

[From Caleb to his Father]

New York, 23rd June 1833¹

My Beloved Father:

I always feel it the greatest pleasure to write to you, and as it were, let my spirit hold converse with yours. This is a kind of relief to any oppression of spirits, however sad they may be. To tell you all my thoughts of you and home would be a long, long task. All my wants may be summed up in one, viz., that of not hearing one syllable from home these last ten months. Of all others, I feel this the most keenly because I can find no solution for such unaccountable indifference. I do not wish to complain but a sort of murmur will force itself up in spite of reason against such wonderful, such tomblike silence. It may be perhaps that you never received all our packages, and this is the only ostensible reason I can arrive at. But to be here one year and never a word from home, ship after ship arriving, persons in the very house where I am, receiving letters from Newton Ards, and yet none for me. There may be found indeed some excuse for you, but Jos. [Joshua] and all the rest, have their right hand forget its cunning, that even affection can be stifled. I can scarce believe it and yet I have written four letters since I came here, one immediately after I landed, one in December, one in February and one in March. None of these has ever been answered, no not a word. It is painful for me to think of this, that desolate as we are, not a line of intelligence could reach us for ten months from a home where I believed it was but a pleasing task to communicate. You must pardon me, Father, but I feel it.

I am in perfect health, thank God. This is the first and greatest blessing on earth, nor have I had one hour's illness since I left home. I have seen many things this last year and I hope I have learned more. If I only came here to live in beggary, the idea of sustaining myself has something comforting. I am no longer a worthless, useless, silly burden upon you, a perfect nuisance to all about me. Oh, how often I have cursed myself for my unsteadiness of conduct and my disregard for you and dear, dear Mother. The very thought is agony.

You will very likely be anxious to know about my pecuniary affairs and how I manage to support myself. I was six weeks here before I got work. I worked for three weeks and then a horrible interval of eight weeks, then employment again for 8 more. During this time I earned about 53 Dollars. With this I managed to make out existence till now I am employed in writing specimens of ornamental penmanship. I executed two large specimens, one for Mr. Pollock and one for Mr. Cummings, for which I get \$5 each, so that this is as handicraft I could make a fortune at here if only I were properly known. Clerkships are poor, very poor trades unless indeed you are a perfect bookkeeper, and this I never was, and then you may make something handsome. But when I look at myself, new fed and clothed and protected to this hour, I must be

¹ - Various hints and statements in the letter lead to a conclusion that the date originally transcribed ("1834") was mistranscribed. Caleb mentions having written home in November (1832), December, February and March. He does not mention a letter written to brother Thomas in October 1833. He asks about the wellbeing of his brother, Matthew, of whose death Samuel learned in late August 1833 (so by June 1834 Caleb surely would have been told). Caleb mentions having received no word from home for ten months, which would be roughly consistent with the date they set sail from Liverpool (21 Sep 1832). His account of his employment history covers 25 weeks, which takes him to mid-May 1833. He says he and Samuel had not heard from James in Ellicott Mills, but by October 1833 Samuel had had a long visit to James and Mary Jane in Maryland, and Caleb himself was by then living close to James and Mary Jane.

a very reptile not to be all thankfulness. I owe in this city ten dollars which one week's work can wipe off. The people here are not so pressing at all for debts. You may just pay at your leisure.

Sam has written you a long epistle. He says in it too that I "ain't" (means am not; quite common here) cut out for this country, so he thinks, but I think otherwise. I must wait till my time comes, nor do I expect to jump into reputation all in a moment the way he did. Sometimes indeed I feel a little dispirited at an unlucky course of things, and at other times I feel equally slated. I have got two pupils to whom I teach ornamental penmanship, for which I think I will get \$10 in a month.

My dear Father, let not a gloomy thought cross your mind about me. If any crosses mine about you, it is that I am not able to help you. But, Father, I feel I love you and wish that principle within me will never rest. Sam invites you over to this place, and indeed, so do I. It is impossible to tell the happy results for large families here. Boys or girls invariably prosper. Father, think seriously of this. It is worth consideration if you should never preach any, you would be supported in comfort. I am sorry I cannot send some little token of my love to you, but you will bear in mind I would do it if I had the means which I have not at present.

I hope you are well. When you get this, won't you write? How is my dear Mother? I should have written to her but Sam never told me of this package of his till on the eve of sending it. Sam has monopolized the honor of sending home all the solid proofs of his affection, but I will take another time for mine. This letter is hasty; it is one o'clock A.M. Sam wants me to write about the fight with the Captain, but I wrote it all in another letter so there is no use in writing it twice.

Farewell, my dear parents; pray for me in your prayers. I know you do, but pray on. Give my love to all at home. Most sincerely do I wish it to them. We have never been able to hear anything of James although we have written to Ellicott's Mills several times. Will you write us all you know about him? How is Matthew?² This is to me an important question. It is very warm here. I sleep with nothing but a sheet over me and all the windows and doors of the house open. There is one thing that I forgot, that Sam was talking about sending me to college. If this happens, I would like to have advice from you as to what course I should take. Farewell my dear Father. May God protect and guard, support and sustain you is my prayer.

Your affectionate son,

Caleb Lanktree

² - See note 1 above.