pleasure & if the lightening [sic] has not been bright I feel as much disappointed as if the I do in England if the sun has not set finely. One Evening at a Ball at Lord Clive's where there are very large Glass Lusters, the Lightening shooting through the windows upon the cut glass lighted, up as they were, with the Dancers under them produced one of the finest effects I ever saw. —

In November the Monsoon begins, & every body rejoiced that the weather wou'd, after the rain become cool; but tho' it disagreed with few Europeans [words crossed out] I was much disappointed The rain is heavier than your's in the same season & with it little abatement of heat, at least not enough to induce one to shut one self up or to put on additional cloathing [sic] both which ought to be done, for the rain with the heat makes the damp[s] [sic] so penetrating that every place is full of it, it is exactly the effect of a very sudden hot thaw & gave me the same feeling & the same complaints I have in England when a great frost breaks up violently. – I got a crick in my neck & rheumatick [sic] stitches in my breast exactly the same as your's & I was plagued with them at every turn till I found myself obliged to take to all my English cloaths [sic] again. My flannel Peticoat & Jacket a Shawl to go out in & a good Blanket on the bed & had I been aware to have done (9) [word crossed out] this earlier I shou'd have saved myself much pains – Flannel is most valuable here – The Natives beg, buy & steal it. Even Mr: Gwillim sleeps in a flannel waistcoat: The seasons in this place hitherto are exactly like England with the difference of the degree of heat – The changes are very similar & with regard to the absolute degree of heat one's feelings are not to be regulated by that; for when the pores are so open as they are here the least check has the same effect as very [word crossed out] cold weather wou'd have at another time. Nov[ember] Dec[ember] brings here exactly the same effects as in England, People who are Gouty are laid up here as duly at the end of Oct[ober] & beginning of Nov[ember] as they are in England & it continues in the same way. All the Servants & people exposed get coughs also, & for two months our servants have been coughing quite as much as every I heard a family in my life. I do not believe there were at one time two in ten that had not a cold or cough. – They call what we have had a very mild Monsoon & I think it must, we had heavy rains sometimes for two days & nights without ceasing but no wind of consequence enough to call a storm nor any thunder but and the ships might have staid [sic] here

all the Monsoon with great safety: but this is not to be relied on [word crossed out] accidents have happened. Between the rains are generally 4 or 5 of the sweetest days that can be imagined & then again 2 or 3 days of rain. This is the great Gardening time, and as the rains of the spring & the return of the sun warms your climate gives you in England (10) the sweet temperament [sic] of May & June, so here by the rains & the retiring of the Sun we are cooled to the same state & the latter half of Dec[ember] & this month are like one of the finest seasons in May & June – whatever of the plants we have, which cultivated in England [word crossed out] either flower, or are fit for food – in June are ready here at this time.

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, February 7, 1802]**

*Page 1:* Now sitting as you see me, I give you & James joy of the little Tom who I trust in God will live & be healthy. I shou’d have been glad to have heard that you had taken a lodging at Brompton for this & you & Mr. James’ occasional visits (2) for I fear if you did not go (& the 29th of August your last date was late, [word crossed out] in the summer) I fear you will not have borne two winters without country air I never cou’d stand it & I attribute my illness before I left England to attempting it. –

We were extremely glad to hear you had the two young girls with you whose company I think you must have needed to enliven you; Mr: James’s return of his Rhumatick complaint gives us much concern I hope it will not become a frequent visitor to him.

Page 10: Visiting, & very unwell in the Monsoon & every time I go out I come home just tired as if I had been at an exhibition of pictures.

**[From Mary Symonds to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, Madras, February 11, 1802]**

*Page 7:* We have had a great deal of amusment [sic] going forward most of it I have been to but the evenings and mornings are so cold that Betsy has not been able to bear them, at first all the medical people advised her to rise early and drive out before breakfast but she caught cold every time she tried so Mr. Ord who attends her, observing that, has advised her not to rise till the sun has been up some time and always to take a cup of coffee first.

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, February 12, 1802]**

*Page 2:* Mr. Gwillim has had a billious [sic] illness in his sickness on board ship he brought up a great deal of bile – He has been remarkably well & was getting fatter, but the truth is he wou’d not let well alone, For being so well he thought nothing wou’d hurt him & being very fond of Malt liquor he drank a bottle of ale every day for 6 weeks or two months, which every body says is very (3) bad in this country & it is not one in a hundred can bear it to mend all he drank milk three mornings & I assure you he eats very hearty – at last he got very uneasy & took some Rhubarb &c but that only stirred up the bile – he was ill six days & was obliged to take some rummagers [?] but thank God I do not think he looks the worse for it – he has now a great charge neither to drink beer nor milk –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, March 18, 1802]**

*Page 7:* The warm weather seems to agree with me very well it is now getting as warm as is agreeable [sic] – we had a few fine showers a day or two ago but we are not to expect rain till June & it will be hotter till that time. The last three months have been the most delightful weather that can be imagined –

*Page 8:* The sun was right over our heads that morning we came early on shore while it was cool & pleasant... I felt no inconvenience from the heat & he requested me to walk round the garden asking me if I felt the heat unpleasant which I did not, so I continued to walk – The sheep were feeding the grass was quite green – all the Hot house plants I had been used to delight in were in full blaze of flowers & behind [?] a large shrubbery The great tall Cocoa Palms were waving & looked so cool that I thought I cou’d have walked all day -...The smallest things that ever were when we went in we found a table of fruits &c & among the rest some mangos for which he was famous – & of which he pressed me to eat – In shape & colour they were exactly like apricots but as large as a small Mellon – The texture is like a very juicy plum of the flavour much like Mellon, Pineapple & Apricot mixed together, certainly very delicious but too rich – I did not eat much but I never have been able to eat any since – whether it was from (9) the heat or the mango I know not, or both together but I got a most compleat [sic] sick headach [sic] which lasted me two days & the poor man was so much censured for his imprudence that I believed he never wou’d be free from the reproaches thrown upon him – I have been affected with the heat once or twice since & am therefore now careful but it is very odd that whilst one is in it one feels no inconvenience –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds, July 16, 1802]**

*Page 19:* The months of April & May which we we[re] taught to think wou’d be very hot were to me deligh[tfully] pleasant – particularly in our pleasant house on the sea Mr: G. was also well at that time but in June had a great many boils of which he was very impatient. They are a complaint that neither black nor white people often escape at that season Richard Clarke has had plenty but he did not much regard them – Mr: Gwillim was really very ill with his for five weeks & took up all my attention for tho not alarming they are extremely painful – I had three which made me very ill for some days. – Richards were many but small ours were large Polly has no ailment – but I lose her very much she is frequently out for a fortnight or three weeks at a time & has many invitations – at present she is from home I dine out on Wednesday to fetch her home. – The last six weeks have been the hottest weather we have had just as it was when we arrived – the Land winds have prevailed [sic] which are very disagreeable if they continue all day – but have nothing baneful in them except that by drying up the skin the checked perspiration (20) brings boils & prickly heat which is exceedingly teasing [sic]. We have no Muskitoes [sic] in this house.-

**[From Mary Gwillim to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James (no date or signature) 1802 (in pencil)]**

*Page 1:* Since I wrote to you we have changed our house, that we were in was in a low situation and at a good distance from the Sea shore so we found it too warm for this season [words crossed

out], (April May and June being the hottest [sic] months) The house we are now in is a mile farther from the Fort than that we left; it has a good garden and it commands a very fine view of the sea, and all the Ships as they go out, or come in; we came to this place the begining [sic] of April and since we have been here I have not been at all oppressed by the heat. Betsy has been much better (2) than she was in the cool weather, and we are all in very good health. We have not yet experienced much of the Land wind, that is reckoned the most unpleasant, but it is by no means unhealthy, it is a hot dry wind, instead of cooling when it blows upon you it feels as if a hot Iron was passing close by you, it makes one's hair curl like a fury, and one's skin feel like old parchment; when these winds set in they are quite regular blowing from four or five oclock in the morning till 2 or 3 in the evening, when at which time it changes to a fine refreshing sea breeze; the Land wind season does not last above a month or six weeks, in general. Richard and I walk out almost every evening, sometimes on the beach it is a very fine sand but not so hard as the sand at Barmouth, consequently not so pleasant, for it fills our shoes, and, as our feet sink, it increases the fatigue very much, which is no desireable [sic] thing in this Climate

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester "Hetty" Symonds James, August 23, 1802]**

*Page 2:* I believe she told you we had changed our house for one which I think you would like as well as I do. It is by the sea side & the two months we had been taught to dread April & May turned out to be in this situation the pleasantest I have felt we had almost constantly a Sea Breeze & when that blows we never feel too warm – about the 10th: of June however it began to be extremely warm & with the exception of a few days we had six weeks of Land wind. which It is reconned [sic] to have been the severest Season for twenty years & upwards & has been in truth very disagreeable This wind has in it nothing unwholsome [sic] but by blowing over a long space of Land heated by the Sun (3) & by bringing with it a quantity of fine sharp Sand it gives a burning to the skin just like the effects of a sharp frost in England. The extremes of heat & cold seem to produce nearly the same effects. The wind sweeps with great violence & is dangerous for this reason that the heat & sharpness of it produces boils & prickly heat which if exposed to the wind are checked by it – for this reason we wear shawls & guard ourselves from it by shutting the windows as we do from Cold – These winds are not very troublesome when they are low or during the night & in good seasons the sea breeze sets in as it has lately done at nine in the morn[ing]. It has during part of June & July blown perfect gales which sound just like the Wintry winds with you & the sky is generally cloudy – If it is a bright day we are certain of the Sea breeze early – we have now had even whilst the Land winds blew showers most days but we have not had so much rain as cou'd be wished for the sake of the Country & the Gardens & every thing will be late When we came here on the 26th: July last year we found the Country perfectly Verdant – a verdure indeed beyond what I had ever seen the grass was tall & fresh, It is now only beginning to look green except where it is watered –

*Page 4:* Mr: Gwillim & I have been great Martyrs during what is called here the Griffinage that is the first year – I trust in God we shall do better next for I fear you will all of you think me very idle tho I have in reallity [sic] been much otherwise – we have both had boils & terrible prickly heat which to a person so irritable as Mr: G. is perfectly a Misery It is so indeed to me tho' I have tried to bear it with patience. These disorders are like the Gout & tooth ach [sic] they excite no pity but are very distressing as for the Prickly heat a real fit of it (of which I have had three

& Mr: Gwillim two) it is worse than I know how to describe every part of back breast arms & hands covered with a thick scarlet rash that itches worse than the Scotch fiddle & it wou'd require a hundred hands to rub every part that itches As for Mr: Gwillim he had four pair besides his own in constant employment & he was so little able to bear a disorder that requires so much patience that made himself quite ill – The return of the Sea Breeze has restored him but my fit is not abated yet having only been about a fortnight. Polly & Richard have no ailments –

*Page 6:* You ask me if the weather is oppressive in this Country – In the Land winds it is exceedingly so but at this present 3d: of August I dare say I am suffering less with heat than you do the Sea breeze sets in about 9 or so in the morning & then it the air is delightful – There is one difference in the heat of this country & England That in days when by the thermometer the heat is extreme we feel no loss of appetite [sic] on the contrary people eat exceeding The land wind is much like our oppressive days in England & takes off appetitite [sic]. but the fine clear days with the Sea air when it is extremely warm a hot dinner tho large has not a disgusting appearance as it seems to have in England – one thing is that with so many doors open & windows unglazed we are not distressed by the smell of the meat as in England in close rooms – I do not know if I ever before remarked a trifling thing to you which is natural enough but we were not aware of it – during the summer months when the air is hot we can see no steam or smoke from any dish nor even from a Pitcher of boilling [sic] water by which means we have frequently burned our mouths & I have been very near scalding my hands by plunging them into basins of hot water. In the Monsoon we see the steam as in England –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, September 14, 1802]**

*Page 6:* We have had the most severe season ever remembered & have as yet had no rains we expect the Monsoon to set in very soon. The heat of June July & August was excessive the Land winds blew with great violence & Mr: Gwillim & I have been great sufferers with boils & prickly heat which last is not yet gone It is a most tormenting disorder & if struck in like other rashes very dangerous – it is also very tedious. Polly has as yet had no sign of it & indeed she is & looks remarkably well she and Richard are in high spirits constantly she has told you what a party we have so I shall say nothing on that subject. Thank God Mr: Gwillim is now very well, as ever I have seen him. –

*Page 8:* I hope I shall find letters from Nancy Green & Lizzy & Mary Thoburn – and that I shall have my seeds by the begining [sic] of Dec[ember]: to sow – my French beans are almost all dead for want of rain never was such a season known –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds, October 2, 1802]**

*Page 1:* Polly is remarkably well having had no sort of complaint since she came. –

*Page 3:* I am quite glad to have them do this part of the business for me for the going out in (4) hot & cold places does not agree with me I get cramps & slight rhewmatisms [sic]. –

**[From Mary Symonds to her Mother, Esther Symonds, October 3 1802 in pencil]**

*Page 3:* I should do more for you but as Betsy has not strength to bear much racketing I am obliged to visit for all the family for Sir H—

### **1803**

**[From Mary Symonds to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, February 7 1803]**

*Page 5:* Our gardens are of this time in perfection for vegetables we have every day abundance of green peas french beans young potatoes very fine Sallads Carrots turnips & sevelal [sic] sorts of greens, all this you will think very fine whilst you are choeking [sic] over a dirty coal fire, & glad to put up with a good pease pudding or a dish of meally potatoes, but our sorrows come on as yours go off & in May & June when you are refreshed by every beautious [sic] flower & fine temperate weather we are scorched up with a burning land wind & have scarcely a (6) blade of grass left in exposed situations it is here we have then fine fruits to relieve us & the trees are always green, but most people have thier [sic] skins not only scorched but covered with that vile tingling disorder the prickly heat, and great boils I think myself the luckiest [sic] creature in the world never to have felt any of these teasing complaints. & am quite singular in not having had any fever or any disorder whatever, by way of seasoning to the Climate. I am howevr [sic] very thankfull [sic] for my good fortune & am not so presumptuous as to expect to escape for ever tho here are some instances of persons who have come here with very good constitutions & have taken good care of themselves who have lived here to an old age without a days illness.

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, February 15, 1803]**

*Page 1:* At present we are all well & thank God have been so all this cool season. —

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds February 12/22, 1803]**

*Page 1:* The pleasant part of the weather I have this year enjoyed exceedingly, not having had even a common cold — The House we lived in on the Plain was damp & surrounded with trees; & plantations too near the house are not good in this country Neither have the servants been ill this year as they were last by reason I believe of the different situations of the houses. Mr: Gwillim has enjoyed the weather much & Polly never has had any illness nor has Richard her quiet way of sitting down is just calculated for this country — I am too much of a bustler for this hot climate & often get reproached for it — however I begin to grow a little more lazy which is highly necessary, only the worst is I am but little the better for it, for the more at ease my limbs are laid the more my head is at work & I am thinking of a thousand things I want to do in this country & have so many plans in my head that like many other greater projectors it ends in doing nothing. —



**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds May 7, 1803]**

*Page 7:* The trees & Hedges are very green & pleasant here now & all in full blow – It is very surprizing [sic] when we have no rain, the grass is very much burnt up. This is the time we have to expect the petty Monsoon, the wind is very high but I see no sign of rain – we had only one shower this time last year that was 4 months after rain we had eleven days rain the last monsoon & that is all now for 16 months the longshore winds have been intolerably bad unless we shou'd have rain I fear the season will be very severe. –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, August 14/15, 1803]**

*Page 6:* The Poppy syrup is as fine as possible & I had some in the middle of one night & Mr: Gwillim boasts much of having prescribed it for me – sometimes when the weather is very hot we have no proper appetite and are as you are sometimes tormented with such a gnawing pain as if of hunger that we cannot sleep. –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds August 16, 1803]**

*Page 1:* I avail myself of the first opportunity to write a few lines to you to let you know we have been very well this summer – Thank God the weather has been unusually mild & we have not been a day without showers – St. Swithins has the same effect here as with you – & ‘tho’ the natives are not acquainted with the name they know that rain at the end of June & beginning of July is generally followed by a long season of showery weather – I shou'd much like to know if you had also a rainy summer. –

**[From Mary Symonds to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, August 19 1803]**

*Page 10:* I have little to say of our own family as thank God, we are all quite well & Sir Henry has borne the last season very well indeed the Land winds have been remarkably mild & we have lately had fine showers every evening which have cooled the air & made every thing appear green & pleasant,

**[From Elizabeth to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, September 3/4/10, 1803]**

*Page 6:* They have had three of the most dreadful days I have ever felt. I have been in a constant tremble, such a sullen gloomy heat as we seldom have here. The Weather has been very moderate this summer ‘till the middle of July but the end of that month & August has been very severe at least to me & many others but Sir Henry has been better than usual indeed he has thank God been the support of the Court, for Sir Thomas Strange has been laid up with boils for 2 months. – We have had slight showers all the summer which give a dampness to the air & the weather has been like our Dog days in England. – Mr: Gwillim never dislikes damp, but I get my spasms just as my poor mother does. —

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds October 20-21, 1803]**

*Page 3:* But their books & descriptions are exactly in the stile [sic] of Culpepper. & a plant is seldom not selected as a remedy for any natural quality but for the influence which some Planet [word crossed out] is supposed to have over it. — —

This reminds me of giving you an account of the Medical skill of these people which I have been several times going to give Mr: John Gwillim but as he has not written, & you tell me (4) you communicate all useful information I shall leave it to you propagate [word crossed out] whatever may be beneficial [sic] to the world that can be drawn from this source. — I must first observe that they begin with an a firm belief that every created being bears in the inside of his skull [sic] the hand writing of Bramha in the Devanagara or Sacred characters & that the time & manner of his death are distinctly written — These letters they assure you are all visible on the pieces of the skull [sic] which they collect after the burning & bathe in Milk (as we read in the translations of the Poets) but in the Calee, Yogam or Iron Age, the character in use is so much changed that it this cannot be read. You will readily see that the markings in the fissures of the skull [sic] is what they mean. — As it is utterly impossible even to the Gods themselves to change this decree of fate, medicine is sought merely to relieve pain & not with a hope of prolonging life, and thus the conscience of an unskillful Physician is [word crossed out] secured from any deep wound & much slander prevented. — (5) As they never form an idea of any Natural cause of diseases; but that they are the effects of sin or of an evil-eye or Fiends (Pisaches) so they can expect no remedy in the natural qualities of things & therefore Conjuraton is peculiarly depended upon but [word crossed out] however efficaceous [sic] the charm may be the manner of administering it, is certainly very extraordinary, [word crossed out] to our notions, for example, my Maid being much afflicted with the cholick [sic] gave a month's wages, for about half a pound of lead, which having been properly prepared by incantations, she wears at the pit of her stomach; being rolled up & fastened by a string round her neck, & many other remedies of the same kind might be mentioned. A servant for whom Sir Tho: Strange has a great affection, had several fits, of a sudden and dangerous nature. upon which the Doctor instead of sending him a couple of bottles as our's wou'd have done, sent him two (6) young black Dogs and a bit of red gum, or earth, with an order, whenever a fit came on again, to cut the ears of the dogs, & having procured a little blood, to rub the gum in it & apply it to different parts of his body [words crossed out] repeating certain texts — As for female complaints such as Hystericks [sic] Night-mare, faintings, disturbed rest & the like, they are constantly supposed to be the consequences of unclean spirits having possession of the Patient, — she is therefore conveyed to Manar-swaamy (a God whom the Bramins disown) & the Poo-jalie (the Priest of that God whom they also disown) by with Bell, Book, & Candle terrifies her into convulsions, when the Fiend is supposed to quit his hold. — But tho' they vainly expect from their herbs & roots supernatural effects, they find real ones; & have many excellent medicine amongst their Vegetables & which they apply [word crossed out] frequently with great success. and indeed there is a knowledge of Plants even amongst (7) the lowest of the people that shews [sic] a great attention to the productions of nature, altho' they have formed no notion how the qualities of vegetables act on the human body. — They divide all diseases into [word crossed out] hot & cold & certain plants are supposed to be suited to [words crossed out] cool & others to warm; but from what I can learn an English Physician wou'd neither agree with them as to the nature of the disorder or the power of the herb; however as their experience is better than their reasoning their patients are relieved. — As I

am upon this subject I must not omit an account of their Surgery of which however there is little to say Their employments are less dangerous than ours & therefore accidents less frequent When wounded or bruised they soon recover even from such wounds indeed as wou'd destroy an European; for as they neither drink spirituous or fermented liquors & feed live almost entirely on vegetable food their blood is generally in a pure state – They have a great abhorrence of the use (8) of a Lancet & rarely open anything & never bleed but with leeches. – Almost every Tree yields them fine aromattick [sic] gums and the seeds, oils – which they use generally for salves in the natural state – Many trees on the roads have had the smooth bark so frequently wounded to procure the gum, that they appear spotted like a Leopard's skin by the small cuts drying into round spots – Their unskillfulness however makes many disorders fatal to them which are easily cured by us. – If a Limb be broken it is not the office of either Physician or Surgeon to cure it nor yet is the Conjurer called in but wisely considering that Men are but Clay they send for the Potter. These potters make their ware of the same kind of red earth as our garden Pots are made of, but of a finer kind. They first set the bone as well as they can & then taking a quantity of clay inclose [sic] (9) the limb round the fracture & for a considerable way above and below. Having done this they lay it over a slow heat (as great however as the Patient can bear) and the clay being thus baked round the limb there is no danger of the bone being displaced. By practise they know very well how long a bone will be in setting firmly & when they suppose it to be safe they break the Pot which surrounds the fracture & the cure is performed. The Surgeons say that in simple fractures their extraordinary method succeeds admirably well; but doubt much whether it wou'd as well suit an European constitution subject to inflammation [sic] – If the Limb be much shattered their method is not so likely to succeed & they never amputate. – I have not forgotten the enquiries you have made about the Natives but Wars & Rumours of Wars keep us in such a state here that we have had few opportunities of writing & no previous notice.

The (10) Packet closed suddenly yesterday by the Union before I had time to send my letter which was all I intended to send as there is greatest reason to suppose she will be taken or if not that her passage will be very tedious – Mary has written to you by it to take the chance her letter was just in time. Today the Packet is opened for a Cartel which will not be taken; but we have only a few hours given us I shall therefore not add much more; but as it will most likely be the last opportunity of writing before the monsoon I cannot let it escape. – Our weather is become pretty mild & pleasant & the monsoon appears to be approaching very fast which is the reason of the ships sailling [sic] so soon – yesterday Mr: Gwillim diverted himself all day with the notion of your business of Butter buying – conjecturing whether you gave the threepences, or sixpences, or ninepences. I believe the day put him in mind of it for indeed the three last days the sky has been overcast & almost constant rain night & day exactly I dare say such as you have had The rain generally begins the latter end of Oct: in a good season & the Bramins say if there be no rain on the 15th: a long season of dry weather is to be expected, which here is a terrible evil – Saint Swithin was as liberal (11) here as in England – we had showers every day for two months which has made everything extremely verdant – we had dry weather for about three weeks & now the rains begin again. My home is so well secured against the rain that we felt no inconvenience thank God, last monsoon & I hope we shall not this I have the happiness to say we are at present all well.

**[From Mary Symonds to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, October 20, 1803]**

*Page 2:* This is the first monsoon day we have had, it now blows hard from the Northward and rains torrents, we are all praying for a heavy monsoon as the late dry season has occasioned a scarcity of rice in some parts; which is a dreadful thing in this country as the natives depend entirely upon it for thier [sic] subsistence, in Bengall they seem to entertain some apprehension as Lord Wellesly has issued an order that no grain of any description shall be exported from there. I suppose that will come a little hard upon us for we recieve [sic] the greatest part of our (wheat?) from thence.

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, no date.  
Elizabeth’s birthday is 21 April 1803; internal evidence suggests the letter is written spring 1803]**

*Page 3:* I am very sorry James continues to have these stitches & spasms – It is the only trouble I have to keep myself from them for they are bad in this country. -

*Page 8:* The heat of this country is so great that much cannot be done therefore (9) you must take care of all ‘till we come to explain all to you – already are two of the seven years passed! – I have learned a good deal of the Gentoo language I cou’d write you a letter in it – It is difficult but I cou’d not get answers to my enquiries without learning the language & this labour must account for my not writing as usual. – We had a charming time of it for three months the weather lovely but this season has commenced very severely – the heat extreme & long- shore wind violent – hot sun & cold wind – constant head ach [sic] to everybody. – In one year we have only had 11 days rain they came altogether it never ceased – It began soberly but at length the wind rose & the last days were all storm of thunder & lightening [sic] – what do you think of a storm of thunder lightening [sic] [word crossed out] & rain for 20 hours – the noise tiresome to an excess – no possibility of sleeping & yet not the least danger, tho’ the lightning was as bright as noon day & not a moment interval between the flashes – However we have had only this in the whole year – we want rain sadly – (10) but what is suprizing [sic] is that the country looks quite verdant – the roots of the trees go so deep in the earth – & the grasses are all runners that cover the ground ‘tho’ they do not rise an inch. & live by the dew. – It is very hot you must not expect much from us, to keep ourselves alive is business enough for the next 5 or 6 months —

**[From Mary Symonds to her Mother, Esther Symonds, n.d.]**

*Page 4:* I suppose you and your boy are enjoying a good fire, now whilst we are boiling in our [word cut off], but however I hope the time will come (5) [sentence cut off] together with a good Elder Bishop. For many days the last hot season the thermometer was at an hundred and three in the siting [sic] rooms and at the same time it was 130 in a Tent, this you wi[sic] own was warm work for at the same time if you let in the wind it scorched you like a flame and if you shut it out you were suffocated, but yet it is very extraordinary that the hot season is thought particularly healthy both by the natives and the Europeans, and what I think wonderful is that through all that heat, tho not a drop of rain falls, yet the trees continue beautifully green, and many tender looking plants throw out new shoots without a drop of water.

**1804****[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds March 7, 1804]**

*Page 7:* We are now far on our journey through the third year in India & [word crossed out] whatever we say of the uncertainty of the Climate of England this seems quite as much so of any three travellers who had given [word crossed out] accounts of these three years seperately [sic], their histories wou'd have appeared to have been utterly false, so much as each year differed This has been to me very severe indeed tho' it has agreed with all the rest very well [word crossed out] During Seventeen months of the time I have been in India that is from the end of Nov: 1802 1801 till about April 1803 – we saw only 10 hard days of Monsoon rain & one shower in the intervening spring & that was to me the pleasantest year we have had. It was the coolest summer & the country was quite verdant 'till just before the Monsoon – since that time we have seldom been a week without rain & the monsoon lasted three months – The torrents of rain which have fallen are astonishing – one shou'd have supposed all this wou'd have cooled the earth, but on the contrary the heat has been insupportable – The two former winter seasons we were glad to shut the doors of a night & put a blanket on the bed but this year the thermometer has never been below 82 – which as far as I remember must be as hot as you ever feel it in England. – The Natives (8) are much pleased with the season for it is a season of plenty. Rain is their wealth & their Glory – If we had not had such rains [word crossed out] there wou'd probably have been a famine a dreadful calamity everywhere but to these poor people who make no provision for the morrow [word crossed out] horrid beyond description – All the parts about this place however dry in appearance & which have been barren ever since I came here were sowed with Rice & different grains the whole place has been looked like a corn country in England in June – they sowed in Dec: & now is the Harvest I suppose the greater part will be cleared in a [sic] about a week & the tanks that is reservoirs – or Lakes you may call them are still well stored & they will no doubt get a second crop – Their custom is to float the fields of Rice by which means the air is impregnated with damps & becomes to me very injurious – I suffered much with the same kind of intermittent I had the first monsoon; but I was so extremely nervous with it that I cou'd not know what to make of myself – Dr: Anderson orderd [sic] me to go instantly to the Mount which being high ground is like the Hamstead of Madras & here I have been these six weeks thank God I think now as well as before the monsoon & as fatt – I am much fatter than (9) when I left England but I change very often from fat to lean but not violently either way. –

**[From Mary Symonds to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, July 21, 1804]**

*Page 3:* The worst of the Land wind season is now (4) over and Sir Henry has weathered it pretty well tho not without suffering much from the effects of the heat on his weak nerves he cannot sleep or eat well in the hot weather, so that it weakens him a good deal and brings down the flesh which he picks up the cool season,

**[From Mary Symonds to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, August 12 1804]**

*Page 2:* That this life is all uncertainty and that we ought not to promise ourselves any thing beyond the present hour, we have sufficient proof but yet there are few if any amongst us,

who consider this sufficiently to keep thier [sic] minds prepared to meet misfortunes calmly, when it may please the Almighty to visit them with the afflictions which are common to all men, we have very sensibly felt the weakness of our nature in this respect within these few days: poor Temple had an illness so short and apparently so slight that it did not prepare us for the sad event which has taken place and consequently it has been a severe shock to us all, he dined with us on wednesday and Thursday, the 1st & 2nd of the month, & on Friday he dined with Mr. Disney a gentleman in the law: he was quite well & in remarkably good spirits, all the evenings at night when he was going home the weather was cloudy [sic] & threatened rain, therfore [sic] Mr. & Mrs. Disney endeavoured to prevail with him to sleep at thier [sic] house but they could not it however rained very little that night & we do not know that he was wet at all, the next day about 12 oclock he complained of a little sickness at his stomach which Sir Henry mentioned to us at dinner time, but the sickness went off & Temple said he was very well again, however the next morning being Sunday Richard drove into the Fort to Church & he called upon T— to ask if he would come out (3) to dine with us, but he found him very unwell & with a good deal of fever, he had a Dr. Scarman with him who lived next door to him, he said the disorder was of no great consequence & that Mr. T— would be well in a day or two on Monday Richard & Sir Henry went to the Fort to thier [sic] business & both went to see Temple but at separate times when Sir Henry called he had fallen asleep & therfore [sic] he would not let him be disturbed, but when Richard called he found him sitting up apparently well & the fever had quite left him, he said he should come to St Thome, perhaps the next day, this they told us when they came home & we all naturally concluded that the disorder was at an end, but the next morning, tuesday Richard went to business early; it being his court day he set off from home at 8 oclock & when he got about 2 hundred yards he met one of Temples men runing [sic] who desired him to make haste as his master was very ill Richard drove very fast, but when he came to the Fort gate (a distance of only two miles from the place where he met the servant) he saw a man runing [sic] with a note towards him, which was from Dr. Scarman, saying that poor Temple was no more he was taken ill at 8 oclock the night before & Scarman staid with him some time, but he did not apprehend the least danger, nor think the illness by any means of a serious nature, he left him quite tranquil at night & at six in the morning he called on him again, and still saw nothing serious, but he applied a blister [word crossed out] (4) because Temple complained of a tightness on his chest Mr. Scarman then went out to prepare some medicine and Temple told his servant to pat his back as he felt a fulness which he thought was wind, the man did so, & T— then said ‘that will do’ and laid down as to sleep, the servant sat down by him, & in a few minutes Temple called out “go and bring Mr. Scarman back I don’t feel well,” the man ran & returned with Mr. Scarman instantly, only from the next room, but they came too late, for his breath had passed away in that moment. Mr Scarman called in three Surgeons besides himself to assist at opening the body, as he wished for some witnesses least his credit should suffer, they found that his death was occasioned by suffocation from a quantity of blood & water which had gathred [sic] in the chest, and which it is supposed was the reason of his always expressing a disinclination to take exercise, his disorder is said to be extremely uncommon in this climate, so much so that Dr. Scarman thinks his assertion would have been doubted, had he not taken the precaution to call in three of the most respectable Surgeons here to bear testimony. What consolation you will have it in your power to offer to his (5) afflicted father I know not for what can we say in such a case, that has not been said a thousand times before & without effect.

*Page 6:* Mr: Biss is staying with us at present and will will [sic] continue some days longer, indeed we shall part with him with regret whenever he leaves us, (7) he is so quiet and good humoured, the Cadets who came out with him were marched off to drill in a few days after their arrival, but Sir Henry procured leave for him to stay a little time with us partly because we wished to have his company & partly because he has had a little bile on his stomach, & therefore [sic] we wished him to be a little seasoned before he went to his own management he seems to have very good health & spirits, and I dare say he will do very well here, he loses no time by staying with us, as we have masters of all languages about the house, & he is very industrious & studies from morning till night, I am sure he will be thought a wonder if he goes on with the same anxiety, we have another very good young man staying with us, who is likely to remain some time as he has been very ill with a bowel complaint, and is so weak that he cannot join his regiment; he belongs to the Cavalry,

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds August 12, 1804]**

*Page 1:* I have the pleasure to say that by the blessing of God we are all in good health at present; but we have had a very severe season the heat has been beyond anything I had before felt & I may say I did not know India 'till this season. – The heat does not disagree with me nor the Land winds they soon cured my spasms & aguish complaint; but they are very distressing to Sir Henry who has suffered very much for three months. The rains (2) came on about a fortnight ago & he is quite relieved even by a single shower we have had it very cool with strong rain every day & I thank God I do not perceive that he looks at all the worse for his sufferings. – The Land winds are [word crossed out] dry & hot & bring with them a great load of fine sand so as sometimes to appear like a fog & [word crossed out] this sand is carried by the wind with such force that it is quite distressing to the people on board the ships [word crossed out] which are anchored two miles from the shore. – This wind dries up the pores of the skin & occasions a most intolerable cutaneous heat & an unquenchable thirst & of course restlessness; for sleep will not come on in this hot country without perspiration. To a person so irritable as Mr: G. you may suppose these winds are a terrible annoyance, not to be relieved by any medicine. He has therefore had little to do with the doctors for they have all told him alike, that (3) it was the mere effect of the wind, & when it changes he has immediate relief; but we have had four months of these winds this year – & during that time he has been unable to study or take delight in anything. Thank god they are now abated. –

I was truly grieved to hear of your being so much afflicted by the spasms last year I fear you do not keep yourself warm enough & those kind of complaints are in our family, I believe for I had all last winter & indeed frequently those spasms or stitches in my chest & various extraordinary catchings in my cheek or my jaw, my throat & all over me. They tell me it is only nervous from the heat; but I think it is like what you used to have in your jaw giving you a flush & start every now & then. – I get fat & have no other illness; but those kind of flushes startle one & I have not had any lately for the hot weather braces me (4) & does me good; but when a shower hangs over the house – I always feel have those nervous feelings. —

We have at present a young man with us whom Mr: Gwillim & Mr: James introduced to us a cadet a Mr: Biss – whose father I have a faint recollection of; but I did not know he was married nor that he lived in Hereford & here is a young man of 20 I feel quite an old woman – He is a

fine young man & very well behaved Richard & he are great friends. He has been confined here for some time for tho' he had not much the matter yet the Doctors will not let them go to Tripasore to drill 'till they are in good health, if they have any friend who will receive them. – He has had a billious [sic] complaint which he had had on board ship for they had a most terrible voyage. I shou'd think from some mismanagement on the ship – We have besides with us another young man who is a very good & elegant lad. A Brother (5) in law of Mr: Plumer the Councillor [sic] who is on your circuit poor boy he has had the flux with blood, – we have also had for some time the assistant of Hetty's apothecary who came out surgeon of a ship & he also was sick – In short the season has been so severe that almost every one that came out has been sick; but I have heard of none dying. The Doctors have been cautious because so many accidents happened during the extremity of the heat with young people full of blood – I suppose you will have heard before you receive this of the loss of poor Temple – that stout young man was called away in a moment, almost, when no person entertained the least apprehension. – He died of health if one may say so, for he has never had any illness except a little billious [sic] complaint of a few days last year. – He [word crossed out] eat hearty & took too little excercise [sic] which was his only fault for he was a most honourable & valuable young (6) man & one upon whose grateful disposition I had had great reliance.

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds October 12, 1804]**

*Page 23:* Our monsoon has begun these three days at least it has rained incessantly tho the regular day according to the Brahmins is the 15th: – Sir Henry thank God begins to get stout & I fear I shall begin to quake; but I intend to be before hand with the enemy & take some Bark as a preservative. I trust in God that (24) I shall hear a better account of you after this than the last winter for I was extremely sorry to hear of your sufferings. I believe it was a severe year all over the World. I pray continually to preserve you & the poor children & of all things I grieve that you have lost that pleasant country house. It may be the better in the end –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester "Hetty" Symonds James, October 16, 1804]**

*Page 2:* The season has been dreadful Thrice months of damp weather for we had no cool weather last year I had the ague or something of that description with such a something [sic] that they called nervous – that almost gives it me again to think of – every morning about 11 oClock lasting two hours – at three oClock in the night the same. I fear it will distress me again this year as I had a smart touch of it a few days ago – when we had some monsoon rains – I firmly believe that I caught it at Landrindod [sic] that cold wet summer I was there last – I had never seen an ague & I cou'd describe it to nobody – but this is the same thing only stronger – as soon as I went to the mount I got better & the Hot dry Season cured me, but Sir Henry who had much perplexity in his business just when it began got a fever – which lasted him till the heats abated & no medicine coud [sic] relieve him (3) It proceeds wholly from the pores being checked by the land winds; but that season braces me. It is the damps I suffer from; but I design to take Bark the moment I find it begins this year for last year I neglected to take care in time – I have used my fire irons already & a great comfort they are. –



**1805****[From Mary Symonds to her Mother, Esther Symonds, 2 February 1805]**

*Page 4:* we have had a remarkably pleasant season & the weather much cooler during the last two months than I have ever felt it in India, I hope to God it will brace Sir Henry a little & enable him to bear the land winds,

*Page 6:* This is a trying season of the year for every one in England & especially for you who I fear are suffering rheumaticks & sad pains, what would I not give at this moment to know how you are perhaps surrounded with snow a yard deep or at best cold & dirt & slip slop, if you could but give us your summers or we could give you our winters what a rare time we would make of it, we have now fine harvest weather the evenings & mornings very cool & pleasant, but from 9 in the morning till 4 in the evening the heat is too great for women to venture out on foot.

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds, no date; received in England February 28, 1806]**

*Page 1:* The season has been so mild that the oldest inhabitant remembers nothing like it, We have had rain every evening & this hot season as we call it has been much cooler than any part of the preceeding [sic] year. Sir Henry has had no indispositions whatever, & he has done an unusual quantity of business being left to the whole care of the Court. Sir Tho<sup>s</sup>: Strange is in England – & Sir Benj<sup>m</sup> Sullivan to the Eastward on account of his health. Richard & Mary are thank God always well at least they have been hitherto. Mary has wonderful spirits but she likes being here better than (2) country, but I own I like the country best

*Page 4:* I have given to a young Gentleman who returns to England for his health a pint bottle of Caya Putty Oil an infallible remedy for spasms & cold pains to be used outwardly or in bad cases a few drops in water inwardly – Tho' I hope you will not often want it yet I trust that you will receive it safe, It was a present to me from a friend who brought it from the Eastward. –

*Page 10:* For these reasons the boys who are sent out shou'd have a tolerable education before they come & shou'd be taught that they must not lead a life of idleness – They will have quite as much necessity to employ every hour of their time as if they were in business, – Neither can they indulge, with impunity, in any sort of intemperance or immorality. Every irregularity is followed closely by severe sufferings. – The women here who are very attractive & easy of access, are all afflicted with hereditary diseases which will be communicated & cannot be cured. [word crossed out] inebriation is in this climate certain destruction & therefore we see that all [word crossed out] Eastern Lawgivers strictly forbid every sort of spirituous & fermented liquors rather choosing to let some perish for want of the support they may afford than allow the use of what may such [word crossed out] inticing [sic] mischief.

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, August 24, 1805]**

*Page 1:* I thank God we are all well & have known no ill health this year. It has (2) been the most extraordinary season ever remembered, we have had showers every evening; & we have had few days that were at all oppressive —

*Page 16:* But this I attribute to the strong winds we have at Madras – the air of Batavia & the Eastern Islands is all softness. – The place is not the more wholesome for that on the contrary Batavia is a Grave to Europeans – An expedition went from this place sometime, just before we came here & every person who slept a night on shore died – This however is only the case at Batavia & the unhealthiness [sic] is in a great measure [word crossed out] by the dirt of the people -

— I am sowing my sunflowers in my walks today – we had a tremendous thunder storm last night – the thunder & lightning is not as with you at intervals – there are several flashes at once & a continual rolling of the thunder It is a concert of thundering some piano & some forte – accordingly the natives speak of the thunder in the plural the Gentoos say, (that is my language) [word crossed out] Wooramooloo – Wooratoonavi – the thunders thunder. – Almost all their words have a sound expressive of the sense. —

It is terribly hot today September approaches & it is a close month. —

*Page 17:* Sir Henry & he [word crossed out] take a composing draught every night lately from your stone bottle. The poppy syrup is as good as ever & on the strength of your having sent out two more bottles the old stock is going off very fast. Mr: Keene is to ask you for a glass in return for drinking his health –

*Page 22:* She [Mrs Young] has given me some curious things from Malacca, amongst the rest a Pint of Caya Putty Oil which is a most extraordinarily efficacious remedy for spasms & therefore I send it for my mother – It must be rubbed on the part as others liniments or a few drops may be taken in water. –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds no date, likely sometime towards the end of 1805]**

*Page 2:* I came here 5 weeks ago & obtained by a favour the loan of a couple of shooting men who go upon the hills & collect me curious birds when they bring them in I am obliged to sit down & draw them for here if dead they will only keep one day & if alive they cannot long be kept so – & are suffering much –

**1806**

**[From Mary Symonds to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, 28 January 1806]**

*Page 3:* I have the happiness to tell you that we are all in good health Betsy never was better in her life. & Sir Henry as if it were to make amends for the fatigue & trouble he has had, being

abandoned by his colleagues, has enjoyed (4) a year & upwards of uninterrupted health which prove that anxiety & the fatigue of business do not affect his constitution. Sir Benjamin Sullivan is not yet returned he writes to Sir Henry that if his presence be absolutely necessary he will come at any rate but that his health is still very bad, he is now in Calcutta, he has been absent from Madras eight months, poor man he has probably prolonged his life by going away as it was generally believed he would not have lived here, but surely there is nothing to be said for Sir Thos Strange who has left his duty to serve his interest only. We are now at Pommel the Cotton farm which we wrote from this time last year the weather is very cool & pleasant,

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, February 11, 1806]**

*Page 2:* I have very little news to tell you thank God we have had no sickness in the home this year & half except that Richard Clarke had a cold with some fever for a few days – I believe he wou’d have been well the day after he was taken ill but finding himself relieved by the perspiration in the night, produced by some hot wine & water he jumped out of bed in the morning & washed himself with cold water & by breakfast time became worse – He was then obliged to send for a Dr: & put himself under our care – the Dr: sent him a sweating draught which threw him into one of those kind of sweats which Sir Henry calls a brewing – The first breaking out of it was so new to him that he really became quite terrified; howe[ver] in the morn<sup>g</sup>: he was relieved. He stayed at home a week to take care of himself It was his first absense [sic] from his office – He was nothing worse a few days after; but the medical man ordered him to wear flannel waistcoats next his skin, as conceiving that he had caught cold, not so much by any accident as by the unusual coolness of the weather. – We have had 18 months of mild weather & some months indeed when the Even<sup>g</sup>: & morn<sup>g</sup>: have been very piercing to our tender bodies, so long stewed in the heats – I made him up that flannel you last sent me therefore if you send him any packet it wou’d be as well to send him a few yards of flannel, as I suppose he must continue the use of the waistcoat –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Mother, Esther Symonds, May 29, 1806]**

*Page 1:* I am indeed not quite well but this I confess for truths sake & perhaps when I tell you what is the matter with me you will laugh at my childish complaints for such they are – I have had the Shingles again (for I once had it at Pimlico) The complaint seems to be almost gone; but I have not yet been out – & tho’ trifling it is most painful — ... I was extremely sorry to hear of your having been so much indisposed by spasms (2) it seems that I am your true daughter for in describing your complaints you always tell me my own – The heat of this climate bringing them a little more hastily on – I was much grieved to to [sic] hear of Ned & Richard James’s illness both seem much alike & probably constitutional to both I wish recovery & permanent health & pray that I may see you all again in in [sic] health & happiness. – I fear Sir Henry will not be able to write to his father & if not pray let him know he is well May has this year passed without a disagreeable day – we have had a sea breeze early every morn<sup>g</sup>: & a sweet shower has this instant fallen – The trees are green & the flowers blooming & every blade of grass looks fresh – The Guns for the Holiday have been firing & the thunder continues the same kind of museck [sic]. – you wou’d not like it but as lightning is rarely dangerous here we listen to the

thunder with pleasure God knows what next month may produce but we have had wonderful weather for nearly two years & one of the worst months of this year is past nearly past – May. – I never Saw Sir Henry better he looks as well as when he left you, I hope you all do the same. –

*Page 3:* I have drawn a great great many birds at Pamal but have been now confined almost a month with this disorder it is not round the lower part of my loins as it was when I had it before but across the pit of my stomach & sloping across my right shoulder the stitches & shooting pains have been very disagreeable. –

**[From Elizabeth Gwillim to her Sister, Hester “Hetty” Symonds James, September/October 1806]**

*Page 2:* The illness I had laboured under for some time by enfeebling my body a little was but a preparation for this severe trial had it come upon me in the height of health & spirits I might & probably shou’d have borne it worse than I did. It may seem to strangers a great folly in me to call it a severe trial to lose a mother at the who had attained to the age of 74, or nearly; but having no children of my own my pleasure [words crossed out] consisted more in the hopes of delighting the aged than in the prospect of pleasing an unborn, or at least an unknown set of little friends.

*Page 4:* I have heard it remarked by some people that the climate of Madras, that is of this part of the Coast, is generally very much the same as that of England, allowing for the different degrees of cold & heat – what is asserted is that we have, proportionally a cold or a hot, a wet or a dry season, as you have & they are at the same times of the year I have taken great pains to observe whether or not this observations be just, & generally I have found, by comparing your accounts with what we have felt, that this is a correct notion – Last year that is the summer of 1805 – was one of the most extraordinary seasons remembered here by the (5) oldest Indians – We had continual rains & the air was so temperate all the summer months that we had as it were, three winters in succession. Now as the winter is delightful to us, of course we all rejoiced & I wrote to you upon this head frequently with exultation but it [word crossed out] sometimes, occurred to me in the Autumn that whilst we were unexpectedly enjoying this unusual temperament that if such a proportionable change shou’d happen in your climate, always too cold & damp, – the consequences must be fatal to many & as even here I suffered from cold & spasms I apprehended my dear mother wou’d with difficulty bear [words crossed out] the fogs & dews that must surround you. -

*Page 21:* I therefore hasten to close it having now the happiness to say that we are all well after having passed four months of the most severe weather I ever experienced in India – The Land winds did not commence till the time when they used to abate the end of June & they have blown ever since with unremitting fury.

‘The only things which have suffered in carriage are some bottles of Capilaire [n.b. probably *capillaire* or maidenhair], only two of which arrived whole but that is quite immaterial as we have very little use for it & the natives understand making beautiful clear syrop which answers the same purpose.’