

[From Caleb to his Father – presumably living at Newtownards, in County Down, Ireland, near Belfast]

New York. 19th Nov. 1832

My Dear Father:

I know how anxious you will be to hear from me, but you cannot be more so than I to write. I have just got a little spare time now from the hurry and confusion of our arrival and I hasten to give you the earliest intelligence respecting us. And here, I may remark, that all my life has been a mere dream compared to what I have seen and experienced since I left my home. Now real life begins with me. But more of this again.

The day before we sailed from Liverpool, we sent you a paper informing you of our departure. We did not sail till the day after, which was the 21st of September. On Friday morning at eight o'clock we began our tedious voyage, and a tedious one it was to me for seven weeks and five days to be tossed on the wide, wide waste of waters. The first fortnight was the most sorrowfully miserable one to me that ever I spent, or hope to spend. I was deadly sick, ate nothing scarcely, and pined, yes, am ashamed to tell it, almost pined and longed more after the friends at home than ever I thought I would. But this was the effect of seasickness. Sam kept up better than I thought. The first fortnight and it was all over for me. Not so with Sam. He was sick several times a week, but still able to go about. There were 142 passengers on the same ship with us, of all denominations, English, Irish, Scotch, French, Dutch, Welch, etc. It is very remarkable, the worst weather we had began on Sundays, and one awful week with us all, for wind, fierce and furious, and for storm and rain and "ocean's wrath" began on Sunday evening.

I have kept a regular journal of every day, a copy of which I will send to Jos. [Joshua] as I promised him. A passenger ship is the place to see human nature and I have seen and experienced more of its malicious wickedness, more of its backbiting, more of its hatred, than ever before, You may think this strange, yet it is true, and were I to come over here again, I would choose to come by myself rather than with any friend acting in any capacity on that ship. Sam promised to get me a great many little things from the cabin, which he did and which I rather I had never taken. It began to be whispered about and at last led to open enmity. Sam had his enemies and I mine in the vessel – secret ones they were – which spread abroad and exaggerated reports about us and the family to the Captain and to others, which as the sequel will show, proved hurtful to us both.

Three little children died on board, the last of which gave rise to an occurrence the fatal effects of which have not yet terminated. I will relate it briefly that you may know the whole truth. When the child had been dead three hours or so, Sam began to dissect it with a razor. This operation the Captain forbid. Sam would not stop for him. The Captain had sent his order, but now he came himself, collared Sam, forced him up the ladder (for he was dissecting the child in the fore steerage) and kicked him along the deck to the cabin. I only saw part of this. When I came upon deck, Sam and the Captain were jawing to each other. Sam told the Captain in one of his remarks that he did not behave like a gentleman, upon which the Captain drew back his fist and struck him a severe blow on the ear. Sam bore it patiently, as what could he do, and shortly

after went below into the cabin. This embittered our lives the rest of the voyage. The Captain was our enemy and he on board his own ship is a perfect autocrat. However, the other gentlemen of the cabin took Sam's part; told him they would lend their purses and try the matter at a court of law when they should arrive at New York. The matter might have slumbered into forgetfulness had not Sam met the Captain at a public dinner here, where he must go and where they must recriminate. The Captain told Sam that he was a dirty scoundrel, and that he had robbed his table for his brother. This was too great an indignity to bear, so he up with a glass of wine and dashed it in the Captain's face. He took it calmly and I believe would have said nothing of it had Sam not gone and engaged a counsellor and attorney and indicted the Captain for an assault.

The trial came on last Friday. Sam was in great hope of realizing 150 dolls. of the Captain. The Counsel addressed the Jury on either side. The jury retired and after 3 hours deliberation, returned a verdict of damages for plaintiff – that is Sam – for one half a cent. He is now left a trophied dupe and a triumphant bankrupt. Some gentlemen did support him with their purses. But for that he could not have gone on, but he is now left penniless. However, he is no worse than when he landed in Liverpool in the beginning of the year. He is not down-spirited nor neither am I. The Captain is not: by any means a bad man. I never heard him curse and he always showed the greatest respect for religion. I believe he is an honorable man. I heard him say had the same offence been given on shore, he would have gone away from the aggressor, but he is bound to keep up his authority on his own ship.

My Dear Father, this need not distress your mind. Sam was foolish and this will teach him experience.

I have not got a situation yet, but am in the fair way. I showed my two letters from Mr. Henry. Mr. Pollock, one of the gentlemen, is dead. Mr. Cumming has been very kind to me. Kept me to tea and finally all night. He will use his interest for me.

This is a splendid place. We pay 3 dollars each for board and lodging, the one in luxury and the other in elegance.

I will write soon again to Mother, Jos. [Joshua], Catherine, Martha, George and John, as this is written hurriedly. The man who takes this is going off tomorrow morning. Sam sends his love to you all individually. We are well, thank God. No cholera here. Plenty of business doing. This is the place for mechanics. No fear of starvation if willing to work. Jos.'s letter shall contain instructions as to what to bring with him when he comes. I am here to receive him and George when they land and that is a great deal. They can tell here of a ship's approach when she is 50 miles off port. I have come in a delightful part of the year. It is very warm. Not too much so.

There are vessels leaving this port every week for Liverpool and send yours to Liverpool when you write to me. This is to be left at Mr. T. B. Furness's and he posts it for me, The very thought that I am writing to my Father is sweet and pleasing, The Methodists here have 16 chapels, all of them growing. Sam was so busy, since he landed, about the lawsuit that he can do nothing else. We cannot find Bishop Emery, I believe he is gone away someplace.

I hope soon to see both George and Jos. here, but tell them not to come till they hear from me

again. There is a whole package of letters following this, so be on the lookout.

How is Matthew? Did he go away that day? Neither Sam or I will forgive Jos, for not coming to Belfast with me that day. We wrote to James a week ago but have received no answer yet. Things are wonderfully cheap here. Tell Catharine and Martha that I hope to redeem my pledge to them soon. If Sam goes back again, I will send them some splendid things. How is Thomas? I have not had time to write to him in the awful hurry of my departure. I have never ceased thinking of you since I left home. I am glad I was hurried off the way I was, although I suffered for it. I might have lingered on, for even at home, the only thing I am need of is clothes, which are extravagantly dear here, especially shoes and boots. The shoes I left home with are unbroken yet.

My Dear Father, I hope your circumstances assume a brighter aspect. I will never die till I see you comfortable and unembarrassed. There are some of my brothers who will join me in the same assertion. And My Dear Mother, how does she hold up any way at all? You now have nearly as many ties to bind you to the New World as to the Old. Continue to pray for us as I am [sure] it will avail much. I used often to think when on the ocean that every morning about 8 or 9 o'ck you were praying at the family altar for us. This used to comfort me wonderfully, and although surrounded by profane wretches, I often felt a degree of calmness and gladness in my heart, quite unusual. My religious impressions were never so strong as on board, Not that I was afraid, for I felt as secure as ever I did on land, but my mind was then left to itself and it naturally turned to think of you.

I do not know a soul here. All is one vast wilderness of faces. I have not yet joined the Methodist Society, but soon, will. They have had another split here, about what I do not know. The old Wesleyan Methodists are called the Methodist Episcopal Church. This paper will hold no more. Farewell, my adored and honored Father.

I remain your devoted son,

Caleb Lanktree