

No. 5

Hamilton Hotel

Bermuda 25th Feb 1875

My dear sweet wife,

Unless you can imagine how a person feels who has been for 3 weeks & 3 days cut off absolutely from contact with the outer world – without either letters, papers or telegrams – you cannot fancy the glee with which it was announced at the dinner table on Monday 22 at 2 o'clock [sic] than an unknown steamer was in sight at the observatory & an hour later the flags telegraphed that it was the New York mail steamer & we knew that it was the Carrissa & no mistake. You must know that for want of better the people at this little island must have gossip about every passing sail & they tell each other that a Brig is in sight in the offing with as much gusto as a NY quid nunc would announce a revolution in Spain or a grand swindle on stock exchange. To pander to this vice of gossip the Govern't here have erected tall masts on the four tallest points of the island & by certain flags hoisted all the people know where a ship or schooner or any other kind of vessel is in sight. I had been spying with my old opera glasses pretty much all Sunday when not at church, at that interesting flag pole on the height on which stands the Governors [sic] residence. But in vain – it was dumb – no flag -- no flag except yes one which tells the people it is time to go to church – I looked because sometimes the Carrissa makes a quick trip & gets in Sunday evening before dark – for after dark she must drift about all night as no performances is bold enough to pilot a vessel among the coral reef that infest the vicinity of the Island for 10 miles around, after dark. On Monday morning as I awoke I said surely the Carrissas [sic] flag will be flying this minute & I hastened to look at the tall mast but no – no flag yet [?] & disappointment! What can have happened to her – some suggested that she was frozen up at New York & had not sailed at all – others suggested dire mishaps at sea – the perils of winter seas – had not they said the Brig Grace Kelly been torn from her anchors by ice & driven away off here by the fierce new gale – after she had [?] reached Philadelphia the “has seen where she would be” after coming all the way from South America? These dismal suggestions

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began to take form & substance, as we went on – at 12 o'clock [sic] a flag was hoisted but not our flag – our Carrissa flag – only some poor schooner thing to get in safely past the sharp toothed coral reef & calling for a pilot. So we gave up guessing & became resigned to eat our good dinner – where as I told you at the beginning of this rigamarole [sic], the glad news came at last – Carrissa in sight!!!

In about 3 hours after meandering about through these beautiful but treacherous waters, she came to her anchorage at this [?] [?] [?] – bang went her cable. Every body [sic] at the hotel was down at the water – standing along the stone wall that surrounds the little port & I think pretty nearly all the inhabitants white and black—full of the same intense excitement you have witnessed on a small scale at Bolton when the steamer arrives. A gentlemen and myself took a boat at once & rowed off to the steamer as eager as any Athenian quid nuce to hear the news – what kind of a passage had you? How cold at NY where you left? Temp 14 below zero – whew! & did not we look patronizingly on the poor wretches that had just escaped sea sickness & fled from 14 below zero -- One landlord bagged about 30 new guests – our letter bags had gone ashore to the PO & we could get our mail about 8:30 p.m., so all were happy excited & alive after our absolute repose of the last two weeks, since the steamer left.

Your dear letter & enclosure at last reached me safely & very thankfully & gladly was it welcomed & read & digested – the good for which God be thanked, you, Dody, & baby all well & happy – also the sorrowful – for Will Buchanan and little Esthers passing away – 3 weeks is long enough to give a sample of the great current of life & death that sweeps on – poor Bob Christy too! I had so much hoped that Esther would after all pull through & did feel encourage did expect such would be your news – but it seems God ordered it otherwise. I have written by this mail to cousin Alice in reply to her letter – in that case there was no hope & now doubtless it was it was a release to him & his family – if in Gods [sic] mercy he was ready to go. I have also written to Mr. Pursertt but as I do not know his whereabouts I do not know where to address it hence I enclose to you. Please put it in an envelope & send to him at once as soon as you can find out his P.O. And so dear little baby has cut an eye tooth, I am so glad for now I hope he will be through all his worst troubles in the teething line before hot weather comes on – I have no doubt I shall see him much improved in walk and speech when I get back. God bless him. How often I have wished I could drop in on you all for a day & then escape that bitter cold again. I got dear Dolly [sic] letter all right as he had it directed properly by a teacher I suppose – Also arrived safely all the newspapers you sent me so nicely & I expect to begin to read them [?] one or two a day only beginning at 29. I am in regular order as soon as the steamer gets off & I get in a state of mind approaching calmness – as we are still unduly excited I assure you.

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I, beside [sic] the letter you received per Carrissa, wrote you three other times – by Brig Excelsior, by Steamer to Halifax, 2 by Barque Eliza Barss & I hope you many have gotten them safely tho' I think this doubtful.

And now let me tell you that after getting your letter I made new the search for the picture but with small hopes of finding it as I thought I had made an exhaustive search before – and there to my great pleasure I found it hidden safely inside of a shirt [?]
—so I am very thankful to say I have it all nights.

In regard to money matters I think they can all stand until I get back except perhaps the \$25 due Yacht Club – you might ask Frank to take it some day when convenient to the Treasurer Mr. Sheppard Harmans whose office is on Broadway near Cedar. I forget but he will see it in the City Directory. If Morrell sends again pay it also -- if not, not.

We have several person; who have come back from St. Thomas & southern islands & they report the season so advanced that (85°) that I have given up the idea of going any further [sic] than here especially as it might prove expensive so I will remain here and return home either by the steamer of the 11th or 25 prox. I cannot yet tell which, as it will depend somewhat on whether the winter breaks up early or not. My expenses here have been light, as I have only thus far gotten rid of \$15 outside of my board bill which is \$57 to this date. The hotel is very comfortable in most respects & the table is rally equal to ay city Hotel – except that we cannot get good butter -- they say it spoils so quickly in this climate. The house is full since the last arrival of the Steamer & the people are pleasant but not at all “swell.” The Colonial Secretary & his wife Irish people & the Surgeon General of the Military forces boarding in the hotel. I have yet seen no beauty either in or out of the hotel & don [‘] t believe that there is any to see, as I have been to the "swell" churches & saw none there. Mr. & Mrs. C R Smith of Watertown, NY are the nicest people in the hotel & she is refined & agreeable – but all are kind & disposed to help each other to a pleasant time.

I do hope Mr. Gray will be called to St. Pauls but I don't think he has the strength for such a parish as he has private means he could perhaps live on the small salary that the parish ought to pay until it gets rid of its crushing debt. He & Mrs. Gray would be a great accession to our neighborhood. Indeed, it is well I did not wait for him to travel with me, as you remark. I heard from Miss Lollie Gulerbridge that her father says the Mr. Cartwright will be pro tem called – I hope it will be pro tem only, as I don't think I could stand him as a permanency [sic] – do you?

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Mr. & Mrs. Butterfield have been very kind & agreeable & I like her better than any of the family & she improves on acquaintance—I think her quite pretty. He has taken me out yachting & had me invited to the Club while I am here & on Tuesday had me to spend the evening, play which is a late game supper – which [however?] I would have been better without as I did not feel so well this morning but it was well attended. I have not however received any other civilities from the citizens.

I wonder why [Terrie?] Roosevelt is going to Florida – I hope it is not required by her health. Frank made quite an escape at the McFarland's – how is he getting on – any more patients yet & what are his plans – tell him my love that he had better fill up some of his spare time be writing me his news in the City & how he & Mr. Bessiere agree on the fine question Them -14° !!

I am glad Murphy's infants are satisfactory & trust he is well attentive as is my pressure. As the season breaks it will require extra vigilance. Be sure to tell me all you hear of Mr. Purrsetts manservants– poor fellow – I fell as sorry for [Aiser?] – call coming together! I have of course heard nothing from [Surufowles?] & am much surprised at my [?] by the news of Mr. Ball as given by Mr. Magruder & your informant -- poor Mrs. [Housion?] I do feel so sorry for her – I hope Miss Susie will improve after all.

Now I much talk a little about Bermuda before I close tho' I fear I have told you pretty much all I can say in my previous letters. On the whole I am much pleased with the climate – a good deal of the weather is too damp to be quite agreeable but the temperature is wonderfully equable, generally on varying 5 degrees between midnight & mid day – I sense that it has generally been about 60° early in the morning & later in the evening and 65 at noon. For about 3 days only we have had it below 70 and the lowest point reached as been 54° one day.

So you see see there is wonderfully little variation – it is plenty cool enough for any kind of exercise out of doors & not too cool. I am wearing my gauze undervest [?] now – my thin summer drawers & my blue flannel suit. The climate differs from that of Florida in that it is never so cold & I may say never as warm – There are fewer bright spring days here – but I think this much be a much better climate for invalids because of its very equable. I may almost say unwavering temperatures. The winters here are generally a little too boisterous. But for the last week it has been faultless – calm soft sunny and changeless – like our best mid June days at home. I did a very wise thing in bringing my little boat, as I have enjoyed it thoroughly & have lately operated it 4 times daily in the water rowing lazily along the pretty shores in among the many [inside] islands which make it remind me so much of Lake George. By-the-by have you seen or heard anything about Mr. Wilson – I trust it was only a hoax.



To get an idea of Bermuda you must try & picture to yourself a vast mountain, as high as Mount Blaua, rising with equally precipitous sides from the abyssal depths of the ocean until its top just rises about the water a few hundred feet. This mountain top is covered with a semi-tropical vegetation [?] [?] the palms, the cocoa-nuts, paw paw, palmetto, banana, mangrove, [?] [?] oleander, india rubber, Pride of India & mahogany trees – but is mainly in the uncultivated parts renewed by a growth of red cedar trees of dark green color – the other trees only seen in or about gardens or ornamental grounds.

The British exploration ship “Challenger” took sounding all around the island & from them we know of is being a great solitary mountain in the sea. The depth of water increases around the stand with extreme rapidity. Seven miles to the South there is a sounding of 8250 feet and about two miles further off 10600 feet. To the North East there is water of 9000 feet at a distance of two miles, to the North West of 13500 feet at a distance of seven miles only from shore and to the Southward of 14000 feet at ten miles from shore. If the water should subside we would find ourselves perched on the top of another Mount Blaua without the trouble of climbing up & without shivering in the cold. It is all claimed to have been the work of the coral insects – but for this I will not vouch, except as to the surface which certainly is coral. As I move along I seen down through the clear water coral of all shapes and kinds, looking like sea flowers and shrubs – and this water! it is so beautiful in its colors varying according to the depth from dark blue to purple & the shallow places with sandy bottoms to turquoise & finally a malachite green along the shores. I never tire of this display of color & wish my fingers still had some of their old cunning that I might copy these white bluff encircled bays on canvas to show you. Photographs are so unsatisfactory as they give only half of nature’s charm – its form but all colorless & dead.

I have visited nearly all parts of these islands & repeat my expression of agreeable surprise at the serene beauty on our drive give up everywhere glimpses of the blue sea & the green islands dotted upon it – all shimmering in warm summer light –P(that is when the sun shines at all – for we have had many cloudy days. Some of the boarders go bathing in the harbor but I have not tried it yet for fear of rheumatism of which I have had a little at times.

The steamer leaves at 1 o'clock [sic] & we shall all go down to the shore to see her off & have our last excitement before we relapse into our ten days Rip Van Winkle repose until the Carrissa awakens us again, which will be on the 8th or perhaps Sunday a week if she makes good time – when I hope my dear wife to get another good long letter & I pray God only good news. You must remember me affectionately to your father Aunt Sidney & Willee & Frank. And kiss a



thousand times my dear little son & don't let him forget "Pap-pa" or to say "yea" in his funny little [short?] way. Tell Willie I hope he can make our something from my rambling description of Bermuda & as to Miss Outerbridge you can say that I think she very fairly sates the case & that I am well pleased & only look having you & Dody & Willie to be content or a long long time.

I think dearest I will go home by the steamer of the 25 prox which would be in all respects a good time to arrive but do not be surprised if I should arrive by the steamer before...on the 15th.

Goodbye my dear wife – take good care of yourself & Willie & love me

Your affectionate husband

J. B. H.

