

David Anderson to Dr Alexander Mackenzie, Stoneyhill, (Edinburgh):
(per Nottingham)

11 September 1772

My dear Sir

As there are no incidents in life which we recollect with so much pleasure as those which ~~we~~ occurred in our infancy, so the friends who have manifested their regard to us in our youth we remember with particular warmth, and the impressions they have made in our mind, instead of being anywise effaced become stronger and stronger by time and distance. When these are my sentiments, need I assure you, that it is with uncommon satisfaction I hear from my father of your being in good health, and that you are so kind as express to him a continuance of that friendship, which you formerly evinced towards me.

Since my arrival in this country the little time which I have been able to spare from the business of the Company, has been chiefly devoted to the study of the Persian language, In this pursuit, tho my (ff 70v) attention has frequently been distracted by other cares, I flatter myself, I have not been altogether unsuccessful. The arts and sciences seldom flourish under an arbitrary government so that a person of a literary turn is not to look for improvement in the books of the modern East. It is only however by perusing them that a person curious in the affairs of this country can push his researches into the nature and origin of the laws and peculiar customs, which are found to prevail amongst the natives of Indostan. And this object is of great importance to every one, who wishes to distinguish himself in the service of the country. For if he is ignorant in these respects he is but ill ~~equipped~~ qualified to act in a legislative capacity, which sooner or later may be the lot of every individual of their civil establishment. But it is in the first ~~instance~~ stage of his service, and in the detail of business, that he feels most sensibly the satisfaction and advantage he derives from a knowledge of the Persian, and it is with this view, that it is chiefly studied.

It is not my intention from what I have already advanced, to imply that the arts and sciences are entirely unknown in this country. It is generally, I believe, admitted that many of them took their rise in Arabia, and as the Arabians over-ran and subdued the greatest part of their neighbouring nations, (ff 71r) they diffused their knowledge with their religion throughout the countries, which they conquered, and from thence they gradually spread to the most eastern boundaries of Indostan. Had the nature then of the government been as favourable for the cultivation of the arts in the eastern, as it is in the western nations, of the world, possibly they might at this date have acquired an equal degree of perfection. Whereas on the contrary they have remained in the same state without the smallest alteration or improvement. The mathematicks in particular stand still, and consequently the number and branches which depend upon them. In mechanics their operations are extremely simple, and the grand principles so well known in Europe, seem now to lay concealed. I say concealed, because from some stupendous works, which I have heard of on the Coromandel coast, I am apt to think they have not always been entirely unknown. Astronomy is little studied and those who have acquired but a very small knowledge of it are able to impose on the unlettered multitude, who are easily persuaded to believe that they have the knowledge ascribed to astrologists, and consult them to fix upon an auspicious day, before they undertake any business of consequence. This superstition seems to have been borrowed from the Hindoos. You will at once conceive a just idea of Indian astronomy, when I tell you, that the system followed seems (ff 71v) exactly the same which was adopted formerly Ptolomeus (?). I have procured

BM: Add Ms 45438: ff 70-3 (p 112-8: Letter Book (to England)
1770-80: Indexed.

for you an Astrolabe, which a learned man and my acquaintance assures me is the only instrument they have for taking altitudes, or ascertaining the time of the day with precision. It will be forwarded to you by my father, and I shall be happy if it proves new or curious to you. On finishing this letter, if I can find leisure, I shall send you an account of the manner in which it is used, which tho you do not understand the figures, will serve to explain to you the principles, on which it is made.

Physick is studied here, and there are some who have acquired reputation from their having obtained a knowledge of the virtues of a few plants. These indeed and a few nostrums (?) compose the principal part of the science of physick in India. The anatomization of bodies is held in abhorrence and never practised. Consequently their knowledge of the human frame, and the disorders to which it is subject, must be very deceptive.

In a country where the subjects are governed by the arbitrary will of a despotick monarch unrestrained by constitutional laws, and where they are hourly liable to the oppressions of his officers, fear is the predominant principle of their actions, and the good or evil which they do seldom proceeds from any sense (ff 72r) of moral obligation. But tho the natives of Indostan rarely practice these virtues which are found to flourish in free states, they are not entirely destitute of written systems of moral philosophy. Persia in former times supplied the East with many works of this kind, some of which are not without a degree of merit. Amongst these are the work of Shegh Saddee and the Ehlak al Musanein. The last of these books is now laying before me, and as it may afford you entertainment, I shall extract a page of it, which, making proper allowances for what it suffers on the translation, will give you an idea of the whole.

On the Proper Use of Time

"It is apparent and manifest to men of wisdom and speculative knowledge, whose illuminated minds cast a lustre around them like the bright rays of the sun, that the life of man passes away like the flashes of lightening, and that the days of his existence like the waves of the ocean are instable and transitory. As every moment that elapses is an irreparable jewel we ought to learn to value it; and as every minute affords us an irrevocable opportunity it behoves us not to let it escape. It is beyond the limits of human power to recall that part of our life which is past, and that which is to come lays concealed under the dark veil of futurity. But betwixt the past and the future, there is a period of time which (ff 72v) is called the present, and being the only part of our life we can actually command, we ought to endeavour to accomplish our ends in it before it elapses. And he alone can be deemed fortunate, who in this fleeting and transitory life acquires reputation and fame by actions of humanity, mercy and benevolence; for fame/like a second life /is and often exists for many generations."

The author then proceeds to illustrate what he has advanced by relating some anecdotes of Moshirvan (?), who reigned about 1200 years ago, and is still famous for his clemency and justice. He afterwards in the same manner goes through the several virtues, shews how far each is conducive to a man's happiness, and gives an instance drawn from authentic history. Many of his maxims coincide with those laid down by our moral philosophers, and the whole book tho written by a Mussulman seldom discover any of the tenets, of which distinguish his faith.

Want of leisure obliges me to draw to a conclusion. To this more than want of inclination you are being obliged for being so soon relieved from the perusing of a dull letter.

Before however that I finish it, it is necessary I should

3

147

inform you that the observations I have made chiefly relate to the Mahometan part of the natives of this country; they are indeed proportionately (ff 73r) very few in number, but the Government being in their hands, they have long had the ascendancy and it is their language only that I understand. Possibly I may hereafter trouble you with a letter on the Gentoos, who are with vast strides now daily regaining the pre-eminence.

My father will make you acquainted with the success which has in general attended my labours. On this subject therefore I need say nothing. My brother James is with me. He desires his grateful remembrance to you. He has had a very narrow escape from shipwreck. Accept my best wishes that you may long enjoy health and happiness.

I am
(D. A.)

Mootey Jill
11 September 1772.

18.2

Dr Alexander Mackenzie to David Anderson, Bengal: Edinburgh 5.6.1773
(Extract)

Your account of the Arabian conquest in India seems well founded, for we read that the arts and sciences flourished there before their irruption into it. Confutiusx was a great law giver and professor of philosophy many ages before your philosopher was born: and that the primitive Indians were the first inventors of astrology and astronomy, which last naturally leads me to return my hearty thanks for the Astrolob you was pleased to send me, which as a fair mark of your kind remembrance I do esteem and shall when arrived, venerate as a valuable relict of Indian antiquity. From hence it it is probable that (ff 283v) the stupendous works which you mention to have been seen on the coast of Coromandel may be the remains of Indian skill in mathematics and architecture. Be that as it may, as nature moves in a circle and all things are subject to change and revolution, what has been may be again. Arts therefore and sciences may yet flourish in India even while you fill some important station in Bengal and the term of that event is supposed by some not to be at a great distance.

As for the medical art, it is perhaps happy for the Indians that its practitioners have not improved it farther than the hint you have given me of it, and well were it for us Europeans that Asia, Africa and America had not been ransacked for drugs to feed the vanity of some of us and kill the luxury of many more: While the medical virtue of trees, plants, flowers, fruits and seeds, fittest for our food and physick and growing up with ourselves in abundance are so shamefully disused or neglected by our modern practitioners. (ff 284r) But leaving arts and sciences to your further discussion in return to your pompous extract from your favourite philosopher Mussanein give me leave to excite and exercise your curiosity by the following copy of a passage taken from a treatise of natural, or if you please, unnatural philosophy lately published here by a senator of the college of justice. Lord Mantaddo(?) relates and believes that a Swede named Keating Leutenant aboard a Dutch East India ship of force, saw on the island Nicobar in the Gulf of Bengal a race of man with tails like those of catts which they moved in the same manner. That they were canniballs, ... Now as a tradition of human cats which were seen not earlier than 1647 of our era may yet remain in the memory of some (ff 284v) old inhabitants on the coast of that Gulf, it would not be pains or labour lost to enquire into the truth of a phenomena so singular in its kind a task which lyes at your door to clear up for or against an ugly tail with which his lordship is disgracefully painted in this island. ...

BM:Add Ms 45430: Correspondence of D. Anderson (mostly letters received) 1770-1773: ff 282-5 Note Anderson letter of 11.9.1772 to which the above is a reply is in Add Ms 45438, ff 70-3. There does not appear to be any further correspondence between them nor is their any other correspondence of this nature in the Anderson Collection (Add Ms 45417-41). David Anderson was in the Bengal service, joining the military service on coming to Bengal, from about 1768 to 1785. In the latter years of his service he was for a time president of Committee of Revenue in Bengal. For a year or so in 1781-2 he also acted as ambassador from the Bengal Government to the Scindia (and perhaps to other Marattha rulers also).

183

David Anderson to his father in Edinburgh: Calcutta Dec 18, 1776
(Extract)

In my letter from Moorshedabad I acquainted you that I was soon to leave that station in consequence of my being appointed to superintend an office instituted at Calcutta for preparing materials for the ensuing settlement of the revenues and for investigating some general subjects relative to the land tenures of Bengal. I have now the pleasure to inform you that I arrived here about a fortnight ago and have entered upon the duties of my new office. The reception I have met with from all my superiors and more particularly from the Governor General has afforded me much satisfaction. The Council have given me a salary of 1200 Rs per month. It is fully adequate to my wishes. To you I imagine it will appear extraordinary. (ff 126r) If I succeed in the task I have undertaken (and at present I foresee no insuperable obstacle) I cannot fail of getting some appointment at the end of it, at least as good, and in all probability better than that which I have relinquished at Moorshedabad. I have taken a house with Mr Bogle one of my colleagues and Mr Alexander, relation of Mr Russells. With these friends and a very few more I expect to spend my leisure time in a sociable and agreeable manner. I have given you this short account lest I should not hereafter find time to write a fuller one to you and my mother jointly. But the chief intention of my letter is business.

...(about) ...money remitted this year:

(in gold and silver	Current Rs 2,448-10
By Bill on Dutch Co for	Guilders 12,786-shs 9- sd 8)

..I shall remit to them on my own account about £ 1500 more by the later ships of this year.

David Anderson to his father in Edinburgh: 11.1.1778
(Extract)

The following is a short state of my remittances to M/S Tod & Co last year and this: (Details.;(ff 141r)...) Total £ Stg 6,371-3-0

My principal inducement in remitting so great a part of my fortune to a country where it will bear a lower interest than if it had remained in Bengall, is that I may have a chance of (ff 141v) hearing before I leave India that I have so much money securely disposed of in England and if I can do this I shall think myself independent, even if I were not to carry any more with me.

BM:Add Ms 45438: The first letter to his father is on ff 19v-26r, dated Calcutta 28.12.1770.

18.4

D. Anderson to Mrs Campbell regarding the Famine: 1.11.1770
(Extract)

We have had a most severe famine here this last season. History scarcely affords an instance of the like. The number of natives who died merely for want of sustenance is almost incredible; nor have the Europeans been entirely exempted from its effects, for in the months of June and July, the people perished so fast (ff 14v) that the living were unable to bury the dead, so that the heaps of petrified bodies laying exposed to the sun produced an unwholesomeness in the air, to which I imagine may in a great degree be ascribed the sickness which had prevailed amongst the Europeans particularly those of the lower class. The surviving inhabitants are now happily relieved from their distress by a plentiful crop, But the consequences ensuing to the Company from the impoverishment and depopulation of the country will I fear be felt for a long series of years.

D. Anderson to his Brother Francis Anderson, Edinburgh: 10.1.1771
(Extract)

(ff 31v)... The last season was more unhealthy than any of the others which I have passed in Bengal. And a famine prevailed in so severe a degree that history scarce affords a single instance of the like in any age or in any country. The number of natives who died merely for want of sustenance would seem to you incredible. I have myself beheld upwards of 100 dead bodies in the space of a mile. And to this may I imagine the unhealthiness, that subsisted amongst the Europeans be attributed. For the heaps of corpses that lay petrifying in the sun, without doubt produced a contagion in the air extremely pernicious to all who breathed it.

BM: Add Ms 45438: ff 14-15r, 31r-32v: from Calcutta. The letter to Mrs Campbell is the first letter in the letter-book.

D. Anderson to G. Bogle from Patna : 22.9.1778
(Extract)

You will ask me Bogle what is the reason that this district which once paid about 60 lacks is now reduced to little more than 39 ? I will answer your question by asking you another. Is it possible that revenue of a country which annually loses from 15 to 20 lacks of its treasure could continue long at an overstrained rate? I believe I would prove to you also as far as proof can be obtained at this distance of time that the former revenue (the short of what was raised by Cossim Ally Cawn) was overstrained. I might also justly assign a number of other causes for the decline of the province. I shall at present content myself with mentioning only one of them. Annual settlements made two or three months after the commencement of the season of cultivation. Think what what effects this must produce in a country where the revenue and even the lands are farmed, not by hereditary zemindars but by occasional strangers.

BM: Add Ms 45421: ff 72-5: volume (ff 119, 16.2.1772-12.11.1780)
is of correspondence, mostly letters received, with G. Bogle.

John Forbes to D. Anderson: 15.6.1779
(Extract)

(ff 155r) As to my future plans they are confined to one simple one, which is to go home: How soon I can remit money enough to purchase a troop of Dragoons. This will require only £ 2100 above the value of my half pay. I would fair hope to be able to effect this matter by the end of next year.

BM: Add Ms 45333: ff 154-5