

[From Sam to his parents]

New York, Sunday, 1st Sept., 1833

My very dear Parents:

I have just heard of a lady going by the packet this morning and hasten to avail myself of the opportunity it offers of writing you a few lines.

The fatal day I left you last February proved indeed a melancholy era in my fate. Few and far have been the moments in which I have been gladdened by the receipt of any intelligence from home and signal indeed have been the changes in my destiny. Nine long months was I in this distant country ere I heard one syllable from my relatives so dearly beloved.¹

I had just been after sending off a large box to home when I received, one day, directed to Caleb and myself, the first letter I had got from a relative since I arrived in America. Little did I think of the awful price at which my curiosity was to be satisfied. Ah, my dear parents, let me draw a veil over those dreadful tidings, the recollection of which must be equally distressing to us both. Never, nevermore however can I recover the full buoyancy of life and thought I had before I was aware of that terrible bereavement. In any future period of my existence, if the world happens to look brighter than its wont, if prosperity or good fortune should ever happen to elevate my heart with unusual gladness, I shall think of that fearful letter and forget myself no more.

It was nearly 12 hours after I received the letter before I knew the full extent of the calamity. When I read that death had made an inroad in our long preserved connections, I had a thousand dismal forebodings about Matthew, which all comparatively subsided in finding that it was our interesting but still sickly Arabella, but when I read a little farther on and found the name of George Stephen, my eyes grew dim, my brain turned, my pulse stopped. The sensation was as if a bolt of ice had gone through my heart and in a protracted swoon I lost all consciousness of surrounding objects. When I came to myself, I was in bed and many a weary hour elapsed before that agony found relief in tears. It was the next morning before I recovered strength to finish reading the letter. Not till then did I know that Matthew was added to the number. Day of horrors. To you at least these bereavements were somewhat softened. You knew they were ill and intervals elapsed before you knew of each. To me, the night came all at once. At one stroke of the pen, I lost the dearest brother of my soul, and a feeling of utter loneliness which four weeks have now been unable to remove, has taken possession of me since. My own saintly George, little did I dream that your death would have been the first I would have heard of.

I will say no more on a subject so painful but I must mention to you as some little consolation that in the bitter sickness and bitter prostration of mind which that intelligence caused, I met with general and generous sympathy from the publishers of the magazine and my friends. Some of the first literary characters in New York took charge of the magazine and made up the entire

¹ - Dates in this paragraph are inconsistent as written. Samuel says he had been in the U.S. for nine months as of 1 September. That means he had to have arrived in November or December 1832. Yet he says he left home "last February," which would normally be read as February 1833. We know Samuel and Caleb went from Newtownards, perhaps to Belfast (nearby to the west), to Derry (in south-central Ireland), and finally to Liverpool, from where they sailed for America. From that I conclude that "last February" means instead February 1832. Furthermore, since Samuel's brother George died in December 1832, and Samuel first learns of his death in this letter, he could not have departed February 1833.

number without me writing a line; otherwise I must have lost my situation. The other event was still more gratifying in the, midst of my distress when Caleb and I were night after night mingling our tears together in hopeless misery. I had for the first time heard from James and certainly, in some measure, the satisfaction of this new found relative atoned for the bereavement of the others.

But why not tell me all the particulars and above all, why not send me some little memorial of my darling George. You will find plenty of his letters in my box. Search them all out. Let not one memorial so precious be lost, and send them all to me. I do think I would give this moment all I am worth to have but the autograph of a brother whom I ever loved with a fondness surpassing the affection of mankind. I have before me now, three books which I had bound, as a present to him and Matthew. Alas, they will never see them.

Contrary to my intention, I find this subject of melancholy interest has absorbed all my room. I must hasten to inform you of some particulars in the fate of your children in this hemisphere, almost as good as dead. I am still employed in the *Knickerbocker* magazine. My salary is good but my expenses are so great at present that I do not calculate upon saving anything this year. Our new Editor, Timothy Flint,² one of the greatest literary men in this country, has assumed the charge and expressed himself warmly as to the manner in which I conducted the periodical during 7 months of the most dangerous period of its existence. The publishers from the same motives engaged me on the same terms as assistant Editor.

I sent you a large packet of letters and presents for yourself and all the boys and girls, which cost me more than 40 Dollars, by Mr. Bush, who sailed in the “Eagle” last June 24th. That ship has returned and I have the dismal misfortune of finding that all have been forfeited³ by the infernal Custom House laws. Unhappily the letters were enclosed in each separate piece, so that I fear unless Mr. Bush had the precaution to extract the letters ere they were seized, you have not heard a word about me at all.⁴ This I feel to be very grievous as I have been buoyed up some time with the daily expectation of receiving a letter or parcel from you in answer to them.

Caleb has gone to teach school near Baltimore where he will get his subsistence and about 300 Dollars per annum. James⁵ has been doing very poorly, and as Mary Jane⁶ writes me word, through his own fault, that unhappy facility of disposition and fondness for some indulgences which in Ireland he had tasted fruit enough, are assigned as the cause.⁷ He writes to me, however, in a very good spirit and says he will never split on that rock again, and that he is now doing well. He teaches a school at North East,⁸ and Mary Jane another at Charleston, 5 miles from him in the State of Maryland, about 200 miles from this place. He often writes to me and in a religious tone.

² - See <http://northreadinghistoricalcommission.blogspot.com/2010/05/timothy-flint-author-pioneer-1780.html>.

³ - “Forfeited” in typescript, which is noted by several sources as a common typographical error; conceivably Samuel wrote it thus in his letter, but it is nowhere considered to be a 19th century alternate spelling.

⁴ - This appears to refer to Samuel’s letters of 23 June, which we have and which therefore must have escaped confiscation.

⁵ - James Hope Langtree, my 2x great grandfather.

⁶ - Mary Jane (White) Langtree, James’s wife.

⁷ - Reference to James’s alcoholism, from which we know he suffered his entire life.

⁸ - Maryland, on Chesapeake Bay, northeast of Baltimore. <https://goo.gl/maps/49mhht7ETvT2>.

I am anxious to a degree I cannot express to hear from you of everything of every one. Tell me the Conference news.⁹ I hope poor noble Matthew has been done justice to in the minutes. I saw your affecting little notice of him in the magazine. I never thought of looking there, or I might have known of his death before I heard of it in your letter. But I think you ought to insert a more extended biography. I am longing to see the book which John is preparing.¹⁰

I hope you will think well of the project I started of coming here *in toto*. Your ties at home must now be considerably weakened. The chain is broken. The sooner you leave forever a place so embittered, the better. Here, I am certain you will do admirably. If you could manage to bring over 300 Pounds you could secure an independence for all your family. John to emigrate here would be the best thing he ever did. He would very soon indeed make a fortune. If Jos. [Joshua] comes, let him be well clothed. He ought to come to this port, or to Baltimore, where he will find friends near him. I think he would do well. He has so much enterprise in his disposition. Clothes are here such an enormous price that I think if he is well off in that particular, he need not be very particular in anything else. In consequence of what he said about some letters sent to Pittsburgh, I made, at a great expense, every exertion to recover what I thought would have proved a complete packet of correspondence. I was successful, but had the mortification of paying very heavily for a parcel of unsatisfactory letters to Caleb.

I wonder why Thomas has never written. Send me his book¹¹ and do entreat him to write to me at large. I would take it as the kindest thing he ever did. How are my dear little Catharine and Martha? I am sure they might write to me. I would be so delighted to hear from them; and then my dearest Mother, oh, tell me all about her. Her little scrap of cherished writing caused me many a flood of tears. Oh, why did she ever say the words:- “If Samuel had been here, he would not have died,” They nearly killed me. I would be delighted if she would write to me at large, informing me of her health and her views with regard to the girls, and everything else. How I do long to see you and it is not improbable I may do so before 12 months. My present employer offered to pay my passage with him to Liverpool if I would remain with him until that time to which I agreed.

I wrote to Jos. giving him the necessary instructions for finding a trunk I am very anxious to recover. I hope he has attended to it and that I will yet see it.

⁹ - The Methodist Conference, in England and in Ireland, in which Matthew Lanktree Sr. was heavily involved – thirty references in the table of contents to his *Biographical Narrative of Matthew Lanktree, Wesleyan Minister* (<https://archive.org/details/biographicalnarr00lank>).

¹⁰ - Three books by John Lanktree (1806-1876) are found via Google: 1) *An Analysis and Chronology of English and Irish History Carefully Corrected to the Present Time: For the Use of Schools and Young Persons* (Lanktree's Chronology) (John Cumming, Dublin, Ireland: 1833) (see <https://www.abebooks.com/book-search/author/thomas-e-lanktree/>); 2) *The Elements of Land Valuation: With Copious Instructions as to the Qualifications and Duties of Valuers* (1852) (<https://books.google.com/books?id=R9tCAAAAIAAJ>); and 3) *A Synopsis of Roman Antiquities* (1857) (<https://books.google.com/books?id=IEhfAAAACAAJ>).

¹¹ - Thomas Ebenezer Langtree (1812-1866). No reference has been found to books he wrote.

Give my love to John and Eliza¹² along with my Aunts, my Mother and the girls, and believe me,
Dear Father,

Your Affectionate Son,

Samuel

¹² - Probably Eliza (Campbell) Lanktree, John's wife.