

# Letters from Jamaica 1858-1866

Thornton Bigelow Penfield  
Sarah Ingraham Penfield

Edited by

Charles G. Gosselink

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The cover picture is “Fort George” from Cyril Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*.

For Bigelow's great-granddaughter Charlotte



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Thornton Bigelow and Sarah Ingraham Penfield

## Preface

Thornton Bigelow Penfield and Sarah Corban Ingraham were married on August 28, 1858. They were appointed as missionaries of the American Missionary Association with the intention of serving in Jamaica, continuing in the work that Sarah's father, David Ingraham, had begun there 21 years earlier. Sarah had been born in Jamaica but left with her family when she was three years old. She was only nineteen when she returned. Bigelow, as he was known then, was twenty-four. They arrived in Kingston, Jamaica on November 15, 1858 and were assigned initially to Oberlin Station, a church and community some sixteen miles from Kingston.

Over the next seven and a half years, Sarah and Bigelow carried on a correspondence with his mother Minerva Dayton Penfield Cowles and her second husband, the Rev. Henry Cowles, and other members of the Cowles-Penfield family in Oberlin, Ohio. Sarah wrote most of the letters. Her own parents had died when she was young. She may, of course, have written to relatives on her side of the family but, with two exceptions, only the Oberlin letters have been preserved. Bigelow wrote fewer but longer, more introspective letters. The letters carry the couple through the joys and difficulties of settling in Jamaica, the birth of daughters Mary and Nellie, Nellie's death, Sarah's own illness and return to the United States with Mary, and her death in Oberlin in 1864. After a brief visit to Oberlin during Sarah's final days, Bigelow continued his work in Jamaica for a year and a half more before returning to Oberlin in 1866. That same year he married Charlotte Elizabeth Hubbard, and the two immediately departed for Madura, in South India, as missionaries under the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He died there in 1871 and Charlotte, with her two children, returned to the United States. Their letters from India have also been preserved.

The Ingraham-Penfield letters were kept in the family and later given to their daughter Mary Cowles Penfield. After her mother died she was raised by her grandmother, Minerva Penfield Cowles, in Oberlin. The letters were "lost" or forgotten until her son Edward Heald rediscovered them in 1955. He transcribed the handwritten letters and sent typewritten carbon copies to his uncle Thornton Bancroft Penfield. These are the copies that were found recently among the papers of Thornton Bancroft Penfield, Jr. The letters are incomplete, missing even the first ten pages and some others of the typed transcript. A search of several archives and collections where Heald indicated he might place the letters has failed to turn up either the original letters or the complete transcript. Here, however, are the available letters, transcribed again from the somewhat blurred Heald carbon copies, edited only slightly with punctuation for the sake of clarity. The letters, sometimes open and optimistic, sometimes dispirited, sometimes very personal, sometimes more formal, give a wonderful insight into the personalities and lives of two young missionaries in Jamaica in the mid-nineteenth century.

With the letters I have included several reports and articles that Bigelow and Sarah submitted for publication to *The Oberlin Evangelist*, *The American Missionary*, and the *Advocate and Family Guardian*, which add another dimension to their story. I have also included one letter that Bigelow wrote to George Whipple from Oberlin shortly before Sarah's death. This letter is part of a small collection of Bigelow's letters kept in the archives of the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans. All of these are letters that he wrote to Whipple and other officers of the American Missionary Association in New York while he was in the United States, mostly before and after his time in Jamaica. For the most part they deal with travel arrangements, salary, and other administrative matters. I make reference to these letters in the Appendix but have not felt it necessary to include them with the family letters, except for this one, which is of a more personal nature and helps to fill a gap in the story.

To help put these letters in context, I have provided some background on Bigelow and Sarah's families in the Introduction which follows. Additional information on the Jamaica Mission and Jamaica itself in the nineteenth century can be found in the Appendix. There is perhaps more detail here than some readers will find necessary, and I would encourage them to go straight to the letters and get to know Bigelow and Sarah directly, without distractions, as I did when I first read them. I have, however, included some footnotes to identify people and events that most readers might not immediately recognize, and there is some repetition there of the information given in the Introduction. I have not further identified the mission colleagues whose names are mentioned repeatedly in the letters. Most of these were former Oberlin students and would have been well known to Bigelow's parents.

In February 2005, my wife Charlotte and I had an opportunity to visit Jamaica and make a pilgrimage of discovery to the area where Bigelow and Sarah lived and worked. We were able to visit most of the sites mentioned in the letters and were glad to find churches and schools still in existence there. We looked for but did not find the grave of little Nellie at Brainerd or of Sarah's baby sister who had died there many years before. We were able to attend a church service on Sunday in Shortwood, a neighborhood of Kingston, where Sarah's father had served and where she was born. We met some of the leaders of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands and enjoyed talking with people at the other churches we visited. Most of all, we were impressed by the land itself. The letters describe but fail to give an adequate picture of the ruggedness of the terrain and the difficulty the missionaries must have had getting around their own parishes and visiting other stations. They must have found some compensation, as we did, in the beauty of the scenery and the friendliness of the people.

I am grateful to all those who have helped me put this collection of letters and notes together. Two of the most important contributors are no longer here to receive my thanks. Edward Heald did a wonderful job with the first transcription of these letters fifty years ago. I have seen samples of Bigelow's handwriting and, while I would love to have the original letters now, I am glad that it was Ed who did the difficult job of deciphering them. I could not have written the Introduction, with its account of the Cowles-Penfield family, without



the help of my college professor Robert Fletcher. His two-volume history of Oberlin College is a mine of information, and it has been a rewarding experience to sift through it and find so many nuggets of Penfield family history. Roland Bauman, Archivist at Oberlin College has been of great support in providing information, advice and encouragement. Martha Duncan, Carol Leonard and Charlotte Mertz have shared documents and family lore and helped to answer some questions about Bigelow, especially concerning his "courtship" of Lottie Hubbard. Larry Heald, an incredible genealogist, has filled me in on the details of Sarah's parents and other members of the Ingraham-Hartson family. I appreciate the hospitality and assistance of Rev. Dr. Richmond Nelson, a graduate and later principal of Oberlin High School in Jamaica, now associated with the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, and Rev. Dr. Dave Hazle, minister of the Shortwood United Church in Kingston. Carolyn Barrett and Mary Ann Jones were our wonderful guides in Jamaica, who got caught up in our search for the churches, communities, and geographical landmarks mentioned in the letters and in the process seemed to adopt Bigelow and Sarah as their own ancestors.

Charlotte Gosselink has been a full partner in this project, encouraging me, offering advice, editing and proofreading, and joining me on the pilgrimage to Jamaica. Most of all, I appreciate the opportunity I have had to rediscover a piece of her family history, the life of her great grandfather Thornton Bigelow Penfield.

June 15, 2005

C.G.G.



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AN OBERLIN FAMILY OF THE FIFTIES

The Cowles-Penfield family, front row left to right: Charles Penfield, Minerva Dayton Penfield Cowles, Henry Cowles, Josephine Penfield Bateham; back row: Smith Penfield, Sarah Cowles, John G.W. Cowles, Thornton Bigelow Penfield, Mary Louisa Cowles (Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio)

## Introduction

There is a picture, a copy of a daguerreotype taken in 1856, in Robert Samuel Fletcher's *History of Oberlin College*, which he captions simply "An Oberlin Family of the Fifties." The picture shows Henry Cowles and his wife Minerva and seven of their nine children, including Thornton Bigelow Penfield. And they are indeed an Oberlin family. Oberlin at that time was still a small, tight knit community, conscious of its foundation and purpose as a beacon of religious and moral reform in a dark valley of sin. The family was thoroughly engaged in the life of this community and the causes it stood for. Bigelow's parents and older siblings had already demonstrated their faith and commitment to these causes. It is out of this background that he and his wife Sarah Ingraham were led to go as missionaries to Jamaica and it is that influence that explains the hopes and aspirations they express in their letters.

Henry Cowles joined the faculty of Oberlin College (known as the Collegiate Institute before 1850) in 1835, just two years after its founding and, with the first and second presidents, Asa Mahan and Charles G. Finney, played a pivotal role in the early history of the college. Commenting on his appointment, the *Ohio Observer* described him as a "studious, mild, careful, kind & lovely man" (Fletcher, 689). He taught classical languages and theology and from 1844 to 1862 was the editor of the *Oberlin Evangelist*, the theological and moral mouthpiece of the college. His first wife, Alice Welch Cowles, served as principal of the Female Department and was a pioneer in the promotion of women's education. She died in 1843, leaving her husband with six small children.

Anson and Minerva Dayton Penfield moved to Oberlin in about 1836. He was a lath and shingle maker. They came from Alden, in western New York, perhaps recruited by agents of the newly established Oberlin Colony who were seeking skilled workmen, perhaps drawn by the presence of Charles G. Finney, whom they may have known when he led revivals in Rochester and Buffalo. Certainly Minerva Penfield became a devout follower of Finney after she arrived in Oberlin. Three of Anson's brothers moved to Oberlin at about the same time. Anson died in 1838, killed in a lumber mill accident, leaving his wife with five young children. In 1844 Henry Cowles and Minerva Penfield were married, and together they raised their family of nine children, each having lost one child in the previous year. In time all the surviving children attended Oberlin College or its Preparatory Department and then pursued professions or were active in causes reflecting the values they had learned in the family, community, and college.

Sarah Penfield's father, David S. Ingraham, was also closely associated with Oberlin in its early days. He was one of a group of some thirty students, outspoken abolitionists at Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, who, being ordered by the seminary trustees to cease all criticism and even discussion of slavery, packed up and moved as a group to Oberlin in 1835. These Lane Rebels are credited with breathing new life into the struggling Oberlin Institute,

encouraging the trustees there to appoint Asa Mahan as president and Charles Finney as professor of theology and insisting that Oberlin allow free discussion of the slavery question and open its doors to students “irrespective of color.”

David Ingraham met his wife Elizabeth Hartson at Oberlin. She was a member of the first class at the new Institute and consequently was one of the women who made Oberlin the first coeducational college in the country. Shortly after their marriage in 1838, they went as missionaries to Jamaica, where Sarah was born. Failing health forced him to leave Jamaica in 1841 and he died almost immediately after his arrival back in New York. Elizabeth and Sarah went to live with the Ingraham family in Michigan. There she remarried and had one son before she too died in 1845. Her husband, Dr. Julius Hume, died in 1852, leaving the two children, Sarah and Edward, to be raised by other members of the family. In spite of this tragedy, Sarah followed her parents’ path to Oberlin, enrolling in the Ladies Department in 1852 and graduating in 1857 with a degree in literature. As her letters show, she too had become an ardent and outspoken supporter of the causes that Oberlin stood for.

In mid-Nineteenth Century America, Oberlin was not alone in its preoccupation with religious and moral reform. This was a time of religious revival, the women’s rights movement, abolitionism, prison reform, temperance and other concerns. However, nowhere was this spirit of revival and reform more concentrated than in Oberlin. Catherine Beecher, writing to Charles Finney in 1839 said, perhaps with tongue in cheek, “On my return from N. Eng. this fall I came within an ace of coming to see you and the rest of the good people of Oberlin, of whom rumour speaks somewhat strangely – as if we might *there* see what I never hoped to see but in Heaven.” (Fletcher, 225)

John Jay Shipherd, with the support of his friend Philo P. Stewart, is generally considered the founder of Oberlin. He had come out to Ohio in 1830 to serve as a missionary to the new settlers who were flocking to the western frontier. Wearying of trying to reach and reform the sinful people of Elyria, where he had settled (He won many enemies there in his war against alcohol.), he dreamt of establishing a new community, founded in the virgin forest far from the taint of established and sin-infected towns, where sin would not be allowed to get a start. (Fletcher, 85) “I propose thro’ (God’s) assistance to plant a colony somewhere in this region whose chief aim shall be to glorify God & do good to men.” He envisioned a school that would “educate school teachers for our desolate valley & many ministers for our dying world.” (Fairchild, 18) In 1832 he was able to purchase land just nine miles west of Elyria, where he established his colony and school. It was named for Pastor Jean Frederic Oberlin of Alsace, France, whose community of Ban de la Roche provided an example of what Shipherd hoped to accomplish.

The school had a difficult beginning. It suffered some setbacks in its early years and softened some of the extreme expectations of its founder (the communal ownership of property, required manual labor and strict vegetarianism, for example) but its fundamental purpose remained constant. Speaking to the graduating class in 1851, President Finney said: “You are not only educated but educated in *God’s College* – a College reared under God and

for God, by the faith and prayers and toils and the sacrifices of God's people. You cannot but know that it has been the sole purpose of the founders and patrons of this college to educate here men and women *for God and for God's cause.*" (Fletcher, 208)

It is hard to separate Charles Finney from the early history of Oberlin College. He was appointed to the faculty in 1835, elevated to the presidency in 1850, the position he held until his resignation in 1865, and he continued to preach and lecture at the college until his death in 1875. Before going to Oberlin, Finney had earned his reputation as a powerful revival preacher in western New York and New York City. His appointment to Oberlin had been somewhat controversial. While no one questioned his zeal or eloquence, there were many who took issue with his theology. By the time he arrived in Oberlin, he had already begun to formulate a distinctive set of beliefs which, being further refined with the contributions of Asa Mahan, Henry Cowles, and other faculty members, became known as "the Oberlin theology." In essence, this doctrine held that individuals possessed freedom of will, to choose for good or evil, and that they could, with God's help, conquer sin and attain a state of spiritual perfection in this life. This contradicted the more orthodox Calvinist view that humans were totally depraved, were incapable of overcoming their sins, and could hope for salvation only through the mercy and grace of God. Finney and Mahan argued that Christ would not have exhorted his followers to "be perfect even as my father in heaven is perfect" if that were an unattainable goal. Christians would never be free of temptation but they could, through faith in Christ, rise above sin and attain a life of holiness.

This doctrine, known as "Christian perfectionism" or "sanctification," was deemed a heresy by many of the more traditional churches of New England, New York and the frontier; and the Presbyterian Synod of Ohio went so far, in 1841, as to warn its member churches to close their doors to Oberlin trained preachers. But in Oberlin itself, perfectionism sparked a spirit of revival, of religious reawakening, that completely absorbed students and faculty and often overshadowed all other academic activities. And, inspired by Finney and Mahan, many students and graduates went out to nearby towns, to the East and the West and overseas to "kindle new flames and . . . set the world ablaze for Christ." (Fletcher, 213)

In time, however, this zeal was redirected as most Oberlinians came to the realization that the struggle for spiritual perfection was indeed very difficult and that it was perhaps better to devote one's efforts to doing God's will through action rather than through too much introspection. The spiritual quest was not abandoned, and indeed Oberlin continued to experience religious revivals from time to time. But even Finney came to feel that sanctification would be reached through steady growth rather than a single dramatic act, that it was more a matter of commitment and perfect trust in God than complete sinlessness.

He saw, too, that the logic of perfectionism required Christians to work not only for the renewal of their own souls but for the reform of society, for the creation of an ethical and righteous community, an earthly counterpart to Paradise. This had been Shipherd's goal with the establishment of the Oberlin

colony, one that Finney and Mahan had shared on their arrival. Now students, faculty and other members of the community seemed primed to throw their energies into the many reform movements of the mid-nineteenth century. And there seems to be hardly a cause, whether it was temperance, vegetarianism, peace, women's education, abolitionism, or moral reform, that was not taken up enthusiastically. As Mahan put it, "whatever is ascertained to be contrary to the rights, and destructive to the true interests of humanity, ought to be corrected." (Fletcher, 235)

This then was the religious and social environment in which Bigelow Penfield was raised. Bigelow's youngest stepsister Mary Louisa Cowles kept a diary in 1851 and 1852, when she was 12 to 13 years old, where she recorded some of the daily activities of the Cowles family. There are the expected reports of household chores, of birthdays celebrated and deaths mourned, of visiting friends, of games and past-times, and even her brothers' attendance at a circus in Elyria. But there are also an unusual number of references such as "went to sabbath school and meeting in the forenoon. professor finney spoke and in the afternoon too," "went to anti slavery meeting in the afternoon," "went to the olive leaf society" (the women's peace society), "went to sabbath school but not meeting as my bonnet was not trimmed," "went to ladies moral reform society . . . mrs finney spoke," "went to sabbath school as usual . . . Mr. Keep occupied most of the time on Temperance," or "went to a missionary meeting." (Oberlin Alumni Magazine, May 1931) Sadly, Mary Louisa died of tuberculosis in 1859, while still a student at Oberlin, before she had a chance to choose her own course in life.

Bigelow, too, would have attended these meetings, listened to Finney and Mahan preach on Sundays, participated in revivals, and read his stepfather's articles in the *Oberlin Evangelist*. When he was twelve years old, he had already made a commitment to missionary work. After hearing a visitor from India speak at Sabbath School, he wrote on a small scrap of paper, which he carried with him to the end of his life (and which is still preserved), "Dr. Scudder asked me to become a missionary and go to India and help him; and I intend to. T.B. Penfield, April 19, 1846." After graduating from Oberlin in 1856, he spent two years at Union Theological Seminary in New York, training in what we would call urban ministry, and then spent seven years as a missionary in Jamaica before finally going to India. For all that, his letters from Jamaica, especially in the early years, show him to be almost overcome with the realization of his own sinful nature, his failings and shortcomings. The doctrine of perfectionism took a toll on his psyche, and only later, after he had suffered personal tragedy, was he able to make peace with himself and his God.

The mission calling was strong in Bigelow's family. His sister Josephine had married Richard Cushman, an 1847 graduate of the Oberlin seminary, and together they had gone as missionaries to Haiti, where he died in 1849. His cousin Minerva Dayton Arnold, who had grown up in the Cowles home in Oberlin, worked with her husband in the Mendi Mission in West Africa until his death in 1851. His older brother Charles stayed on in Oberlin after his graduation in 1847, serving as a professor of Latin and Greek from 1848 to 1870, and then accepted a position in the Central High School in Cleveland, but



some years later his daughter, Mary Alice Ament, went as a missionary to China. Bigelow's stepsister Sarah Cowles Little's daughter, Alice Little, served as a missionary in Micronesia.

Shipherd's call for "school teachers for our desolate valley" also found a hearing in the family. Bigelow's oldest stepsister Helen dropped out of Oberlin before her senior year and went to teach school in Cincinnati. Her letters, collected and published after her early death from tuberculosis in 1851, shed further light on the family and are a touching memorial to her own life. Like Bigelow, she struggled with her own faith but found fulfillment in her chosen career. She was also not afraid to address the wickedness she found around her, admonishing little boys for playing marbles on the Sabbath and passing out tracts to brewery workers in Cincinnati (*The Memoir of Helen M. Cowles*, 1856).

Temperance had always been an important cause at Oberlin. In the early days, many in the community, especially in the student boarding houses, had abstained from meat, all rich food, tea and coffee, as well as stronger drink. Henry Cowles was among the officers of the Oberlin Physiological Society, which promoted the austere vegetarian diet of Sylvester Graham. But students rebelled against these privations, and even faculty support fell away, so that by 1841 the extreme dietary restrictions had been dropped and the use of tea and coffee merely discouraged rather than prohibited.

But alcohol was still seen as an unacceptable sin. We are tempted to smile at the Penfields' efforts to promote the pledge of total abstinence among their neighbors in Jamaica, where the economy was still based in the production of sugar and rum. But we know, quite literally, where they were coming from. Bigelow's mother, Minerva Penfield Cowles, had presided over the first meeting of the Ohio State Women's Temperance Convention in Columbus in January 1853, and his sister Josephine presided over a second conference in Dayton later that year. Both served on the executive committee of the Ohio Women's Temperance Society, and Josephine was for many years an officer of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Josephine had remarried after her return from Haiti and lived in Columbus, Ohio. Her new husband was Michael Bateham, editor of the *Ohio Cultivator*. Though he was not educated at Oberlin, he was a strong supporter of Charles Finney and often lectured at Oberlin on agricultural matters. He and Josephine were deeply involved in another of Oberlin's major reform efforts, the campaign against war. Again Henry Cowles was a founder and officer of the Oberlin Peace Society and often published articles in the *Oberlin Evangelist* in support of the international peace movement. In 1850 he attended a peace conference in Frankfurt, Germany. In 1851 Michael and Josephine Bateham were appointed and went as delegates from the Ohio State Peace Society to an international conference in London. Unfortunately, the British organizers would not allow women to attend and Josephine had to watch the proceedings from the gallery.

She may have been disappointed but was probably not surprised. Even Oberlin did not accord women equal rights at that time. Though women had been admitted as students from the beginning and mixed with men in classes and in the dining halls, they were not allowed to speak in public assemblies (except at women's gatherings) or participate with men in open debates. Graduates of the Ladies' Department could read their essays at Commencement at a special women's meeting, but women candidates for the regular B.A. degree were not allowed to deliver their essays in person at Commencement but had to have them read by a man.

Most Oberlin women did not at first support the "radical" cause of women's rights, but a few graduates, such as Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown, played a leading role in the national women's rights movement and must have had some influence among students and faculty at the college. Sarah Penfield may have been present when Antoinette Brown returned to Oberlin in 1853 and addressed the Young Ladies Literary Society on the subject of "Women's Sphere." (Fletcher, 294) Sarah was no radical, but her letters show her sensitivity to the issue of women's rights, especially when she experienced the patronizing attitude of her older male colleagues in Jamaica, who may not have been aware of the changes that were taking place back in Oberlin. In 1858, women for the first time were allowed to read their own essays at Commencement. Bigelow's stepsister Sarah Cowles would have read her essay when she graduated in 1859. She also had a liberal understanding of "women's sphere" in society. She went on to become principal teacher and then director of the Wisconsin State Institute for the Blind, a position she held, even after her marriage, until her retirement and return to Oberlin.

Though the Oberlin community did not give much attention to the women's rights movement, it enthusiastically supported that other "female" cause, the moral reform movement, the effort to uphold strict sexual standards, protect marriage, end prostitution, and reclaim those who had strayed from the path of virtue. Though men participated in the movement, it was women who carried the burden of this cause. Alice Welch Cowles, Henry's first wife, was a founder and president of the Oberlin Female Reform Society. Minerva Penfield Cowles served as president later on, and as we have seen, even young Mary Louisa attended meetings. The society endeavored to promote high moral standards among the students of the college and raised money to support the New York Female Moral Reform Society (later the American Female Guardian Society) in its efforts to combat prostitution and rehabilitate fallen women. In the year between her graduation from Oberlin and her marriage to Bigelow, Sarah worked in New York at the Home for the Friendless, an outreach of the Female Guardian Society to "respectable" females without employment, friends or home; and later, from Jamaica, she wrote articles for its publication, the *Advocate and Family Guardian*.

But in the years leading up to the Civil War, all of these other reform measures were overshadowed by the antislavery movement, that great cause which came to dominate and almost define the college and the community of Oberlin. Abolitionism had not been one of John Jay Shipherd's priorities when the college was founded, but with the arrival of President Asa Mahan, Charles

Finney, and the Lane Rebels in 1835, Oberlin enthusiastically took up the cause and became a center of the movement in northern Ohio. Students and faculty not only supported and worked for the immediate emancipation of slaves, speaking out publicly in surrounding towns and often suffering physical abuse for their efforts, but they also showed concern for the education and nurture of freed slaves. The college opened its doors to students of color, and the community became a haven for the many free blacks who settled there and for fugitives who stopped on their way north to Canada.

Henry Cowles had been an early convert to the anti slavery movement after William Lloyd Garrison's famous 1831 call for action. Before that time public opinion in the United States, even among those who opposed slavery in principal, had not generally supported emancipation, preferring the option of colonization, the repatriation of slaves to Africa. Charles Finney and his supporters in New York were quick to back Garrison's demand for immediate emancipation, and Henry Cowles was one of the first to take up the cause in Ohio, where he was then serving a church near Ashtabula. He was one of the founders of the Anti Slavery Society of the Western Reserve in 1833 and earned a reputation as a leading abolitionist even before he joined the faculty at Oberlin in 1835. There, of course, he continued his efforts, and under his editorship the *Oberlin Evangelist* became a strong voice for abolition.

His family must have absorbed his sentiments toward slavery as naturally as they adopted his Christian faith. And they had opportunities to witness slavery and emancipation from a very close vantage. When Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote to Minerva Penfield Cowles, in 1852, asking her to take on the care and education of two recently ransomed slaves, Emily and Mary Edmondson, Mrs. Cowles immediately invited the two little girls into her already crowded home in Oberlin. They lived with the family and attended the Oberlin Preparatory Department for about a year and a half before one of the girls succumbed to tuberculosis and the other returned to her family in Washington.

Henry Cowles's oldest son, Henry Benjamin, who was just Bigelow's age, completed his studies in the Preparatory Department in 1855, but then, like many other Oberlin students, was caught up in the controversy surrounding the spread of slavery into the western territories. He must have left Oberlin for Kansas early in 1856, because he does not appear in the family portrait taken later that year. He may have gone with a band of men and women from Oberlin, sponsored by the Emigrant Aid Association of Northern Ohio, to help swell the ranks of the free-state settlers. He was certainly there that summer to witness the turmoil and violence we associate with "Bleeding Kansas" and to describe what was happening in his letters home to the family. By 1859 he was back in Oberlin, but in 1861 he returned to Kansas, with his wife Rachel and their children, presumably to farm the land that he had previously purchased. He died in Topeka in 1870, most likely from tuberculosis, the disease that had taken so many other members of the family.

His younger brother John found an opportunity to confront slavery closer to home. He graduated from college in 1856 and then continued in the Theological Department. In 1858 John was involved in that famous incident of

Oberlin history, the Wellington Rescue, the successful effort of students and townspeople to free a fugitive slave who had been living in town and had been seized by slave hunters. As soon as he heard the news of John Price's capture, he saddled his horse and rushed ten miles south to Wellington to join the large crowd of rescuers gathered around the hotel where Price was being held. One historian has called John an "unsung hero" of the rescue, presumably for his efforts in recruiting the men who actually entered the hotel and freed Price (Brandt, 82), but in the aftermath he was not among the twenty-one Oberlin men who were arrested, tried, and acquitted for violation of the Fugitive Slave Laws.

After completing his seminary studies and volunteering as chaplain with the Fifty-fifth Ohio Regiment during the Civil War, John served churches in Mansfield, Ohio and Saginaw, Michigan. He was considered a "silver tongued orator and preacher of power" before a tumor in his cheek ended his speaking career. (Mary Cowles Heald letter, February 7, 1931) He then moved to Cleveland where he worked as a newspaper editor and pursued other business interests. In 1874 he was appointed a trustee of Oberlin College, a position he held until his death in 1914.

By 1861, all the children had left Oberlin, leaving Henry and Minerva Cowles with what must have seemed a very empty house. Henry Cowles would have been further saddened when the *Oberlin Evangelist* was forced to cease publication in 1862 due to financial constraints and a lack of subscriptions caused by the Civil War. He gave his full attention to writing biblical commentaries, eventually publishing sixteen volumes covering both the Old and New Testaments. Minerva maintained the old homestead for visiting family and friends and found pleasure spending time at the homes of her children and grandchildren, many of whom attended Oberlin College. One of them, Charles D. Bateham, became a professional photographer in Oberlin, and it is to him that we are indebted for the many family portraits that survive.

When Sarah Penfield returned from Jamaica in the fall of 1863, Minerva took her in and cared for her until her death the next spring. And when Bigelow, who had come home briefly, went back to Jamaica and later to India, where he died in 1871, she took his four year old daughter Mary Cowles Penfield under her wing and raised her as her own child. Mary's health, like her mother's, was always fragile. In a letter to her sister-in-law in 1879, Minerva expressed the concern that ill health might prevent her granddaughter's planned marriage to another Oberlin student. It should be noted here that Mary and Charles Heald were married in 1883 and had four children. She died in 1953 at the age of 93.

Minerva's health was failing and she died in 1880 not long after writing that letter, followed by Henry less than a year later. But Oberlin continued to exert a strong pull on the family. They sent their children to be educated in Oberlin and brought their loved ones to be buried there. Charles Penfield and John Cowles, of course, lived close by in Cleveland. Josephine Penfield Bateham returned to live in Oberlin sometime after her husband Michael's death. Her youngest brother Smith, who had studied music at Oberlin and in

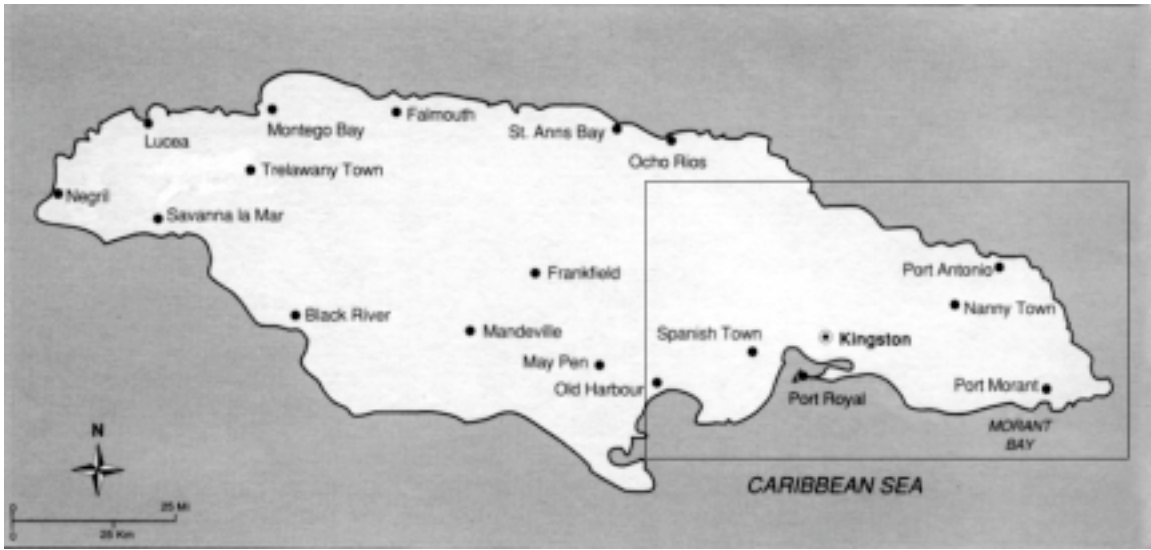
Leipzig and then had a successful career as a church organist and music teacher in Savannah and New York, returned to Oberlin in retirement. And Sarah Cowles Little came back from Wisconsin to spend her last days in Oberlin.

In a letter to her children written in 1893, Josephine commented on the longevity of the Penfield stock. But looking at this history, and reading these letters from Jamaica, we are struck by the fragility of life, by the tragedy that beset the Cowles-Penfield family. Both Henry and Minerva lost their first spouses. Only five of their children lived to enjoy their old age. Two daughters died before they reached twenty and two sons died in the prime of their thirties. And this does not count the five children gone before the Cowles and Penfield families came together. The story tells of husbands or wives lost and the grief of parents who saw their infant children suddenly taken from them. Certainly there was tragedy. But there was also triumph. The story tells of a family dedicated to life, to service, and to changing the world. We may not always share their convictions, but we can only admire and respect their zeal, their faith, their commitment and their resilience. This was, indeed, a remarkable family.

. . . . .

Bigelow and Sarah were well matched in their faith and idealism. We almost forget how young they were when they first arrived in Jamaica. We marvel at the self-confidence and enthusiasm they showed in their work and the resilience they exhibited when faced with personal difficulties and professional setbacks. It was not an easy assignment and there were few rewards. How did they do it? Perhaps we should let Bigelow speak for himself, and maybe for the whole family, when he wrote shortly before his departure from Jamaica:

“Had I foreseen the trials and griefs that awaited me here, I should scarcely have had courage to face them, I fear. But why not? Had I foreseen the help with which a gracious God would meet my every trial and grief, I had been bold as a lion.”



Jamaica, West Indies



Jamaica Mission Field

# Letters from Jamaica 1858-1866

*The American Missionary*, New York, December 1858

## SAILING OF MISSIONARIES

Rev. T. B. Penfield and Mrs. S. C. Ingraham Penfield sailed from New York Saturday, November 6, in the steamship *Washington*, for the Jamaica Mission. Mrs. Penfield is the daughter of Rev. Mr. Ingraham, deceased, one of the first missionaries from this country to the emancipated people of Jamaica.



King Street, Kingston, Jamaica 1850



## JAMAICA 1858-1859

Bigelow and Sarah Penfield arrived in Kingston, Jamaica on November 15, 1858. Unfortunately, the letters which might have described their departure from New York, the voyage by sea, and their first few weeks in Jamaica have been lost. The first ten pages of the original transcription are missing. Fortunately, however, we do have the report Bigelow sent back to the American Missionary Association in New York, which was then published in *The American Missionary*.

**Article by Rev T. B. Penfield in *The American Missionary*, February 1859**

### Jamaica Mission

Oberlin Station, Dec. 4, 1858

I take the earliest opportunity of announcing to you where and how we are situated. We landed from the steamer at Kingston, about 12 o'clock, Sabbath night three weeks ago tomorrow. The next day we dispatched a letter to High-gate, the post office nearest the missionaries in the mountains. This letter, by the way, has not been received yet.

We found that we had arrived at the very commencement of the rainy season, which began much later this year than usual. Accordingly we could not go to the mountains and the missionaries could not come to the town, so that all possibility of reporting our arrival to them seemed cut off, unless they should send to High-gate P.O.

For four or five days the rain poured down in torrents almost incessantly, so that we were obliged to keep in the house. Saturday, however, one of the elders of the church in Oberlin Station happened in, to our as well as his great joy. Mr. Venning, also being in town that morning, was told by a friend that he had noticed in the Kingston papers our arrival, so that we were favored with a call from him. Of course the news was soon spread through the Mission, and Monday brought the horses and mules for us and our baggage. We started for the mountains the same evening, Bro. Starbuck as guide. On reaching the Station, which was to be our home for the future, we alighted from our horses for the night. In the morning the great bell was rung, and quite a congregation soon assembled to see and welcome the new minister. We shook hands with them all, and received their cordial greeting, with thanksgiving to God who had so richly blessed us.

We had morning prayers with them in the chapel and, promising to be with them again the next Sabbath, we rode on to see the other missionaries at their own stations. We were almost impatient to settle down at once, at our home and among our people, but were finally over-persuaded to defer it a week or two. We spent the week at Brainerd,

Richmond, and Elliot, visiting and being initiated in the ways and doings of those whose co-laborers we are to be. Bro. Starbuck and I then returned to Providence and Oberlin, he filling the pulpit at Providence and I at Oberlin. I enjoyed the services of the day deeply. The chapel was nearly filled (an unusual thing for Oberlin) and the audience were all attention. After services I had a good time getting acquainted with the people. I think I shall like them well, as I hope to be able to do them much good. They have so long been without a steady pastor that they seem overjoyed in the prospect of my living among them. I should judge the church was in a somewhat backward state, from all I see and hear; but it could hardly be expected to be different. In the evening, at our request, the three elders and the deacons of the church met Bro. Starbuck and myself for a brief consultation upon the state of affairs and the prospects for the future. I was well pleased with the conference. Yesterday we came to our home, and now have things as comfortable as could be expected, our boxes and bedding, &c, not having arrived yet.

**From Sarah**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica, W.I.  
January 3, 1859*

We pick up the story with the last part of an incomplete letter giving Sarah's account of their first days in Jamaica. Included in the missing portions of the letter, perhaps, are the details of how they so quickly acquired a "family," the Jamaican children whom they took into their home. The road from Kingston to Oberlin Station, now known as Lawrence Tavern, would have passed through Shortwood, the community where Sarah's father served a church and the place where Sarah was born. It is likely they stopped there on their way to Oberlin.

*They hardly knew how to express their delight at seeing the daughter of one they so much loved. My old nurse took me to the little chamber where I was born and made me eat of some cake like what she used to make for father and drink the lemon drink he loved – called me her own daughter and told me many things about my parents and myself*

*The ride of sixteen miles to this place from Kingston made me quite lame and when I was forced to go on to Brainerd Station, ten miles further, in the morning, I rode in torture all the way. There was nothing for us to live on or with here and the missionaries were very anxious to see us and get acquainted, so we yielded to their wishes and spent a little more than a week among them. Some of them we were acquainted with before and all we like very much. We could not bring anything but our trunks on the steamship so we were forced to leave our boxes in New York and they have not reached us yet, so that when we did come here to live we were obliged to borrow bedding from friends in the mission. I happened to have a sheet and pair of pillowcases in one of my trunks as well as a quilt that was unquilted. The latter has been quilted and this is all the bedding of my own I have. We have had to use shawls and cloaks and all*

*sorts of things to keep us warm, for really the nights are decidedly cool, though the days may be ever so oppressive.*

*I have been obliged to scrimp before but never as I have since we came here. We did not intend to take so large a family so soon upon our hands but it seemed unavoidable, and as we hoped it would be a blessing to the children, we said let them come and the Lord will provide for us. Our salary is large enough so that when we once get started and can raise provisions ourselves we can get on very comfortably, but for the present we shall have to economize closely to keep our heads above water.*

*We have found the people fully as intelligent as we expected. In the church there are some who I have no doubt are sincere Christians. They have but little education. A few read poorly and almost none of the grown people can write or cipher. Our school has commenced today. For the present I have to spend a little time with it every day, but in the spring we hope to have a teacher from America who will take charge of it. Our Sabbath School is increasing in size and interest and the Sabbath services generally. The attendance is improving. The people all seemed pleased with their new minister, though at first we heard a good deal about his being too young. Indeed they still think me young. But I shall grow old enough with this load of care upon me. Love to all your dear family. Wish I knew how Jane was. Pray for us.*

*Lovingly, SCI Penfield. Bigelow sends love to all.*

**From Sarah to Josephine<sup>1</sup>**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
January 28th, 1859*

*Dear Sister Josephine,*

*If I thought you had not heard from us all this long time I should feel that I had done wrong in not writing before, but knowing how frequent are your communications with friends in Oberlin I have felt sure that when they heard from us you would also. We are obliged to send our boy Thomas to Kingston and I feel as though I could not let him go without taking a letter to you. We have been waiting until our boxes come before having the Ordination exercises, but as we are just upon the eve of a second communion and they have not made their appearance we have decided to wait no longer. Wednesday next, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February we have appointed for the Ordination exercises.*

*We have already borrowed bedding of the missionaries and by borrowing more we shall manage to entertain them quite comfortably I think. I wonder if you had such a rough sort of a house to live in when in Haiti as we have here. On the outside it is the*

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<sup>1</sup> Josephine Penfield Bateham was Bigelow's oldest sister. She was earlier married to Richard Cushman and they served as missionaries in Haiti until his death. She later married Michael Boyd Bateham, editor of the *Ohio Cultivator*. They lived in Columbus, Ohio.

*most ill shaped house I ever saw and if you saw the plan we sent home you will see that it is not much better planned inside. This little outline will give you some idea of how our house looks in front. Its only redeeming quality is that it is painted white. But enough of this. It is too much like complaining. I did not expect to find things nice and comfortable as they are at home and I am not disappointed. In the course of two or three years I think we shall have quite a cozy little home here. There is a farm of 18 acres connected with the Mission house, which we hope to turn to account in the way of making a living. Already we have quite a little field planted with cane, corn and beans. Next week we are to have a man come and plant yam for us. All the preparation the land needs is to cut the brush and burn it over. It is then ready for digging the yam or cane hills as the case may be.*

*The package of seeds Mr. Bateham and yourself gave us were very unfortunately put into one of the boxes but when they do come I have little doubt that we shall succeed nicely in making them grow. Indeed many of them have been raised in the island already. About Christmas time I happened upon some nice cucumbers. They tasted more like home than anything I have had since I came here.*

*We bought a few white beans in town, which made us another nice meal or two. We can get American potatoes by paying enough for them and we may get a few to plant, but yam takes their place tolerably well. Just now we are feeling quite poor with our first quarter's salary and the second being not yet due. It was rather a pity for us to take so large a family upon our hands at first but we could not well do otherwise and we trust the Lord will give us means to provide for them. The people do not seem very much inclined to send in provisions; indeed they are less so here than at any of the Stations.*

*The former missionaries here have spoiled them by sending them presents the other missionaries say. We feel that we are getting a place in the hearts of the people without this, however, and hope that if our lives and health are spared we shall be enabled to do much for their spiritual welfare. We are going about among them all we can and think this will be one of the most effectual means of doing good. The father of one of the adopted children has been living for some years with a woman to whom he is not married. A week or two since, this woman was taken very sick with the fever of the country. In her extremity she sent for the minister to come and see her. Bigelow went immediately and labored faithfully to show her her great sin and lead her to the Savior. She did not seem to realize her situation as he had hoped and he came home quite disheartened, but we gave ourselves much to prayer for her during the day and at night he went to see her again. He found that her stupidity in the morning was owing to her having been under the influence of opiates, that she really did not feel her sins, and during the day she had asked and she hoped received forgiveness for them.*

*The bans for their marriage were published for the first time last Sabbath and when they have been three times published they will be married. We have visited her nearly every day and she seems to be a growing Christian. She is rapidly recovering her health and we hope will, by her future life, undo as far as may be the evil she has done heretofore. Adultery is the great and crying sin of this people and I am shocked to see*

how very common it is. Theft is exceedingly common and already we have lost several things by it. Cheating white people is a thing they will do whenever they have a chance. "Buckra has plenty money," they think.

The people from a distance of thirty or forty miles around carry all their provisions to Kingston on their heads or on the backs of mules or donkeys. If you stop them on the way, you must pay Kingston prices, and even then they will not always sell it for they are so anxious to go to Kingston. The journey is often performed in the night. It is almost impossible to sleep for the noise and hallooing they make in passing. Our room is very close to the road.

This afternoon I have been off three miles on horseback with my Willie as guide to see his aunt, a good sister in our church. She is very nearly white and quite intelligent so that she is a good deal of society for me. Her people were formerly slaveholders and their large property is now nearly useless. She is a maiden lady and living alone on the place.

As I told her this afternoon, if she had a good husband they might make themselves rich off the place. Land here is quite productive and it does not require many acres to make one quite comfortable. The natives make their living off two or three acres. Indeed so many have their little fields from which they make a living that it is difficult to get them to work out. Two or three shillings a day is all the wages they ask. I found the road that I went over today very bad. It has been raining a good deal this week and the steep mountain paths are very slippery. I often have cause to be thankful that I am not a coward, but when I ride in such narrow paths right on the edge of a deep precipice I sometimes think, "What if I should go down?" We have been saved from such accidents so far, but they do occur occasionally.

The last time Mr. Penfield went to Kingston he had no little trouble in getting home, for when he had got only four miles on the way home, his horse gave out and would go no further. He was obliged to get off and drive the horse, walking all the rest of the distance of twelve miles, and you may be sure that when he got home nearly at midnight, he was completely exhausted.

We have both been very well since we came here. Do not know that we were ever better in our lives. Bigelow does not look much as he did at Commencement time, I can assure you. We have had boils and sores aplenty but no acclimation more serious. Bathing regularly every day has done much to keep up our health I am sure.

I have had my first experience with chiggers this week. I woke in the night with a terrible stinging and aching in my foot, but I wrapped it in a wet towel and after a while managed to get to sleep again. The first thing this morning I got Miss Jones, our teacher, to look at my foot and she soon got out a chigger, but she broke the bag and it has been quite painful since. Scorpions we have seen nothing of as yet, but ticks and grass lice are very troublesome. We have lizards all over the house. Ants, too, are in everything that is

*not suspended or kept in a safe set in oil. I get along very well with my housekeeping. Indeed in every thing heretofore hath the Lord helped us.*

*We are very cheerful and hopeful but the dear ones at home are much in our minds. We received our first letters the 15<sup>th</sup> of January. You may be sure we rejoiced in their reception. It is sad indeed to think that Margaret must go in the same way that Mary is going.<sup>2</sup> It does seem as if something might be done for her. To think of Charles' children as motherless is dreadful but the will of the Lord be done. I do hope there is a letter from you on the way to us. We have not learned the fate of that precious little boy yet.*

*In much love, your aff. sister, S.C.I. Penfield*

### **From Sarah to Mary<sup>3</sup>**

*Oberlin, Jamaica, WI  
February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1859*

*My Precious Mary,*

*I was quite surprised and greatly rejoiced to receive so long a letter written by your hand with our first package of letters from home. It was just two months from the day we landed before we received our first letters January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1859. I do not think we were ever more rejoiced to receive letters in our life. We got word last Wednesday that there were more letters for us in Kingston, but the rains have been so heavy we could not send for them, and we are getting impatient.*

*I cannot tell you Mary how much you are in our thoughts and prayers. The thought that even now you may have passed from the earth is sometimes pressed home to us with crushing weight. Oh Mary, you are very dear to us, and the thought that you are slowly but surely going down to the grave we can hardly bear. I do hope you enjoy the light and joy of the Savior's presence continually and that you feel in your weakness that you have his strong arm to lean upon. This is our constant prayer for you. How were our hearts saddened to hear that on our dear sister Margaret consumption had also laid its dread hand. To think of Charles' children motherless is dreadful. It does seem as if something must be done for her. If she could only leave her cares and go further south to Columbus or somewhere for a pleasant visit, perhaps it would restore her. If that would not answer I wish they would bring her out here. I wish you could have come, dear Mary. Consumption is almost unknown here, and though my hopes of being entirely free from cold here are not fully realized, still I have hardly coughed since I landed. Do not think I*

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<sup>2</sup> Bigelow's older brother Charles' wife Margaret and his step-sister Mary both suffered from tuberculosis. His oldest step-sister Helen died of the same cause in 1851 as did his step-father's first wife, Alice Welch Cowles, in 1843.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Louisa Cowles, Bigelow's youngest stepsister.

*was ever in better health. How is John?<sup>4</sup> Is he looking as pale as ever? I do hope he will not work too hard and run himself down. As to Sarah<sup>5</sup>, if she does not get married, I am thinking quite seriously of urging her to come out here as a teacher when she graduates. It will be just the climate for her and I do think she is well adapted to do good here. If she married a missionary, of course, it is all the same.*

*I am greatly rejoiced to know that Sarah Treat<sup>6</sup> is coming out. I shall welcome her with outstretched arms. I send a letter for her thinking she must be in Oberlin or at least our folks will know where she is and will forward it. You are all welcome to peruse it and if, as may be the case, she has already sailed when this reaches you it may be kept at our house and given to anyone else that may be coming out.*

*I have some delightful horseback rides in this beautiful country and I often think how much Mary would enjoy the scenery. I am constantly gazing at it. Of course, it is entirely different from anything at home. The foliage is entirely different and then the country is so mountainous. Bigelow is planning an excursion for climbing one of the highest peaks. How soon he will do so I cannot tell. Our riding, when not going to Kingston or one of the other stations, is generally to see some of the people. We find this one of the most effectual means of doing good. Already we hope the Lord has blessed it to the conversion of at least one soul. I sometimes go quite alone and almost always read and pray with them before I leave.*

*My visits seem to be much prized. Since we came we have opened a female prayer meeting, which is held every Monday morning at seven o'clock. Of course I preside at this. At first I think they were inclined to think me too young to lead them but I have seen nothing that looked like it lately. Some of the sisters are very much attached to me and I to them. Last Monday there were two young women who had not been before and both seemed really concerned for their souls. Several whose love had grown cold seem to have been awakened. I have a very pleasant class in Sabbath School and am getting up quite an enthusiasm for learning verses. My class are the oldest children in the school and some of them have forty verses every Sabbath. The whole school numbered sixty last Sabbath, and when we began there were not more than ten or a dozen.*

*We are greatly encouraged and looking earnestly for a great revival of the Lord's work in our midst. Bigelow will write particulars of his ordination. It was a very interesting occasion, one long to be remembered. It was worth a great deal to see so many of the missionaries together. You will be glad to know that I have already found some of them that I love dearly and by whom I feel sure I am loved in return. Miss Woodcock has been a dear kind sister from the first. It does not seem as if she could do enough for us. Nearly all the bedding I have borrowed has come from her.*

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<sup>4</sup> Bigelow's stepbrother John G. W. Cowles.

<sup>5</sup> Bigelow's stepsister Sarah Cowles.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Penfield's classmate at Oberlin, class of 1857, often referred to as Sallie.

*Mr. and Mrs. Venning, too, are very kind and cordial. Mrs. V. is a native, though nearly white. Her home is in Shortwood and she was quite intimate in father's family. She has tended me many a time and says she feels quite motherly toward us. These I love dearly and feel very kindly toward the rest. Am quite sure they do to me.*

*Mr. Beattie is very poorly indeed. It is not thought that he can live long. Perhaps he may go to his reward before you do, dearest Mary. How many there will be to welcome you when you have passed to the other side of the Jordan. But it will be sweeter than aught else to be welcomed by the Blessed Savior, will it not, precious one? Oh, Mary, I will try to meet you there some day. Do pray that I may come bringing my sheaves with me. As the work here opens before me, I feel it will be a privilege to toil on if the Lord spares me, sowing the good seed for many years, though it may often be in tares. My heart bleeds for Jamaica, so wicked and downtrodden. The work needs to be carried on more diligently here. Oh that many more might be inclined to come and labor for this people. I would love dearly if I might see you dearest once more before, but it is only a little while and I shall be with you. Adieu.*

*Love, SCI Penfield*

**From Bigelow to Henry Cowles<sup>7</sup>**

*Oberlin, St. Andrews, Jamaica  
Saturday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1859*

*Dear Father,*

*We received our last intelligence from you, indeed our first since reaching Jamaica, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of last month by a vessel which sailed from N.Y. quite unexpectedly to Mr. Whipple<sup>8</sup> so that he merely had time to run down to ship a few letters and papers but not to let us know whether our boxes had left as yet or not. Our letters have dates of November 16<sup>th</sup> and December 2<sup>nd</sup>. We have just learned from a man who chanced to call that there are letters and papers in town for us which came by the Washington or as we have learned this evening by sail vessel a few days ago and shall embrace the earliest opportunity of sending for them.*

*An ecclesiastical council was convened at our station on Wednesday last at the call of this church, composed of several churches of the mission through their delegates and pastors. We have for a long time been busy in making preparations for it both in the way of brushing up theological views and of setting the house to rights. The time for the ordination had been postponed for a month or more in hopes that our goods would come,*

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Cowles, Bigelow's stepfather. Formerly on the faculty of Oberlin College, he was now the editor of the *Oberlin Evangelist*, a semi-monthly paper devoted to theology, evangelism, missionary outreach, abolitionism, and other social concerns.

<sup>8</sup> George Whipple was the Executive Secretary of the American Missionary Association in New York, an Oberlin graduate, and for short time an associate editor, with Henry Cowles, of the *Oberlin Evangelist*.



*but we finally concluded to wait no longer. By borrowing bedding, etc. of the other missionaries we managed to get along pretty comfortably. The people sent in quite a quantity of yam, the substitute for potatoes here, and we furnished the extras as well as goat-mutton and chicken. The Rev. Gardner of Kingston who has charge of the church at Shortwood (Sarah's native place) came up and preached the sermon and a good one it was, setting forth Jesus and him crucified to the audience, which was about as large as the chapel could well hold. The examination was (undecipherable) not many questions being asked more than necessary in order to draw out my belief on the several most important points of theology. To expedite matters somewhat I had previously drawn out a pretty full statement of my views in the form of a confession of faith. Bro. Wolcott was called to the chair and Bro. Starbuck appointed scribe and conductor of the examination. After the examination we had an intermission of half an hour or so and then proceeded to the public exercises consisting of the regular sermon by Bro. Gardner, the ordaining prayer made by Bro. Wolcott of Elliot, the charge to the new pastor by Bro. Starbuck the former pastor, the charge to the people by Bro. Venning of Chesterfield, and the right hand of fellowship by Bro. Hall of Brainerd. The exercises as a whole were very interesting indeed. Bro. Venning tells me that the people call it being raised and they pay the ordained minister much more deference than one who has not been publicly set apart to the gospel ministry. I presume it arises mainly from their love of forms and ceremonies rather than from any idea that the minister is thus merely given the approbation of his fellow ministers and members of the church. I think that the many views which are very tenaciously held by them have taken their origin in this same love of ceremony and show, which seems to be that of immersion, for those who are strongest in its favor so far as I have seen would prefer a public baptism by sprinkling to a private one by immersion.*

*You ask me several questions about the condition and progress of the people which I will answer as well as I may upon such limited opportunity for observation as I have had. No doubt my feelings and views in regard to these questions will be greatly modified as I come to understand and observe the ways of the people more and better. In the first place let me say that Jamaica needs missionary work most emphatically however well she may be using what she has. I cannot help feeling that she has very little of the right kind of Christian missionary labor performed within her limits. The generality of ministers (whose name is legion if all are called such that claim the title) are either too little raised above the people in point of morals and discernment of truth to command respect and lead them in the way of God or too much raised above them in pride and false ministerial dignity to meet them on the common level of manhood and humanity. So that great allowance must be made for the slackness of the people in following their spiritual guides. In the first class must be placed many if not most of the native leaders or ministers, as they call themselves, and many of the ministers of the established English Church of England. In each of these there are a few noble exceptions to my knowledge and it might be that a more extensive acquaintance among the ministers in the Island would enable me to add many more. In the second class, I fear, must be placed the greater part of those who are not included in the first. I hope not to be uncharitable in my judgment, but Jamaica, as it is, needs a peculiar work done for her and peculiar qualifications are needed in those who would engage in it successfully. I am persuaded*

*that no one can meet with success in his efforts to raise the people of this Island, so long downtrodden, who has not so given his heart to the work as to make great sacrifices for them, to meet them on terms of easy familiarity and yet in such a way as to make on them the impression that he occupies a place in the scale of being above them but within their reach. He must be patient and persevering, not cast down by trifles, sowing the good seed at all times and in all places, oft times if may be with tares, and the promise will be verified to him without doubt. He must study human nature as it is found in Jamaica, for many of its phases here are different from those met with in America.*

*As to the progress which has been made by people since the system of slavery was taken away, I of course have not the power to estimate it correctly, nor can anyone who was not here previous to that time. But I learn through such that there has been some progress. There is at present a great difference between those who have enjoyed good privileges the last twenty years and those who have not, and the latter seem to have remained more nearly stationary, occupying still much the same level of intelligence and morals as when under the system of slavery. They are capable of great improvement and many of them are making all they can of their powers. So far as I am able to judge as yet the deep blacks are as capable of improvement as the browns and though it may be that they are sunk lower in degradation, living more like savages than the brown or mulattoes, still they are more approachable and meet you with much more frankness. They are more simple, less crafty, more ignorant, yet at the same time more teachable than the other class. Theirs is more the sin of ignorance. The great obstacle in the way of elevation of either class seems to be their utter indifference to being raised, either physically, intellectually, or morally. They are so utterly careless, so perfectly contented to live and be as they are that one is often tempted to let them alone. Yet this must not be, and by continually urging them on, setting before them almost constantly the inducement to strive for something higher and nobler, some will be induced to attempt it and to persevere until they begin to taste the fruits of such labor. But once having been raised thus far, I believe there is scarcely a race that appreciates their advantages as highly or at least that is more thankful than this same African race. Those who have been brought to give their hearts to the Savior seem to have no bounds to their gratitude.*

*Please tell Mother that we are well and in good spirits and love her as much as ever. How I do wish you could both make your arrangements to come out and spend a winter at least if not a year with us in a year or so. There is almost nothing you could do that would please us so well and I believe it would prove quite beneficial to your health. Please ask for a letter<sup>9</sup> for Sarah and myself from the church to the congregation at Oberlin, St. Andrews, Jamaica and forward to us as soon as convenient.*

*Yours in love, T.B.P.*

The last part of the foregoing letter, concerning “the condition and progress of the (Jamaican) people” was reprinted under the title “Missionary Correspondence” in the *Oberlin Evangelist*, March 30, 1859.

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<sup>9</sup> Probably “a letter of transfer” of church membership.

**Report from Rev. C. C. Starbuck in *The American Missionary*, April 1859**

Chesterfield, Feb. 5, 1859

ORDINATION OF REV. T. B. PENFIELD

Rev. T. B. Penfield was ordained to the ministry and installed as pastor to the church at Oberlin on Wednesday, Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, by an ecclesiastical council convened for the purpose. After a satisfactory examination respecting Bro. Penfield's views of truth, Christian experience, and motives for entering the ministry, the public exercises were held as follows:

Sermon, by R. W. S. Gardner, of the Congregational Church in Kingston.  
Ordaining and Installing Prayer, by Rev. S. T. Wolcott.  
Charge to the Pastor, by Rev. C. C. Starbuck.  
Charge to the People, by Rev. C. B. Venning.  
Right Hand of Fellowship, by Rev. H. B. Hall.  
Benediction, by Rev. T. B. Penfield.

The exercises were deeply interesting, and the appearance of things at Oberlin, since Mr. Penfield's arrival there, has been such as to warrant a good hope for the future. We may well trust that the presence of a resident, married pastor, among the people at Oberlin, will be blessed of God to the revivification of a religious interest in both the church and the surrounding community.

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin, Jamaica, W.I.  
February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1859*

*My Dear Mother,*

*While I was writing Mary's letter Saturday evening, Mr. Hoppin rode up to the study door and handed us a letter from home as well as one or two others. They were very, very welcome and eagerly perused. Mr. Whipple's letter saying that he had not yet sent our boxes was no very great comfort. I am often tempted to impatience in having to wait so long for them to come. There are so many things in them that we need so much. We have not bought any furniture yet except six cane seat chairs which we chanced to get quite cheap. B. has made an hourglass stand, which I have covered with some calico that Cousin Amanda gave me for another purpose.*

*By the way, if you see her, do give her my love and assure her that she is not forgotten. If I can ever get the time I will write her.*

*My hands are very full I can assure you. I have the two oldest children, Anna and Willie, study at home. Of course they require a good deal of attention. Then every afternoon I have to walk over to the schoolhouse and spend an hour or two with the children there. There is no school Friday and Saturday and on these days I have my washing and ironing done.*

*I find that I must take hold of myself if I would have my work done as I wish, so this keeps me about the house a good deal of the time. I have had plenty of sewing to do for the children too, besides my housework, and you readily see that I must be quite well to perform all these duties. Some days I have a feeling of languor and lassitude that makes me feel as if I could hardly get about, but not often. I think my regular morning bath is a great help to me. I am getting more and more interested in the work the Lord has given us to do here. The field is a wide one and there is a great deal to be done in it. We improve all the time we can spare in visiting among the people and it does seem as if we must pay more attention to this part of our work if possible. I often go alone and am always welcomed. I am thinking of appointing one afternoon to reading to the people at my own home. So few, indeed almost none, of the grown people can read well. I feel more and more like laying myself out for the people here, like living and dying for Jamaica. I do hope the Lord will spare our lives to accomplish something for these people. The missionaries at this station have never remained long and it has been a great hindrance to the work here. They seem to think we shall be going off soon, too.*

*It is quite a trial to us to have them always telling us how other missionaries have done, evidently expecting we will do the same. I do not mean to be disheartened but when they pray for Bigelow as the "young youth," as one of the sisters did this morning, it always makes me feel sadly. One thing, I do not think there is much danger but we shall grow old fast enough. You wanted to know our trials, so I will add to the list that in the farm horse we purchased we were sadly cheated, as she has turned out to be a poor broken down thing. B. went to town with her and was obliged to walk all but four miles of the way home and drive her. She cost us eleven pounds and we have been obliged to pay for her pasturing where she could get better feed and now a doctor's bill for her of 12 shillings (\$3.00). I must tell you that I have been having a serious time with my first chiggers. My foot has been sore with them for a fortnight. SCIP*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
March 4, 1859*

*My Dearest Mother,*

*I have been trying all the time for the last two or three weeks to take time to write you but it has seemed utterly impossible.*

*The date of our last letters from you was December 30, 1858, to which we replied immediately and added on the envelope that our goods had come. Josephine's letter of*

January 7<sup>th</sup> arrived when the goods did. I hardly think that a vessel from America has arrived since that time. I believe that the arrangement for the regular stoppage of the California steamers is now completed and we may hope for some more frequent mail soon. It will be a great comfort surely. We are still in good health though feeling the effects of the climate in the way of boils and sores a good deal. Bigelow has five or six boils in a heap under his left arm and suffers very much from them. There is a strange epidemic prevailing in this region in the shape of sore mouth and throat, which has gone through our family. I have had it as badly as any of them and perhaps worse. We have added one little girl to our family and have another one promised for this week. Still another is pleading hard to come but we are obliged to put her off for the present, though her mother promises to supply her with both food and clothing. The fact is, we have more on our hands now than we are able to support, and though some of the parents and friends of the children pretend to help support them, we are in great danger of running ourselves into debt by keeping them. Every case that has been presented has seemed so urgent and we have been so sure that it was our surest way of doing good that we could not say no.

We had thought that we would write to the Oberlin Sabbath School and see if they would not like to support one of the children and perhaps to the Columbus School in regard to another. It has seemed to us a possible thing that some individual of the Oberlin community would like to take the support of one on their own hands. We are inclined to think that \$25.00 or \$30.00 would cover the money expenses of one child. If three or four could be supported in this way, when our place begins to bring in something, we should get along quite nicely. We feel so certain that is one of the best possible ways of doing good here that we are willing to deny ourselves of almost everything for the sake of doing it. This is the belief of all the missionaries, but I am sorry to say that in the treatment of these children most of them have departed very far from Oberlin principles, never allowing them to eat at the table with them and in no way acknowledging them as equals. Mr. Olds was an exception and Miss Woodcock is now, though perhaps you had better not tell Mr. (illegible) son, as I learn that he is as little inclined to grant privileges of this sort to the children as any of them. Miss Dean, a lovely woman and excellent teacher, was sent home so far as I can learn for no other reason than that she put herself on equality with the people too much or rather strove to put them on equality with her.

In this thing we are greatly disappointed in the missionaries. Their conduct is so utterly adverse to our Oberlin training and it seems to us quite wrong. However, we have no right to interfere with their domestic arrangements and we have made no words about it. If they will be equally considerate to us, it is all we ask for the present, though we hope when Mr. Hall and Mr. Starbuck go away a new order of things will be introduced, though Mr. Thompson and Mr. Wolcott are equally conservative. As you remarked, Mr. Starbuck is a peculiar man and we have our trials with him. His ways are extremely disagreeable and yet we are compelled to have him with us over the Sabbath every week or two. When we first took the children into the family we set the table for them to eat with us, and when he was here the same as usual, but he went on about it at such a rate and acted so cross that it made me quite miserable and I thought perhaps we had best

have the children wait when he was here. B. was hardly inclined to this concession, but as the table was rather crowded (I could not put up both leaves for want of another table cloth) and I seemed so much inclined to it, he yielded. Well, the goods came and I had plenty of tablecloths, and as we had become more and more convinced that it was the best way, we set the table for all again and oh, how mad he was. A child for acting so would have gotten a sound flogging. Another thing is that it is our custom to have the children sit with us in the sitting room in the evening that we may see that they use their time properly, and this is a great vexation to Bro. S. also. I am sure I could not feel that I did my duty to these children if I left them to themselves as they do at the other stations. I am sure too that Oberlin people would open their eyes wide if they knew all that I know, but I do not like to turn reporter. I only hope Mr. Thompson has got enough of the Oberlin spirit during his visit so that he will come back with different views and feelings, but I fear it is a vain hope. If I could have given you a hint and so had some of the brothers make inquiries and draw him out on those points and then pour in the truth upon him, it might have done him some good. As I write there is a probability that Messrs. H. and S. will leave in the course of a year or so. It seems that the sooner the latter does the better and we are not alone in this opinion. All admit that he is not at all adapted to this field.

He will not lift a finger at any kind of work and though Providence is exclusively under his charge, he boards at Brainerd (15 or 20 miles off) and just goes over to preach on the Sabbath. Just now he is teaching at Richmond but is so universally disliked that he has not more than half a dozen pupils. I do hope that the new teacher will be the right sort of man, but greatly fear that if he is, things will not go smoothly between him and Mr. Wolcott.

We are greatly encouraged in our labors among the people at this station. The congregation has more than doubled, and in our Sabbath School last Sabbath there were 95 children besides the teachers and Bible Class. There are five or six inquirers of whose conversion we entertain some hope, but I am grieved to say that the woman of whose conversion on a sick bed we had hoped so much, since her recovery has turned out badly. She was a very turbulent woman before and is as bad if not worse now, so that Mr. Coryton feels as if he could not marry her. They have not lived together since her sickness. One man who had been excommunicated from the church for living in adultery is to be married to the woman this week. Two or three others have promised to do so. You have no idea how common this sin is in Jamaica. Indeed, it is so common that people live on boldly in this way and never seem in the least ashamed of it, sometimes even attending church regularly the whole time.

This is doubtless one of the dreadful fruits of slavery. If a man promises to marry a woman, that is considered reason enough for her to go and live with him, and then he takes his time to fulfill his promise and sometimes never does it.

It seems to be thought a great virtue to marry, almost enough to take one right into the church. Another of the bitter fruits of slavery, and one growing out of the one just mentioned, is want of natural affection. You would be surprised to see how little

parents care for their children and how cruelly they will beat them for the slightest offenses. A scene transpired, close to us, the other day, which I can hardly bear to relate. A mother had become angry with her son for taking a star apple from her tree and in her anger had him tied hand and foot to the root of a tree naked and then with a huge stick began beating him. The poor little fellow screamed for Mr. Penfield and he went over. The woman kept beating him all the time he was going, towards a hundred strokes probably. He begged her to stop, and when she would not, he stepped between her and the child and pushed her back when she tried to whip past him. Then she was angry at him and said, "Minister tumped her" and ordered him out of her yard. Her loud voice might have been heard half a mile as she abused him and dared him to unloose the child. This he did not do, thinking he had no right to, but the little fellow begged him most piteously to. I wish he had done it, for after he came away she beat him again though not so hard. The neighbors say that this is no uncommon thing and once when she was angry with him she tied him to a tree and built a fire under him and scorched him dreadfully. I feel very sorry for the little fellow. He seems quite bright and smart. Has worked some for me to pay for making his clothes so that he could go to the Sabbath School. I wish he could be got away from his mother. I have never had any conversation with her so that I do not know whether she would give him up or not. I am living so near that I do not think that I had better take him.

Such things as this make us feel that we are in a heathen land. It is a fact that people here who do not attend church or come under religious influence in any way are the most wicked and degraded imaginable, and their name is "legion." Those that attend the native Baptist chapels are not much better. Even their ministers drink, believe in witchcraft and all that sort of things. Last week we got up a temperance meeting, taught the children temperance songs, made flags and a banner, etc. in preparation, secured several speakers, but almost none of the people came. We were quite disappointed but accomplished something, for a few took the total abstinence pledge who had before taken a little occasionally. And since, with full permission of their parents, every child in the school has taken it. We mean to have another before long or, as perhaps a better plan, Mr. P. thinks he will preach a sermon without their having known of it beforehand on the subject, for temperance is very unpopular here. Mr. Gardiner, the English Congregational minister, who preached at B's ordination, said he thought we made too much of it, from which we inferred that he was in the habit of taking his wine himself. Indeed, almost every one does that and often something stronger.

But I must stop and write another sheet to Sarah. Mr. Beattie still lingers on. How I long to know how it is with dear Mary.

Your very aff. daughter, SIC Penfield

**From Sarah to Sarah Cowles**

*Jamaica, W. Indies  
March 14, 1859*

*My Dear Sister Sarah,*

*Your letter with its budget of news was very welcome, and speaking of news reminds me of the Oberlin Students Monthly. I do like it very, very much. The present writers for it are almost all old acquaintances and give it a very deep interest to me. There is no periodical we receive that I value half so highly. The local news in it are almost invaluable. How shocking the death of that young lady at the Hall must have been! I need not tell you that I heartily rejoice to know that the ladies are to have a society room properly furnished and sincerely hope that you have a reading room also by this time. These are the beginnings of changes that will make Oberlin a strange place when I see it again. The introduction of gas is another. Has it been introduced at "our house" yet? How pleasant it must seem. I am longing to know what is the result of the fugitive case.<sup>10</sup> Oh dear, I am ashamed of my country. Even wicked Jamaica has not slavery or the miserable slave bill though to be sure it once had. I cannot tell you how glad we were to get our goods safely up the mountain. Everything came safely except the stand. This had two legs broken, but B. soon mended them. Our stove and clock came at the same time and both are great comforts. The melodeon is such a treasure because I play it both at church and Sunday School as well as at prayers. When Mr. Hoppin was over two or three weeks ago, we had a grand sing with him. My bedding of which I thought I had such an abundant supply proves to be none too much. Indeed I wish I had more. If the folks have any idea of sending me a box I wish they would send a plenty. The people here are anxious to buy quilts. The nights are so cold in the mountains that they need them, but cotton batting cannot be got in Kingston. Children's clothing or second-hand clothing to be made over would be very acceptable too. We have put down part of our carpet in the sitting room and have still enough for the spare room. I must say it is the only carpet I have seen in Jamaica.*

*We went to Kingston last week and bought paint and paper with which we hope to improve the looks of our house somewhat. We are planning some alterations, of which, if made, you will be duly apprised. One thing we have done already, in our room we have hung a curtain of our furniture calico across the end where was the wash stand and bed, behind which our clothes are hung, etc., and have removed our bed to the diagonal corner. The door also is being removed to the side opposite its former place. We hope soon to build a porch along the back of the three middle rooms to save the necessity of going through the spare room so much and to secure our present dining room for the teacher, if we ever get one. With this plan we shall take part of the kitchen for a dining room and have it open off the porch, putting the passage way and rest of the kitchen*

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<sup>10</sup> In September 1858 John Price, a runaway slave who had been living in Oberlin, was abducted by slave catchers. In the incident which became known as the *Wellington Rescue*, a large group of students and professors from the college and other residents of the community rushed to the nearby town of Wellington, where Price was being held, and secured his release. A number of the rescuers were later arrested and charged with violating the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and were brought to trial in Cleveland in April 1859. John Cowles was among the rescuers but was not among those arrested or charged.



together for a kitchen. This is our plan. How soon it will be carried out I cannot say. This or something else must be done when a teacher comes, for the room between the study and ours is not fit. Besides, we need it for the children. You would be quite amused to see how motherly I am with my five children about me. I succeed better in governing them than I feared I should. At first the boys sought to try me but I was so decided with them that they gave it up. They are all improving rapidly. Anna is a noble good girl, always kind and faithful but not so much of a leading spirit among the younger children as I could wish. Thomas is making good progress in his studies and is quite a help to Mr. Penfield. He is quite black but carries such a pleasant, happy face you would love to see him. Willie is perhaps rather my favorite though he has faults that are a great trial to me. He has a good mind and excellent memory and will make a fine scholar if he will, but he is greatly inclined to indolence both in his study and work. As Thomas tells him, he hasn't energy enough. Sometimes he will start up and I am all encouraged about him, but in a little while he is all back again. He loves to read dearly, would read all the time if he could and indeed I have high hopes of him. I have told him something of you and your love for children so that he has quite an idea of writing you. If he does I do hope you will not fail of answering his letter. How is Edward<sup>11</sup> getting on? I have not heard a word from him since I left America. Do tell me all you know about him. Give my love to everybody. I would write a dozen letters to Oberlin if I could. You will be glad to know that Phebe is getting to be quite a good girl. My youngest is her niece Silena. She is doing very well but was decidedly the toughest specimen yet. I think the children all love me very much. The girl I promised to take in this week is Anna's cousin. Her mother is to clothe her and pay a quarter of a dollar a week for her board besides what work she does. The children are all in school till 4 o'clock Thursday afternoon. I have my washing and ironing done on Friday and Saturday. The girls cannot bear to use warm water and I have given up boiling the clothes. Hanging them in this burning sun a few hours amounts to the same thing. B. has made a washboard for me that does nicely. His knack at tinkering is even more useful than we expected. We are greatly troubled with ants and rats. I need a Maltese cat. We have got a nice field of yam planted and are just having some sugar cane put in. B. is making a garden and putting in the seeds Mr. Bateham sent. They will make us many a fine treat. If we could afford to buy them, we would put in some Irish potatoes; they are very high. Corn is \$10.00 a barrel. We live on fish and yam mostly, though the latter is quite expensive now, \$1.50 per hundred. We shall have to pinch some to get through this year, but when our crops come in we shall do nicely. We are happy.

*Aff. Love, Sister Sarah C.I. Penfield*

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Hume was Sarah's half-brother. He attended the preparatory school at Oberlin 1858-1859.

**From Bigelow to Charles<sup>12</sup>**

*Oberlin, Jamaica, W.I.  
Monday, April 11, 1859*

*Dear Brother Charles,*

*Your letter of two sheets and a half was by no means too long. Indeed if it had been twice as long it would have been only the more welcome. It was a most pleasant surprise for I had hardly expected anything more than a very short letter. I am really afraid that you had to rob yourself or the family to find time with all your other duties for writing an epistle of such length. Yours was the only sizeable letter we received at this time, and so I have concluded to give you the first place in answering the letters just received. The package of letters and papers must have been in Kingston two or three weeks before any of the missionaries heard of it.*

*Mr. Hall<sup>13</sup> of Brainerd, ten miles further from Kingston than we, was the first to hear of it and sent a boy to town for his and Mr. Wolcott's papers and letters. Through a mistake Mr. Dance, who keeps the mission rooms at Kingston, gave the boy all the letters so that when Mr. Hoppin reached town and asked for ours, he could only obtain the papers. These he brought to us but our letters, for which we cared much more, had gone to Brainerd. This was Saturday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April. The annual meeting of the mission association was to meet in Kingston on the following Tuesday, so we had to wait until then to learn of the dear ones at home. From the Evangelist, however, we learned of the death of little Emma.<sup>14</sup>*

*That was so utterly unexpected and sudden that we could scarcely believe our own eyes. When we left home she was so perfectly well to all appearance and as we saw her the last time in such a picture of health that had we known that one of the children was to die within half a year we should by no means have thought it her.*

*We had for a long time been expecting that the next letter from home would bring the news of Mary's departure to the home where sorrow never comes and had not dared to address a letter to her for this reason so that the letter which spoke of her death<sup>15</sup> was in some measure a relief for we were relieved of our suspense in regard to her and could not but feel that our loss was her eternal gain. Indeed my first thoughts as I read of her death were of the meeting she must have enjoyed with her mother and Helen and Mr. Kendall<sup>16</sup> and especially with her Savior. I could almost have rushed to exchange places with her. The day of her decease was that of my ordination and how little then did I think of the scenes which must have been transpiring at home. I believe I realize more and more that here we are but pilgrims and strangers and especially is this true as one and*

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Henry Penfield, Bigelow's oldest sibling, was at that time on the faculty of Oberlin College, teaching Latin, Hebrew and Greek.

<sup>13</sup> Many of the Penfield's missionary colleagues were from Oberlin. It is worth mentioning that Rev. Herman B. Hall and Mrs. Sophronia Hall were the parents of Charles Martin Hall, who developed the electrolytic process of refining aluminum in Oberlin after the Halls' return from Jamaica.

<sup>14</sup> Charles' youngest daughter Emma died of unknown causes in January 1859; she was 8 months old.

<sup>15</sup> Mary died in February 1859.

<sup>16</sup> Bigelow's oldest stepsister died of tuberculosis in 1851. Her fiancé Sewell Kendall died two years later.

*another of our family are called to their father's house. Which of us shall be called next? I often think I should love to go if I were only perfectly sure of my acceptance with God. I wonder if I am a Didymus by nature, a constitutional doubter. However it is to be explained, I feel I never have been entirely free from doubts as to my present acceptance with God, and never even in my most devotional moods and when I feel most fully that I am entirely consecrated to the work and will of the Lord can I say were I to die now just as I am, I am sure that I would be saved*

*It always hangs over me as a cloud, this doubt. Will it never remove? Sometimes I think it is want of faith, but if so have I ever had true faith? These are questions always unsettled in my own mind and the more I look at them the more I am perplexed.*

*If my own experience can teach me anything it seems to be that I am to leave all such doubts and questionings as if I had nothing to do with them, and the more completely I can forget them and leave my final salvation to God the more peaceful I seem and the more trusting.*

*And yet even then the thought will be presented to my mind that this is a false confidence and a deceitful peace. But I will not murmur against God although I shall always have to write bitter things against myself. My only wish is to glorify God and if I do this to the best of my ability there certainly is no ground to doubt but that God will make the rest all right in the world to come. What think you, Brother, about this? If others had these difficulties I might know how to advise them but how shall I advise myself? Bro. Beattie has gone, too, to join the innumerable throng. He died in full assurance of faith. God granted him his wish expressed some days beforehand that he might go home on the Sabbath day. His end was peaceful and happy. I have just heard of the death of Bro. Beardslee and shall look with great anxiety to hear the report confirmed or contradicted. I understand that he died last week of fever.<sup>17</sup>*

*I have seen little of him since coming to Jamaica merely having met him in town some three or four times. He has been perfectly cordial to me and has invited me to preach for him several times. Of course I have not complied with his request for it would be the same as inviting him to fill my pulpit and this I could not do so long as he held such erroneous doctrines. I have loved and respected him as a Christian and a brother but believed him to be under an error, which if it did not hinder his own salvation might that of others if taught to them. This, so far as I can learn, is the position taken by all the brethren of the mission. He has however taken the ground publicly and in print that all Christians besides the Campbellites are in the apostasy predicted for the last days, and has said that he very much doubted whether any could be saved except those who had been immersed. As to the question which you propose concerning the probation of infants, my own opinion coincides with yours. I believe that children who die as early in*

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<sup>17</sup> Evidently this report was wrong, for we shall hear much more of Brother Julius Beardslee in later letters. Beardslee, also from Oberlin, was one of the early pioneers of the Jamaica Mission. However, he resigned from the Mission and earned his former colleagues' disapproval when he adopted the theology of Thomas Campbell, founder of the Disciples of Christ. Whether baptism should be by immersion or sprinkling was only one of the points of theological difference.

*life as little Emma cannot with any propriety be said to have had probation. They can neither have accepted or rejected Christ. Neither can they have had even the probation which the heathen have, for they, although they know not of Christ, still have a conscience which gives them the law of God, and these infants certainly have not, or if they have, it is never manifested. I have always thought it a possible thing that the heathen would have another probation granted them, yet if so why are they sent into this world at all? If they are to have another probation, infants also may, and yet the Bible never intimates any such thing. It always speaks as if those who enter this world have their only probation here.*

*But is any probation needed in their case? We do not suppose the angels in heaven ever had any, other than what they still have in their present state and condition. After all, though a father's heart will often yearn to know the fate of those of his children who have died before coming to years of accountability, since the Bible is utterly silent on this subject with the exception of such passages such as "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," etc., we must be content to leave it all to the benevolence of God.*

*April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1859 – It is a fine morning after there being just enough breeze and clouds to keep the air comfortably cool. These we find really refreshing in this climate while days are oppressively hot.*

*We cannot bear the direct rays of the sun on our heads for even a few moments at a time between 8 o'clock A.M. and 5 P.M. but if required to be out in it must carry an umbrella or at least have a good substantial wide brimmed hat. In the early and late portions of the day I find a panama hat I purchased in town on my first arrival quite sufficient, but for a few hours just about noon in a clear still day, even an umbrella is of little use, for the earth radiates such heat, especially from the hard smooth roads, that the air seems like the breath of a furnace. So far we have stood the heat very well by means of the free ventilation of our house, for we make our plans to be out of doors as little as may be in the heat of the day, but have been anticipating much more languor and debility from this cause during the summer, but we are told by the missionaries that this is the most oppressively hot season of the year, as there is more breeze and rain about noon in the summer than now.*

*Jamaica is very different from America, I find, in almost every respect but perhaps in nothing is the difference more noticeable than in its natural scenery. In the parts through which I have traveled (with the exception of that near Kingston) as well as that in which we live there is a continuous succession of hills and nothing which approaches a level except very narrow strips of land on the tops and the bottoms of the hills. A good portion of these, however, are far from level.*

*Vegetation is very luxuriant here and pastures even have to be tilled or burned over once or twice a year to make them serviceable, otherwise the bush becomes thick and high on them. All things conspire to remind me that I am indeed in a foreign land and far from home. In many respects I enjoy this. There is some little romance though far more real life in it after all.*

*My love of travel in which I can sympathize somewhat with you is gratified to an extent. I have always felt that it would be of great service to me to travel more and have often said within myself that if my calling were consistent with it and I had the required money, I would indulge myself in the luxury of a tour of the eastern continent. If I were in your position I should certainly regard the idea as one to be favorably entertained and one whose accomplishment, although distant, was by no means impossible.*

*We have just received this noon another package of letters from America containing letters from Smith,<sup>18</sup> Sarah H., Mother, and Mr. Whipple, the last date being that of Mother's Mar. 4<sup>th</sup>. The only fault we find with our letters is that they are so short. Mother writes often and her words are always treasured in our hearts, but if she could only find time to write us a long letter once in a while we should be overjoyed at its reception. We almost live on our letters. But now for news, for no doubt you can give your own moralizing if I will only give the facts. We are in excellent health and spirits except very languid and indisposed to severe action. Are getting along pecuniarily as well as a young and comparatively inexperienced couple with no means to start on except their salary and with a family of six children could be expected in the first year, especially if you take into account the expense of furnishing a house, buying a cow, a stove, a clock, two horses, etc. etc. That is, we have done just what anyone else in the same circumstance must have done, run into debt. I think we should, with the rigid economy we practice, have been able to keep our heads above water for all these disadvantages had it not been for a bill which has just come upon us unexpectedly and which we could not foresee. We understood from Mr. Whipple that the society would meet the bill for freight and duty on our goods which we left for Mr. Whipple to forward. But when they came there was no word to that effect and so our treasurer Mr. Hall took the amount between \$20 and \$40 out of our salary for this quarter. Had we foreseen this we might possibly have scrimped ourselves somewhat to meet the bill, but as it was, our only recourse was to borrow \$25.*

*Most people I suppose would call us foolish to take so large a family on our hands and perhaps we were, but there were circumstances connected with the case of each one that seemed to justify and almost demand our taking them. As to our salary, I believe I wrote that it is amply sufficient to meet all our necessities and so I believe it will be ordinarily and would have been this year if and if. All the children in our family seem to be making such rapid progress and improvement that we cannot consent to part with any unless it is absolutely necessary. If we are right in our belief that it is our duty to keep them, the Lord will provide for us so that we shall not suffer above measure.*

*We had the advice of all the mission to buy this cow which we have and it was our only chance to get a good one at a reasonable price. I paid, or am to pay out of my next quarter's salary, \$40 for her. She is a descendant of an American cow.. Most of the Jamaican cows are the shape and size of our oxen in America and give but little more milk. As to the mare, she is dead. I was grossly cheated in her for she was old, infirm*

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<sup>18</sup> Bigelow's younger brother Smith Newell Penfield was an organist and music teacher.

*and used up, the very opposite of what her owner, a white man, assured me. I did not like her appearance from the first but was strongly advised by Mr. Wolcott to buy her.*

*My pony, Guy Fawkes as he came named to me is a fine fellow worth all I have given for him, \$30.00, and even more. We have a fine pig, a goat and a kid and if we only had the capital to put the house and premises in order we should get along well. There are plenty of annoyances to be sure but of these we make as little as possible. Perhaps a chapter of them if not entertaining would be in measure instructing to you. We have jiggers or chiggers a plenty. Sarah has had nearly a dozen extracted from her feet and has suffered considerably with them. They trouble her so much that she can always tell within a few hours after they enter. I have taken three out of my own feet but did not know they were in until they had festered and then have suffered hardly any from them. Ticks and grass lice are much more troublesome. The first are such a plague to horses and mules, etc., that they have to be removed and killed every morning. If they are suffered to remain long they will eat the ears of the poor animals off. I have seen a great many horses and donkeys which have been mutilated in this way. They will sometimes get on our persons and then it is farewell to comfort until they are removed. Every time either of us go into the pasture or where our clothes reach the grass we are pretty sure to get an army of grass lice on us. The bite of either grass lice or ticks makes a sore which itches terribly. I presume we have often had a hundred such at once, so that from this cause and others, perhaps as naturalization, we are completely covered with sores, pimples and rash almost continually.*

*I had five large and painful blind boils in succession in my left armpit a few weeks ago, the last commencing before the second was fairly well. The ants, although little creatures, are great pests. They get into everything. Our safe or cupboard has to be set into cups of oil to keep them out and even then if a string or a stick or anything else is so left accidentally that it forms a bridge for them, the busy creatures are in at once and we have to remove everything from within and scald them out. They are continually entering our birdcage and carrying off the seed, so that nearly as much goes this way as by the bills of the birds.*

*There is a species of ants call termites, or wood ants, that are hard at work constantly eating out floors and other woodwork. They eat the insides, leaving as fair an outside as ever, but thin as paper. In the U.S. we used to consider rats quite troublesome but we had not then been in Jamaica. They run in troops over and through the house by night, making more noise than a parcel of school children and doing such damage as they choose. Arsenic however has partially freed us from this annoyance. They are a terrible annoyance to the poor people who have but an acre or so of corn, cane, and sweet potatoes, etc. and the rats will sometimes in one night make a clean sweep of the whole. I planted quite a little piece of corn, and one Friday on looking at it saw it to be growing nicely. The next Monday I found it all dug and eaten up by the rats.*

*Such are a few specimens of the annoyances we have here, thorns in the flesh Sarah calls them. I like your plan of letter writing very well and shall make no objection whatever to receiving just such letters as your last every month. I trust that Margaret*

*and the children are well. Please give them my love. You see that I have profited by your suggestion as to the letter paper.*

*You ask if we take the Students Monthly. Sarah Cowles has made it a present for this year to my wife. You will consider this letter as well as Sarah's as from us both to you both.*

*Your loving brother, T. B. Penfield.*

**From Bigelow to Mother**

*Oberlin, Jamaica  
June 21, 1859*

*My Ever Dearest Mother,*

*What I would not give for even a visit of a few minutes from you just now. My Darling Sweet is sick, not dangerously I should judge, but enough to be very uncomfortable. The main difficulty seems to be in the stomach, which is very fickle and cannot hold food but a few moments at a time. During the past week she has eaten almost nothing and has left her room but once. She has had considerable fever (but it has come and gone at very irregular intervals) and has suffered considerably from headache. She had not been quite well for two or three weeks but had managed to take charge of household matters and even to do considerable work herself. A week ago Sabbath however, she was compelled to take to her bed and has been able to sit up but little since. She had much fever and pain the next day (Monday) as she has had any day. We sent for Mrs. Venning Tuesday morning early and she came soon and remained till Wednesday night. She thought there was no need for alarm in the case and that by careful nursing we would soon see her well again. She seems to be much better one day but the next pulls her down again. I am inclined to think it is a mild form of acclimating fever and hope to see her well again soon and in her accustomed place at the head of domestic affairs.*

*My own health is quite good, cheeks well filled, complexion ruddy and considerably tanned, have an appetite but little short of ferocious and in general am getting along very well as to the body. The weather is at present quite favorable to health and vigor, as we are having just now our spring rains. We looked for them from about the first of May, but they came a month or so later than usual. Since their appearance the air is much cooler and pleasanter. The languor and prostration which we experienced almost continually for a month before they came has nearly ceased to trouble us. However, we still feel it sometimes just before a heavy shower. We have more or less rain now every day and generally more. Sometimes for a day or two together we have scarcely an hour's intermission. For instance, it sprinkled nearly all day Saturday last and by night was raining hard and continued until Monday morning. I do not think there were five minutes at a time when it was not raining at all, though it slackened considerably at times. The rains have brought on vegetation wonderfully. The*

*fields and trees all seem to have renewed their youth and are beautifully fresh and green. I had not thought there was a very great lack of water before, but by contrast with their present aspect they certainly were rather brown.*

*Since coming to Jamaica I have quite turned traveler and in my visits to Kingston, to the other stations and elsewhere have rode horseback but little short of a thousand miles. I have been to Kingston on an average once a month or even a little more, to Brainerd and Richmond rather oftener still, to Elliot four or five times, and to Chesterfield once, besides shorter travels in all directions almost innumerable. I think this of itself accounts in measure for my good health.*

*Thursday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>. Sarah seems much better today, has been gaining since my last date and unless again taken down will probably soon be about the house.*

*We thank you for having sent our letter of recommendation to this church. It came by Miss Treat just too late for presentation to the church before the communion season immediately following, but it is in good time for the next. I believe in your last you expressed some doubt of whether we had received Charles' letter giving an account of Emma's death, and for fear the letter I wrote acknowledging its receipt and in answer to it may fail of reaching you, I once more advert to it. We saw a notice of her death in the Oberlin Evangelist but were rejoiced to get a somewhat more detailed account of her last moments. For the first time now death has broken in upon Charles' hitherto unbroken circle. Oh, no, I do not believe it. Through the hope and certainty of life and immortality brought to light in the Blessed Savior we can see, not with our earth eyes, for they are too dim with weeping, but with the eye of faith to which only the invisible is an object of sight. We can see the pearly gates ajar and the shining track pursued by the little one as she entered on life, eternal life. Let those believe the opposite who can see anything in it consolatory to man or glorifying to God. My eyes see nothing in the case of one so young and lovely like the beginning of the death that never dies, but only the reaching down of the strong arm of the good shepherd to draw into the fold above the little lamb too tender for the rude blasts of the world. To the family it should be but the incoming of eternal life, the surer linking together of the world of death and the true land of the living, a kind of first fruits, an earnest of the family harvest in Heaven, a breathing of angels as a prelude to their shouting the harvest home. I meant not to write so much but my feelings urged me on and I know you will not chide me for speaking my heart right out. The package of little Emma's things came safely to hand and will always be preserved as mementoes if they should never be used.*

*I commenced keeping a journal soon after coming to Jamaica, but for some months have added scarce anything, I have been so exceedingly busy all the time. And latterly the care of the sick one has swallowed up most of my time, whatever could be spared from her room being needed in my usual avocations. I had intended to keep up the practice of journalizing and still intend to if---. But there is so much else to do that I am sometimes led to think that time taken by it is of more worth than the result obtained. I have sent two or three copious extracts to Mr. Whipple according to his request and am about writing him to please forward them to you if he is through with them. They are*



*samples of my labors among the people. The more I visit them the more I love to do it, but latterly have scarcely found time for even that.*

*I suppose your "motherheart" (I believe you have more of it than most mothers) would hardly be satisfied unless I make a clean breast and tell you how we are getting on pecuniarily now. Well, we are out of debt once more and intend by the help of Providence to keep out hereafter, though in order to do so with our size family we have to scrimp very much. If you were here I would gladly show you our wardrobe as a specimen, but hardly dare drag it into a letter, lest other eyes should see our poverty. One or two hints at its appearance will suffice. You know about what my part was when I left home. I had expected to add considerably to it in New York for the rest of the outfit we hoped for but failed of receiving, and since then we have been able to add almost nothing, and many of the articles now (though clean and tidy as they may be) are rather the worse for wear. Sarah's wardrobe is somewhat better. But enough. The Lord will provide. For if God so clothe the grass of the field, how much more - - -. I doubt not that we shall get along, although the prices charged for almost everything are so high that several of the mission have remarked that pounds go little further here than dollars at home.*

*I am not advancing far spiritually as I ought, as I wish, or as I am determined by the assisting grace of God to do hereafter. In the midst of all my unworthiness I do sometimes have exceeding precious views of the free grace of Christ and with Mary of old can say, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." There often comes before me the sweet consciousness that my mother dear remembers every day her absent son and expects him to play the man for the Lord his God, his father's and his mother's God, and that her prayers to this end are fervent and constant. God grant that I may not disappoint the high hopes you entertain of my usefulness among the heathen. I greatly long, though I fear do not yet hunger and thirst after righteousness, for I have not the consciousness of being filled. Pray for me in all my unworthiness that God would grant me this blessing and make me useful. But especially pray for the work that it may be carried on by my means if it can be, but if not that I may be set aside and it be performed by other and more fitting hands.*

*Hope Henry has recovered from the ague. Give my love to him and family as well as to yourself and family.*

*Your loving son, Bigelow Penfield.*

The foregoing letter, considerably edited, under the title "Missionary Correspondence" was published in the *Oberlin Evangelist* of December 7, 1859.

**From Bigelow to Mother**

Oberlin  
July 19, 1859

*Ever Dear Mother,*

*Your letters are always welcome, only if we could get a few more we would be the more thankful of them. Our mail which has just arrived the first for six weeks, brings us but two letters, one from you dated the 18<sup>th</sup> of May and one from Mr. Whipple. The tone of the two was different – you in your love and high hopes of our usefulness overrating the good that we are doing, as I think, and he, slightly misled by certain expressions in my last to him, rather underrating it. Both have driven me to Christ the more earnestly in prayer that I might accomplish all you hoped of me and more than he thinks I am doing. Your letter speaks of taking comfort with Josephine at Columbus, and your wishes that we might be with you. My yearnings to be with you once more are often irrepressibly strong, but ere long we shall meet. I only pray that we have the grace to learn that sweetest of lessons that in whatsoever state we are therewith to be content and therein to glorify God our Creator. Do not ever think of us as left comfortless. We are taking comfort such as the world cannot give. I certainly am very happy indeed, more so I think than ever before. God has given us a wealth of affection in each other and his presence is none the less with us here than in our native land. We have our own peculiar trials, and often they are severe, especially to flesh and blood. But I am striving to learn to consider these but of small account while the inner man is revived day by day.*

*Since my dear wife has partially regained her health, I have drawn up a systematic arrangement of my time that I may make the most of it and myself in it. One feature of it I have found of particular benefit to myself and hope never to relinquish again. That is one hour every day I spend in devotions. I was somewhat fearful that I could not spare so much time from my other duties, but after full trial I believe that I cannot spare less. It prepares me for the trials and duties of the day so that I can discharge and stand them all the better. Indeed I believe that if I had observed the same rule during my course of study I should have been the gainer even intellectually.*

*I think you need not fear that we shall do too much; my only fear is that we shall accomplish far too little where so much needs to be done. At the same time we think ourselves pretty judicious as to manual labor. We do very little of it and that of those kinds that require but little physical exertion or exposure to the heat and rain. Then too we take some little recreation in a quiet way almost every day, striving at the same time to benefit the children by teaching them unobjectionable games, etc., often giving them exercises that draw out the mind as well as interest and amuse it. My own health, as I told Charles in a letter written last week, seems to be perfect. I beat the fatigue of my Sabbath duties much better than at first. I fully coincide with you in your remarks about doing good by training children in our family, especially that three or four is enough to begin with, but I believe Sarah is writing about the children so that I need not say much on this subject. We have our trials with them but hope to succeed in the end in our endeavors to lead them to Christ, this having been done effectually, I believe the rest will follow with much less trouble. When in America I used to think that a foreign missionary*

*must of necessity be a spiritually minded and devout man and his trials and experiences would of course and inevitably drive him to Christ, so I reasoned. I fear even that I entered the field depending more on what I supposed would be the effects of the work on my own soul than upon God and his assisting grace.*

*A letter of yours written some months ago was of great service in rousing me to increased diligence and spiritual mindedness. I find that the missionary work of itself does not draw one to Christ any more than other labor in other lands, so long as one depends upon it for this effect rather than upon the true source of strength. I do not willingly censure my brethren, nor do I set myself as judge over them. But I say privately to you that I have been greatly disappointed in them. I had expected to find them eminently spiritually minded. I had supposed that the mission meetings would be mainly devoted to prayer and mutual counsel as to the best way of reaching the hearts of the people and securing God's blessing upon our labors, a time for earnest continued and united supplications, for great meltings and searchings of heart. But so far there has been no such state of things. Our gathering together is like that of those who come to transact worldly business and yet who wish to ask for divine guidance before they proceed to the duties before them. I feel as if this condition of things must not be allowed to continue. I have conversed somewhat with the brethren on the subject and find no great objection to change, though none has as yet been brought about.*

*The churches seem to me to be asleep and the missionaries drowsy. Oh, that God would thoroughly arouse us to our duty. At our May (semiannual) meeting I preached the sermon and took occasion to speak (by way of suggestion) of what I considered the proper object of our meetings and hope some good will yet result from it. My position has not been disputed nor my suggestion opposed. Will you not pray earnestly for us that we may be led to what shall glorify God and save a multitude of these perishing heathen.*

*Mr. Starbuck talks of leaving Jamaica for some other missionary field this fall, and Mr. Hall will probably return to America to remain next spring. Our anxiety is great that only the right men should be sent, men who are full of the spirit, who are determined with the blessing of God to accomplish great things for Him, who are willing to condescend to men of low estate. Mr. Venning seems to me to be thoroughly in earnest in the work and is laying himself out among his people. I think he would gladly join in making our meetings what they should be, but he is modest and diffident and does not incline to take the initiative in such matters. In the matter of prejudice against color, I think his course and sentiments are far preferable to those of the other brethren. If the majority were in favor of the course pursued in our house I am persuaded that he would adopt a similar one. I am thankful that such a man as Mr. Douglass has been sent to Richmond for he seems to have come in the spirit of Christ. I love him very much. I learn that his principles and determined course of action are nearer our practice than that of the other missionaries. Miss Woodcock is of the same persuasion and Mr. Hoppin, who is not far from the same, does not expect to remain more than a year longer with us. Mr. Wolcott and Mr. Thompson with their wives are all who are left and they are the very most determined of all in opposition to our policies.*

*If those who come to fill the places of those soon to leave are only of the right stamp, I think a revolution can be brought about quickly such as would put us in a position more readily to receive the divine blessing. Mr. Wolcott is scarcely a missionary at all and I believe does not expect to draw a salary much longer. I fear that Brother Thompson, with his strong bias and his mind not eminently logical, will be the greatest obstacle in the way of the needed reformation. I suppose he considers the question settled by his long experience of only one side. I judge from some remarks thrown out lately that Miss Jean has already informed Mr. Whipple of the course pursued by most of the missionaries. I think it very likely that it was in respect to these things that Mr. Tappan referred when he spoke of the need of revolutionizing the whole concern.*

*Pray for us that we may be directed in the wisest way, that we may do right at all times and be kept in our proper place at the foot of the cross. Give my love to all the family.*

*Your affectionate son, Bigelow*

Excerpts of the foregoing letter, under the title "Missionary Correspondence" were published in the *Oberlin Evangelist* of December 7, 1859.

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin  
July 19, 1859*

*My Precious Mother,*

*With our last mail we received one letter from yourself dated May 18<sup>th</sup> though some of our papers bore dates a month later. This was written when you were in Columbus and our hearts fully echoed your wish that we might be there to enjoy your visit with you. We have had a visit too though of quite a different nature. I at least have made the acquaintance of the Jamaica fever and in spite of all we could do we could not get rid of him for about four weeks. When he did go, he had taken away so much of my strength and flesh that I fear it will be some time before I shall feel like myself again. Bigelow devoted himself untiringly to me and upon my sending for them both, Mrs. Venning and Mrs. Hall came to see me. Things about the house went very much to loose ends though B. did the best he could to prevent it. I am almost impatient to get strong enough to take hold and straighten things up myself, but I find I must possess my soul in patience for the present. I think my sickness has been a good lesson to me in patience and I wish I shall profit by it.*

*When my fever was not too high to allow me to think, I enjoyed communion with my Savior very much. Some days my pulse was as high as 130. Of course I had no physician, but I was my own doctor and used cold water very freely. I took nitre two or three times but immediately threw it up. Since Jane was released from school she has been very kind in taking care of me. She is an excellent nurse, almost as good as Rachel. It is a about a week now since I was able to leave my room. I have a good deal of*

headache but am otherwise well except for weakness. B. says I was his rose before but now I am his white lily.

I am very glad that you finally got away from home for your Columbus visit. You have doubtless been home again a long time by this. I hear by Miss Beattie that sister Margaret is at the Cleveland Water Cure and thinks she is improving under the treatment. I am very glad to think this is so. Our last news in regard to the Rescuers is that the Wellington folks are out of jail but eleven or twelve of our good Oberlin friends were still waiting their trial. What a shame to our country are such proceedings. It does seem as if slavery would work out its own destruction before many years at this rate. What a shame for that miserable slave law to be upheld in the free state of Ohio!

We have only four native children with us now and we have our trials with them. Willie has had to be punished for swearing. It was found out while I was sick that he was in the habit, and had been since he came, of helping himself to rice and eating it raw. When we forbid this, he commenced taking raw flour in the same way. He has been so indolent both in school and out that we have very little hope of being able to send him to America. Indeed, we have felt for some time we could not keep him. But he has no home to go to and if we give him up I fear it is to hopeless ruin. So we think we must persevere with him a little longer. I think he has done much better the last week or so. Phebe too makes me no little trouble by her rude boisterous ways and habits of disobedience. She needs close watching and frequent reproofs.

Thomas is generally very good and evidently means to be faithful to all his duties. Both he and Phebe wear out their clothes very fast and it is no small expense to keep them decently clothed, though the friends of the latter assist us somewhat in this thing. Thomas' friends are too poor to do anything for him. Anna does very well though she is by no means a healthy girl, and I have lately been obliged to notice that she is far more liable to be sick on washing days than any others. The fact is that she does not like to work and will do just as little as possible. When Jane was here she always helped out with the washing and ironing, and sometimes was obliged from Anna's real or feigned illness to do nearly all of it. Now that she is going away I have decided to hire B's and my washing and ironing done and see if the girls can manage their own and the boys.

Miss Beattie has now decided to go to America very soon. We expect to purchase her bedstead and bureau, for you must know that so far we have had nothing in the shape of drawers and have been obliged to keep our things in trunks.

Sallie<sup>19</sup> pays us \$1.50 per week and does her own washing. At present she has our spare room. Whether we shall ever be able to make the proposed alterations and give her another room is still a matter of doubt. Many thanks to Mrs. Wilcox for her kindness in piecing quilts for us. They will be very acceptable.

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<sup>19</sup> It is not clear when Sallie, Sarah Treat, arrived to take over responsibility for the school.

*I am hoping to go to Brainerd and Richmond next week and spend a few days in visiting the other missionaries. I think it will do me good. Mr. and Mrs. Douglass are going to be housekeeping in Mrs. Beattie's bamboo and thatch cottage. They have both had several fits of ague since coming here. Mrs. Hoppin has been quite sick but was better the last we heard. This is just the time of year for sickness as the heavy rains are over and the dry warm season has set in. We are visiting in the study – the coolest room in the house with the thermometer at 84, and B., who has just been out in the burning sun chasing our wandering kid into the pasture, comes in puffing and sweating and declares it is a hot day. This tropic sun is dreadful. I am very glad not to be obliged to be out in it, and am sorry for those who are.*

*We have an abundance of mangoes and bananas. Neither of us like the first and are most tired of the latter. I expect you at home are enjoying the early approach (undecipherable – ‘of peaches,’ perhaps). What I would not give for one? I am getting to have a tolerable appetite again but I do not relish our fish and yam diet very well. It seems as if potatoes and home fruits would be so much better. But I do not complain. I feel thankful that we are so well provided for as we are. The missionaries among the Indians are often much worse off than we are. Tell Sarah I congratulate her on being the president of the Lit. And much love to all. I shall write more as I get stronger. (undecipherable) will reach you before my letter does and John and Sarah will be graduates. I wish them both a life of happiness and usefulness.*

*Your loving daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*

**From Bigelow to Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
October 7, 1859*

*Ever Dear Mother,*

*Since the date of my last to you (September 2<sup>nd</sup>), our hearts have been gladdened by the receipt of three letters from you, bearing dates June 23, July 15 and August 4. They were truly as cold water to a thirsty soul. The last before them was received July 14<sup>th</sup> and these September 26<sup>th</sup>. Ten weeks and no news from home had made us voracious. We literally devoured their contents. How many times they have been reread I am not able to tell, but almost enough to learn them by heart.*

*On September 13<sup>th</sup> the semi-annual meeting of our Association held at our station proved to be a most interesting occasion. Connected with certain parts there was a little annoyance but of scarcely account enough to be mentioned except as specimens of what we have to encounter here. I refer to the hoggishness of the common people and will allude to it in its place.*

*The Association is a voluntary society of which all the ministers connected with our mission may be, if they wish and at present are, members. At each meeting (held*

once every six months) delegates chosen, one from every church connected with the mission, also sit as members for that time. Wherever the meeting is held, it is expected that the missionary family at that station will provide for the members of the mission who attend, and that delegates shall be taken to the homes of the church members. Those who do not provide for delegates are expected to send in various little things such as pineapples, breadfruit, etc. to the minister. The meeting generally begins about noon and is immediately preceded by lunch for the delegates, being prepared by the people at some place nearby. At the earnest solicitation of the people, however, we this time consented to prepare a lunch for the delegates also at the chapel and the people were to send in provisions enough to meet the expense of it. The sending in of the provisions was accomplished tolerably but when the five delegates came in to eat their lunch, with them came several of their friends, some of our members and their friends, so that a large table was more than full. This was imposition No. 1. Then all the horses of the delegates, of members of the church, of all others who came to the meeting were turned into the pasture for the day, numbering about 40, I should think. This was contrary to my express orders, and not the slightest attention was paid to my boy to whom I entrusted the matter.

At dinner again (which we eat at about four, after the public meeting) we were still further annoyed. The members of the mission, with two friends whom we invited ourselves, filled the table so, of course, the children had to wait. When they sat down, a number more had to come to be fed of whom most were our own church members. They hung around all day and some pretended to help do the work, but it was evident that they were chiefly attracted by the "loaves and fishes," alias chicken-pie, roast pork, etc.

But enough of this, for you are no doubt tired of reading it and I certainly am of writing it, but from this you can get a faint idea of the selfishness and greediness of the people generally. They get all they can and give only what they must. I blame them for it, of course, and strive to show them a better way, but still I think I can easily account for it on the score of their training under slavery.

But now I come to pleasanter and more congenial topics. The meeting was opened with singing and prayer, and after receiving and enrolling the delegates the regular exercises began. There was first a skeleton of a sermon given by Bro. Hall upon the subject of obedience to rulers, and aimed mainly at symptoms of insurrection which have appeared among many of the people around us of late. The subject was well discussed by several of the brethren in a plain practical manner. I next presented an essay prepared for the occasion on the question, "What is the great central principle of Christianity," and Bro. Venning followed with a dissertation on brotherly love. We then listened to reports from the different stations by delegates and adjourned. After an intermission of but a few minutes we again assembled and listened to a sermon by Bro. Starbuck on the subject of preaching Christ to the people. It was sort of "concio ad clerium." After the sermon we celebrated the ordinance of the Lord's supper and were dismissed with the benediction.

The exercises seemed to me very interesting and profitable. The evening was spent in mission business. Among other items, my request for the means to put up a

*porch along the side of our spare, sitting, and dining rooms, and to ceil the room I now use as a study was discussed. I had understood the question of a porch was decided in the affirmative six month previous, but others thought not and so it was discussed again and negatived, although the money asked for this and other purposes had come from America and was in the hands of Bro. Hall. They, however, gave me enough to purchase lumber for the ceiling and I shall have to put it on myself. Their main objection to the porch we so much need is that so much has been wasted in useless repairs, additions, etc. at Oberlin by my predecessors. I do not think I shall ask for any more funds for my station purpose hereafter if I can possibly help it. You know I always was rather an independent piece.*

*After this meeting we separated for the rest of the night with the understanding that there should be a prayer meeting before breakfast the next morning. Mr. Douglass threw the weight of his influence in favor of this movement and I myself conversed with most of the brethren on the subject. The Lord gave the proposed measure favor with all and the next morning we had a very interesting and no doubt to all of us profitable season. It seemed to be the wish of all that the meeting should always be held on the morning after our gathering as a mission. Soon after breakfast our company bade each other adieu and scattered to their different fields of labor, Bros. Venning and Starbuck going first to town.*

*Having occasion toward the close of the next week to go to Providence, I learned (from them) that there was a "shipload of papers" in town for us, but nothing was said of letters, and indeed Bro. Starbuck had seen none. The following Tuesday I went to Kingston to buy lumber for the ceiling and found papers but no letters. What could it mean? On inquiring at Gall's (our agent) I found that they were there, not having been landed when Bros. S. and V. were in town nor sent to our rooms<sup>20</sup> since. Such a feast we had when I got home. We could only wish for them oftener, but we will not quarrel with our lot nor murmur against Him who directeth it. Indeed our hearts were so filled with thankfulness that it seemed impossible that we should ever murmur again. I wish always to answer your letters as well as write news and so I will hastily speak of the most interesting parts. And first of all I must thank you most earnestly for what you spoke of on the indwelling Christ. Your words on this subject took hold of me more than all the rest of the letters and ever since I have been seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit to realize this in my own soul. There was need enough of it indeed. I was so conscious of short coming almost continually and withal so weary of this earth born to conflict that your words were truly "fitly spoken."*

*You presented the very truth I needed, "the more excellent way of an indwelling Christ." One week ago tomorrow was a day of deep thought and firm resolutions with me for it was the last closing scene in the first quarter century of my life. I trust I was led by the Spirit in my inquiries as to what and how little I had accomplished for God during that period as also in my determinations to do more for the future all the time my life and*

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<sup>20</sup> In missionary parlance, the "rooms" or "board rooms" refer to the offices or headquarters of the mission: the local office in Kingston, the AMA Rooms in New York, the American Board Rooms in Boston, etc.



*faculties are spared. Since then I have striven to be more methodical in the use of my time, more uniform and zealous in my devotions, and more devout in all things.*

*I do not think a day passes in which I do not often think of your words and strive for the blessing pointed out, with prayer and entire self consecration. As yet, however, it does not seem to me that I have received the fullness of Christ. But the question sometimes arises in my mind, may not one receive the blessing while earnestly seeking it but not as yet knowing that he has it? Pray for me, dearest Mother, that in the exercise of true faith and charity I may grow up into Christ, my divine head. I am determined by the grace of God to strive earnestly for this all the days of my life. I do not think it is very likely that I shall tarry in the flesh another 25 years, but yet of course it is possible. If I do, most earnestly do I pray that I may have to record at its close less wandering from a closer walk with God. My heart bounded in thankfulness when I read your reminder to us that our reward was not pledged to our measure of success but to our diligence, but soon sadness gained the ascendance as I reflected that my diligence had scarcely been greater than my success. I have truly been very busy, but as I look back, much of my labor and care seems to have been but ill directed and spent on trifles. Like Martha, I seem to have been careful and troubled about many things other than what is for this people the one thing needful. It could scarce have been otherwise while I had no "indwelling Christ." But though there is sadness for the past in the thought you gave utterance to, there is hope for the future and so I seize upon it, embracing both these glorious truths together in an indwelling Christ as the sufficient cause and great diligence in his service as the glorious result. The Lord grant us both this blessed experience henceforth, dear Mother. I have never read the work on the Christian's higher life to which you refer and shall be most glad to find it in the barrel you are so kind as to send. I hope it will come with Bro. Thompson as it would probably pass the customs more readily. If I had known sooner of your intention of sending us a barrel, I should have suggested (what is very important to their going through the customs house speedily without being rummaged) that you send a list of the articles contained, setting on each a secondhand or nominal value, as the duty is mainly ad valorem. Such a bill of lading should be in the top of the barrel and a copy sent by post to Mr. Whipple when the barrel is sent. Perhaps Bro. Thompson told you this so that you have done just so already, but if not it may be remembered against a similar case. I am glad you sent the barrel, as all freight is computed by the barrel and in case the form is different, all the advantage is taken which is possible. Please thank all the contributors to the contents of said barrel in our name as you see them.*

*I am glad that you have a sewing machine to aid you in making outfits for the children and doing your other sewing. Perhaps you remember the promise Mrs. Whipple made to us that her influence should be used in procuring us a sewing machine. However well she directed it, we have not received one as she led us to expect and probably shall not until we are able to buy one. Mr. W. also promised when we were in N.Y. that one should be given to the mission, but since two have been bought and sent out to Messrs. Hoppin and Wolcott I presume he is free from his promise. These, however, do us no good since first, they are private property and we could not make use of them without paying rent, and second, they would probably on no condition be sent*

here, and we have no horse such as Sarah could ride to go where the machines are. However, we are quite content as we are, and are sure it is all for the best.

*We rejoice jubilantly with them that do rejoice at Oberlin, O., in the triumph of right over wrong, of faith and good works over hellish designs.<sup>21</sup> “The Lord hath triumphed gloriously.” “His right arm hath gotten him the victory and to him be all praise.” The papers you hoped to find and send containing the particulars did not come, but a Cleveland Weekly Leader full of news was sent to Sallie. While reading of the joyful meeting at O., we could scarcely restrain our own shouting for joy. In spirit we were with you and joined in the whole. We have strong hopes that what the “Rescuers” started in the jail will make the victory already achieved more lasting and available and will yet be the champion in many more bloodless victories over our national sin. May the Lord accomplish and hasten the dissolution of that mother of abominations in his own good time.*

*We were very glad you finally concluded to repeat some of the circumstances you had before written connected with Mary’s last hours and moments. Your first letter must have been lost as no such letter ever reached us. I suppose some of yours and ours are lost, but probably the number is comparatively small. As to the matter of caste<sup>22</sup> in the mission, I have not seen any new developments of late, but as I was over at Brainerd last Sabbath to preach (it being now Tuesday October 11<sup>th</sup>), I had a long talk with Mrs. Hall on the subject. From her conversation and her evident sincerity I am led to believe that she is doing what she believes to be on all accounts for the best. Her arguments are the same as those of the other missionaries so far as I can ascertain. The main one has to do with expense. They think it cheaper to make their children live on yam and fish mainly than to give them the variety of food they use at their own table, and hence can support and train up more children so than in our way. Again they think it will tend to foster pride in the children and lead them to consider themselves our equals if we allow them to share our meals. They consider them and the people generally as their inferiors.*

*In what exactly I have not been able to ascertain, but it seems to be something which they believe training of the right sort even cannot remove as is evident from their not striving to bring their servants (as most of them call them) up to take this position of equality with them. Mrs. Hall also said that she thought the children themselves would be generally better satisfied to eat by themselves than with the mission family. She says they are accustomed to different and cheaper food than we and prefer it. When I asked her what she thought Oberlin folks would think of the practice, she replied that they did know of it, that is a good many of them, and she thought most of them would do the same if they were here and even that Mr. Whipple would himself. But I must close this lengthy letter. Love to all friends and more than all to you. Your loving son, Bigelow*

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<sup>21</sup> This is another reference to the *Wellington Rescue* case. On July 6, 1859, all charges against the 20 Oberlin “rescuers” were dropped. After spending 83 days in jail in Cleveland during their trial, they were released and returned to Oberlin to a grand victory celebration.

<sup>22</sup> Bigelow and Sarah use the word “caste” to refer to racial discrimination or prejudice. The term was commonly used that way in North America as well.

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
November 1, 1859*

*My Dear Mother,*

*I simply enclose a note in this letter of Smith's. We will try and write you a long letter after we get the barrel from Kingston and read the letters in that. We are in pretty good health though B. took cold while visiting among the people Saturday and has had some trouble with his throat since. The cold seems to be settling in his teeth and the side of his face more now. Still it is nothing very serious. You have spoken several times of my articles in the Advocate and wished I would write more. When I think that I may do good by them I wish so, too, but really Mother it is hard work for me to write articles. Writing letters I do not mind, I can scribble them off as fast as I choose, but I have to make a great effort to write for publication. I had one of those pieces in the June Advocate for several months, wrote it over several times, and when I did send it off was very much dissatisfied with it. I have had a couple of articles commenced for several weeks but cannot muster courage and time enough to finish them.*

*Evening – Since I stopped writing we have had a regular Jamaica shower. It commenced pouring down while we were at prayers and we were obliged to stop and move things to keep them from getting wet. It rained down between our room and the spare room so hard that a washbowl and pitcher I set to catch the water were filled in a few minutes. The water ran in streams all over the room floor and even our pillows were wet. Sometimes the sheets are wet, too. The study room leaks, too. As the regular rainy season comes on I expect we shall be “drowned out” half the time. The sitting room is the only safe place in such weather.*

*We are feeling badly to learn that Mr. Thompson has brought no teacher for Chesterfield, fearing that it will result in our losing Sallie. She has said that if no teacher came for them she would go, and I expect they will be likely to claim her promise. Miss Jewitt, who was to go there, comes now as a married lady and will probably go to Brandon Hill. Miss Wazie was to come as a private member of Wolcott's family, but if she is at all fit for the post I hope she will go to C. till someone else can be procured. He wrote himself that two or three lady teachers had applied. Strange he did not bring one. But we must possess our souls in patience. I know that if it is the best for Sallie to stay here the Lord will bring it about. It will certainly be a great trial both to her and us if she must go. She is doing nicely in the school, too. The children will be sorry to part with her. Our next letter will convey decisions on this and some other points.*

*Very aff., your daughter Sarah P.*

*Please forward the enclosed letter to Smith after you have read it. The last two pages might be read to the family if you think best. I will try to write you a letter by this same vessel.*

*Your loving son, Bigelow*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
November 8, 1859*

*My Dear Mother,*

*The barrel has at last arrived and its contents have been duly examined and disposed of. Unfortunately one jug of marmalade had burst its sealing and its contents damaged some of the other things somewhat. One of the quilts had the color taken out in large spots and all the four corners. It was the prettiest of the two that Mrs. Wilcox sent. Please thank her very kindly for them. The brilliant wrapper was also pretty badly spotted. I think I shall make it over for Phebe. I do not know who to thank for this as there was no paper upon it. Sarah's brown gingham I have given to Anna. It fits her very nicely. She says, tell her, "I thank you very much." and tell her "Howdye" for me. It is a universal custom among the people to send "Howdyes" to their friends. I do not think there was something in the barrel that I shall prize more than that wrapper of Mary's. It looks so much like her to me, and then, too, it is just the thing for this climate. I have hemmed it up about an inch at the bottom and taken off the cuffs (for in this climate I do not pretend to wear anything but open sleeves) and have it on now while I write. The skirts from yourself and Margaret will be very useful, too. Sallie and I both wear (undecipherable) and skirts more than anything else. That neat little collar from cousin Louisa Marshall pleased me very much, and all the more for coming from one so nearly a stranger. The same may be said of (undecipherable) from Helen Andrews. Do thank them both very kindly. I have given each of the girls an apron off the gingham that Mrs. Summer sent. They send thanks. I think I shall make Thomas a shirt of the unbleached cloth you sent but do not know what I shall do with the bleached, it is so badly mildewed. I am much obliged to the kind friend who sent that chemise.*

*I found a beautiful pincushion among the things without the name of any donor. To whom am I indebted? Thank Rachel for the marmalade. One jug came very safely and we are saving it for some great occasion. I am inclined to think that Henry is the giver of that nice lot of beans. They are certainly very acceptable. White beans are quite a rarity here. Now, if there is anything I have failed to mention, you must not think it is because there is a single thing for which I am not thankful and you will please to receive and tender my thanks accordingly. Bigelow will acknowledge his individual gifts himself. In all his thanks I shall join heartily, especially for the books.*

*The good man left home yesterday in company with the new teacher to attend the Mission meeting which is held at Richmond today. Sallie went over last Friday morning to take care of Mrs. Douglass. She has had an alarming attack of bleeding at the lungs, but our last word from her was that she was a little better. School is suspended for this week. I suppose it will be decided today whether Sallie leaves us or not. May the Lord's will be done in regard to it. I trust I shall be willing to give her up if it seems best. The new people, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson and Miss Wazie, have been with us since last Thursday and I've become much attached to them. They seem to have come, as we have long prayed they might, in the fullness of the Gospel of Christ. Mr. Thompson spent Thursday night with us on his way to the mountains. That evening we had a precious season of*

*prayer together. His heart seemed full to overflowing with the love of God. It was a time of rejoicing with us.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Wilson are quite young. He is just my age to a day. Intends to go on with his studies by himself and prepare for the ministry in a few years. He gives promise of great usefulness, especially as he is so eminently a man of prayer. Mrs. W. is one of the sweetest little bodies that ever lived. I love her like a sister already. They will be our nearest mission neighbors and we hope to see each other often. Bigelow took me over to Brandon Hill Saturday, and I was interested to see how little both he and his wife seemed inclined to make of the many inconveniences they will have to meet with there.*

*The house is very small, consisting of only three tiny rooms back of the chapel and an outside kitchen. Mrs. W. said after hearing her husband's description, "I shall like it, I know. At any rate, I will like it anyhow." You will rejoice to know that they agree with us on the caste question. We count three families on our side already and I do hope Mr. Thompson will join us. If Sallie goes to Chesterfield, perhaps Mr. Venning will too in time. It may be that this is a work that God would have her do. Miss Wazie agrees with us, but what she can do at Richmond is doubtful. She is quite an old maid but a really interesting Christian. We have had sweet counsel together these few days. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson will probably return with B. tomorrow and he will assist them what he can in getting up their things from Kingston and getting settled at Brandon Hill. The people at that place seem greatly rejoiced to get a teacher at last.*

*Your good long letter in the barrel was a feast to us. I suppose there must have been one between that and the last which we failed to receive. I am glad to know that an effort is being made to raise the professors' salaries at Oberlin. Mr. Thompson thinks that if we request it we can have our salaries raised. I do not know whether the mission will think best to do so or not. Mr. Hall may object. I think there has been too much difference between the salaries of the ministers and the teachers. I do think that \$420.00 is a starving salary in this country. Poor Mr. Hoppin has found it so and I hope they will not settle Mr. Wilson on that. Mr. Douglass' was raised to \$500.00 on account of the importance of his post. It may perhaps be well to give ministers more than teachers, but if so, let the teacher have enough to live on comfortably and then what the minister is over, let it be above that. I think that \$110 is too much difference. The ministers here have seemed to countenance such a great gulf between them and the teachers and the sooner it is diminished the better.*

*Bigelow says as soon as he dares he shall propose that the "Association," which is now open only to the ministers, have its constitution so changed as to receive the teachers and the ladies of the mission, too, and that the latter be requested to write essays and to read at their semi-annual meetings. I hope this thing will be brought about, for there is far too much conservatism in the mission. Mr. Hall used to say at every meeting that if all the gentlemen voted for a motion and all the ladies against it, he should write home that it was an unanimous vote, and this when they requested the ladies to vote, too. This annoyed me greatly and at last I told him just what I thought of it and he has not said it since. As long as some of the Mission feel so, you may be sure I do not trouble*

*myself to vote or say anything at the meeting except through my husband. B. feels that he is younger than most and does not like to say much.*

*Goodbye, your loving daughter Sarah C.I. Penfield*

*I shall write to Mrs. Fitch<sup>23</sup> of this myself.*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
December 15, 1859*

*My dear Mother,*

*Yours of October 12<sup>th</sup> was received just after mine of November 29<sup>th</sup> was mailed. I am glad you are going to keep a memorandum of the dates of your letters. I have done this since the first of November and find I wrote you on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup> of that month. I do not think our agents in New York are as faithful and punctual in mailing letters as those in Kingston, so this will account for your letters getting lost more than ours do, but letters often lie in Kingston weeks and weeks before an opportunity offers for sending them to the States.*

*I am sorry you did not find Mrs. Beattie more communicative in regard to us. She is such a great talker I thought she would tell you everything she knew of us, but now I think of it she is a little inclined to let her talk run on herself and her own troubles. I do not think her stay with Mrs. Beardslee in Kingston tended to mollify her unpleasant feelings in regard to the members of the mission, for when she was here she did not seem to feel very badly about matters and things. Indeed, she expressed herself very happy in going home. Perhaps you may hear more from the Halls and Hoppins, but after all, the letters will have to be the main dependence for information. If there are particular things which you wish to know about and we fail to mention them, we shall love very much to have you ask questions.*

*It seems that the past summer has formed an exception to other summers as it has spared you a serious fit of illness. We are very, very glad of this and hope coming summers will follow its good example. Your release from household care has proved the blessing we hoped it would. I am very glad it is, so you can travel about some with father both from the pleasure and benefit it must be to you. We are pleased to see that you hold to your former opinion that we ought to come home in four years from the time we left, but we have very serious doubts whether the members of the mission here and the Association in New York would agree with you, and you know we must have permission from both these sources before we can go. By the time of the reunion in 1865 I think, if we like, we can get leave of absence and we should think that gathering quite a consideration in deciding upon the time of going.*

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<sup>23</sup> Probably Jane Fitch, Sarah's Sabbath Day School teacher in Oberlin.

*But, as you say, the Lord will direct. Circumstances might arise which would make it necessary for us to go before that time which we do not now foresee. The field which we are trying to cultivate seems a barren one, and yet Jamaica must not be given up. Somebody ought to labor here, and at least for the present I think we must. If we can be encouraged with the hope that our labors will be at all successful here, we shall expect to live and die here.*

*It is very pleasant to know that John has been such an affectionate son to you. B. has written to him and Ionie. Would that the past might be forgotten and he might be such a brother to us as he is a son to you.*

*Life with us still moves on in the same way. This way seems to me sometimes rather monotonous, still it is pleasant. We have a great many beautiful moonlight lights and we often speak of the pleasure there would be of attending a choir meeting or lecture or something of the sort. Instead of this we stay week after week with nothing but an occasional trip to Kingston or one of the other stations to break in upon the routine of our daily duties. When we go to a meeting, we step from one room to another and scarcely have a bonnet on our heads from one year's end to another. For horseback rides, of course, we wear hats.*

*I intend to have my Neapolitan done over and keep it in Kingston so that I can wear it when there, which will probably be about once a year. I think I have not mentioned that in my last trip to Richmond I lost my little cameo pin. If it were not asking too much, I should be very glad if you could get me an ivory one and send it either in a letter or by the barrel you speak of. It is very inconvenient to be without anything of that sort. I have just been making B. a new satin vest; have succeeded very well for the first attempt. The one he bought before leaving the States is quite worn out. This is better satin than the other one was. I think he needs as good clothes as he did at home. I can get along with poorer, though nice dresses come in play in Kingston and Spanish Town. I have worn my silk dresses to meetings a great deal here in the mountains, though for comfort I usually wear a white Spencer with the black silk skirt rather than the black one. I have recently got me a light calico wrapper. The next thing is to be a riding dress. I have not had a decent one so far. I have recently made and sold a bed quilt for \$5.00. Have two or three more promised. In this way I hope to pay for my saddle and help buy a sewing machine. This year I am to have 2 pounds (\$10.00) every quarter for my own personal expenses. I mean to make the most of it. By dint of great economy we managed to make the two ends meet last year. This year we hope to do a little more than that and so begin to lay a little aside for going home. Mr. Walcott boasts of laying aside \$100 a year before he went to Richmond, but in the next breath he will tell you how he has lived on green bananas and salt for weeks together. I do not think we should feel justified in living so for the sake of laying up. We live plainly and are glad to for the sake of taking more children into the family and giving them as good as we have ourselves. I have done a big day's work today and am very tired, so I must tell you goodnight.*

*Your aff. daughter, S.C. Penfield*



Mary Cowles Penfield, 1864



## JAMAICA 1860

**From Sarah to Brother Edward<sup>24</sup>**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
February 1, 1860*

*My dear brother Edward,*

*I have not received a letter from you since I last wrote, but I see by my record that that was quite a long time ago and I gladly take up my pen to write again.*

*I wish you would make it a rule to write me once a month and I will do the same for you. If you were in Oberlin, where you could see the letters received by the Cowles family, it would not be necessary for either of us to write so often, but as it is, I guess that is about right, isn't it?*

*You are in my thoughts a great deal of the time and I find myself often wondering what you are doing and how you are getting along. I wish you would write me more particularly what are your daily duties. Do you spend any time in the store? I hope you at least improve its advantages for reading, but be careful, dear brother, what you read. Don't read "trash." Cultivate a taste for solid reading, something that will really make you wiser and better. I hope you will take care of the minutes and not let your time run to waste.*

*Have you grown taller since I saw you? Are you fleshing up any or are you going to follow your father's example and be a slim man? I hope you will be a healthier man than he was, so don't think I want you to pour over your books all the time. No, you must have relaxation and recreation sometimes, only be careful who you share it with. Let it be the best boys in the village that you choose for associates and no others.*

*Cousin Harlow's advice in regard to your health will be very valuable, for you know he is almost a doctor. I hope you will not allow yourself to become a tea and coffee drinker. I really felt sorry when I found you were using it at Mr. Wyett's. Coffee, as you know, grows abundantly in this island. It is used universally by the people and it is thought one cannot do without it in this climate. Well, we used it a little, very weak, when we first came, but for a long time now we have given it up entirely and never make it except for company. When we get older and somewhat enfeebled by the climate, we may think best to use it, but while we are young and vigorous, there surely is no need of it.*

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<sup>24</sup> Edward Morris Hume was Sarah's younger half brother, the son of her mother Elizabeth Hartson Ingraham and her second husband Julius Morris Hume. Born in Wayne, Michigan, he was orphaned, with Sarah, when he was only seven. He was raised in the home of his cousin David Pease and was living with him in Norwalk, Ohio when Sarah wrote this letter. He later studied at Oberlin for one year.

*Our boys Thomas and Willie are busy taking our sugar cane in donkey loads to a neighbor to be ground and made into syrup. There is only a little ready to be cut now, so we do not try to make sugar.*

*I think you would be quite interested in the operation. The donkey itself with its short legs and long ears would doubtless be a curiosity to you. Sugarcane when growing looks quite like corn. It is cut and tied into bundles which are piled on wooden hooks, suspended from the donkey's back on each side. Then he trots off with it to the mill. There the juice is pressed out by cogs turned by horse power and then boiled down after the fashion of maple sap at home.*

*On the large sugar estates where they make sugar the year round, they generally have a very large water wheel to drive the works. Of course we do not go into such things very extensively, but we have several acres of land connected with the station and if we can raise a few of these things for our own use it is a great comfort. We have growing now on our place, besides cane, yams, corn, beans, sweet potatoes, arrowroot and cassava, as well as quite a variety of fruits. Pineapples and cocoanuts are very good, too. Some are fond of bananas, but I do not like them.*

*Monday, February 6<sup>th</sup>*

*I have news for you, dear brother. There is a little stranger at our house who claims you for uncle, and more than that me for mother! She arrived Thursday evening February 2<sup>nd</sup> and, as that was the anniversary of our dear Mary's death, we will call her Mary Cowles. It is a plump healthy little creature and is very quiet and good-natured. That we have taken the "little angel without wings" to our hearts as well as home you will not be surprised to hear, or that it makes us all very happy. We only pray that our kind Heavenly Father who has lent us this precious treasure would teach us how to use it for His Glory and cheerfully yield back the trust whenever it shall take wings to fly away. We have consecrated it to the missionary work. I cannot write more.*

*Yours affectionately, S. C. Penfield*

**From Bigelow to Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
February 3, 1860*

*My ever dear Mother,*

*I know you will rejoice with me when you read the news I now have for you. My dear wife presented me with a little daughter at 7 o'clock last evening, and you may be sure the little stranger received a most cordial welcome.*

*Our cup of joy seems full, for both Sarah and the little dear are doing finely, just as well as we could possibly ask. I have held the little wee thing in my arms for quite a*

*little while and yet I hardly dare handle it much, for a little babe is such a delicate creature and I feel clumsy and awkward at taking any care of such a commodity, though my Dear says I take to it quite naturally. Mrs. Beattie was to have prepared your mind for this piece of news, though we fear from what you write, or rather do not write, that she was too much taken up with her own affairs to remember our message for you. But perhaps it is just as well. I can scarcely realize my standing in the world of fathers as yet, but undoubtedly shall have a realizing sense soon enough. We have dedicated it to the Lord and pray that if it is spared to grow up to a woman's estate, it may be a foreign missionary.*

*But the little one, though to all appearances as strong and healthy as babies ever are, seems such a frail treasure, and to hold onto life with such a slight tenure that any lack of wisdom on our part or a very small accident might take it from us. You will remember that Mary's birthday into the world above was just a year ago yesterday. This fact taken in connection with Mary's ardent wish that if we ever had a little daughter we would call it Mary Cowles has just about settled the all important question of its name already. Her birthday will serve to commemorate another event which also took place one year ago yesterday, my ordination as a minister of the everlasting gospel. I cannot tell you how thankful we are that all things have gone so well thus far.*

*February 6<sup>th</sup> - The little one is to all appearances well and doing well. It has slept with Sallie at night, that is the part that it has slept at all so far. But after this we expect to take it into our own room at night as well as day. Sallie has been a dear, kind sister to us in all this trying time. She has put her own comfort entirely out of the question (too much, I am afraid) whenever by doing so she could increase the comfort of the little stranger or its mother. May the Lord reward her according to all her love shown to us in this our need. Money could not have purchased such service as she has rendered. As we have an opportunity to send to Kingston tomorrow and may not have another before the Alma, by which we hope to send this, returns, I shall necessarily be brief this time.*

*Your loving son, Bigelow*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
March 3, 1860*

*My dear Mother,*

*You will perhaps be surprised when I tell you I have not yet recovered from my confinement. It seems strange when I seemed to be doing so well at first, but a great many things have conspired together to keep me down. Baby was born Thursday evening, February 2, you know. Well, the next Sunday we had Sunday School, preaching, communion, and mission meeting in the chapel. Our room being under the same roof, I heard every word as much as if I had been there, and my mind was kept so on the stretch*

*that by night I was very feverish and seriously threatened with inflammation in my breasts. Baby's efforts to nurse induced sore nipples, and from that day to this it has been a constant torture for me to nurse her. If you have ever suffered from the same cause, you need no description from me. If not, it is no use for me to attempt it. I had one of them burnt out with lunar caustic but it has been worse than ever since. Dear little Mary has had a sore mouth off and on for two or three weeks from sucking these raw sores. All this resulted from that Sunday's excitement. It is a most miserable policy to have the chapel and dwelling house under the same roof.*

*Monday evening Messrs. Thompson and Hall came to spend the night on their way to Kingston. They were out till very late watching the eclipse, talking, and laughing so hard that I could not get to sleep. Tuesday night they returned and after Mr. Hall had gone Wednesday morning, Mr. T. stayed and gave us such a talking to about our treating of the native children. He said we were losing the confidence of the rest of the mission, that we should find ourselves isolated from the rest of the mission if we persisted, that we had no right to set aside the experience of the other missionaries, we should ruin the children, & etc.*

*This talk was begun in my sick room but B. saw that it was exciting me too much and invited him to walk out for the rest of the talk. Enough had been said, however, to bring on my fever again. This talk was a very trying thing for both of us. We felt as if we stood alone, and if things went on at this rate, a division in the mission would ensue which would very likely result in our being sent home. Perhaps B. will tell you more about it. Mr. T. talked harder still to Mr. Wilson's folks, but they stood firm, yielding only this, that their children should stay away from table when the other missionaries were there. After much conversation and prayer, we decided to do the same. We thought we might do it without sacrificing principle, and it might prevent serious trouble in the mission. They eat at our table when we get through (if we have company) and they have the same as we do. As to Mr. Douglass, we are very much in doubt. The other missionaries consider him on their side, though I do not think he is in heart. For the Wilsons, on account of their crowded condition, the children eat in another room but the door is open between the two and they have meat and other things as in the family, which is not the situation in regard to other children in the mission.*

*Saturday Mr. and Mrs. Hall, with their five children, took lunch here on their way to Brainerd for the Sabbath. Sunday they came again and the Monday, with all the Halls and Thompsons, but they did not stay to lunch.*

**Bigelow continues:**

*March 21, 1860*

*Dearest Mother,*

*As you will see by the date, this letter was begun by Sarah in pencil marks more than two weeks ago. Of course at that time we expected to finish and send it off at once, but God in his goodness has seen fit to lay so many burdens upon us since, that it has seemed to be out of the question to write more until now.*

*But let me explain myself and review the intervening time. In writing the foregoing I think that S. went beyond her small stock of strength, and in the following night had a severe attack of fever. In her letter she did not mention the fact that I was sick, as she hoped to be able to write that I was better before she should close it. The day before I was taken with slight chills, had a little fever and found myself with a severe cold that made me feel quite good for nothing. I sweat quite heavily in the night and on Saturday, when S. wrote, was considerably worse, having heavier chills and fever and a very sore throat. That night Miss Treat took charge of little Mary and I slept on the sofa in the "hall" or sitting room. In the night I was awakened by strange noises in the kitchen, which is quite open for the night breeze by means of cracks at the door and in the floor and window minus its panes of glass. I soon ascertained that S. was wondering about the kitchen and other parts of the house in high fever (somewhat out of her head she now thinks), with only her night clothes on, hunting for a vial of nitre. She soon found this and returned to bed, but of course she was much worse. In the morning we found she had taken a heavy cold, which spite all our efforts settled in her left breast, making it quite hard and inflamed. I was somewhat better but not able to preach, so Miss Trent, who flew around and accomplished enough for two or three people besides waiting on S. and myself and performing I do not know how much other work out of our sight, took charge of the Sabbath School and dismissed the congregation. S. went in a few minutes to teach her class, thinking it was a duty under the circumstances (a mistaken judgment as I think), and when she came out said her breast was so painful that it must be drawn if possible. Baby would not consent to do it. So I tried to do it by means of a tobacco pipe (which we had found of use before). But no milk could be drawn, and on removing the pipe we found it full of blood.*

*But I find I am too weak to give all the particulars, and being unwilling to keep the letter longer, I will write what my strength permits and send it. We called the nearest approach to a doctor we have in this region, a young man, Mr. Sims by name (jet black), who studied some with Dr. Way when he had this station and who now keeps an apothecary shop a few rods from the chapel. Under his treatment the breast rapidly grew rose, and one week ago Monday had to be lanced. I was feeling a little better that day though not quite well. Had preached twice the day before, once here and once at Eden (where I preach once in two weeks), about three miles off. I felt the need of a little gentle exercise, and as we needed a goat for milk for the baby, I rode off in search of one. While I was gone, Mr. Sims lanced the breast. That breast soon began to get better, but the other rapidly grew worse, and day before yesterday, as Mr. Sims had been absent some three days and might still be longer, I was obliged to lance it myself.*

*Since then she is much freer from pain and I hope will now rapidly gain strength and health. I was feeling almost well again, but last Saturday I took the colt (the only horse I have now) to be shod the second time. Thomas had gone to Kingston for supplies for the family, which Sally had bought during my sickness. Willie had run away through fear of a whipping for disobedience and lying, so I had to go myself. In being shod, the colt reared and plunged so that no one but myself could hold him, and it took all my strength away, straining me in my bowels. Sabbath I preached two sermons, one at*

*Brandon Hill and one at Oberlin, though not really able to do so. Yesterday Miss Treat, worn down by her excessive burdens and school teaching, had to give up herself and keep quiet. So I went over to the school house and dismissed school. It is almost time for the two weeks vacation for the spring, and I scarcely think she will begin again until after that.*

*Thursday, March 22. I am feeling much better today than yesterday, in fact almost well again. Sarah is pretty comfortable and steadily gaining. I trust our darkest times for the present are over. Miss Treat is about the same. She is not confined to her room, but is obliged to keep pretty still and off her feet (She is threatened with one of the many afflictions to which women are subject). We hope that rest and perfect quiet for a few weeks will give her back her former strength and health. In addition to all this, one of our girls is frail (I mean Anna) and a little work gives her a headache and drives her crazy for the time being, and the other (Phoebe) has been sick for a day or so, though she is now about well again. But in all these trials and afflictions I have not had one murmuring thought. Our mercies have far outweighed our afflictions. I only fear I am not learning all the lessons God would teach me by them. They ought to drive me nearer to Him, and in some respects I think they have. But I feel that I have allowed the heavy pressure of duties to prevent my praying more than I ought. My season of devotions in the morning has been crowded utterly out, and I cannot estimate the loss I have sustained thereby. Oh, Mother, when shall I learn to live always in an atmosphere of prayer, in the very heart of Christ?*

*Do not feel too sad about what we have suffered. During almost all our sickness we have been wonderfully preserved and aided. I was not confined to my bed at all. Neither is, or has been, Miss Treat, and Sarah has been able to sit up most of the time. So we have been able to wait on each other and ourselves with tolerable comfort. If we had been sick abed all, or even one at a time, it would have been much worse. But we begin to appreciate the privilege we have always enjoyed before, of having medical assistance within reach such as we could rely on. It is one of the greatest disabilities under which we missionaries labor.*

*You speak of our saddle. We received it safely, but S. has not yet used it. She has not been able to ride since August last. As to a sewing machine, we are scarcely able to buy one yet but need one so much that we have concluded to take Mr. Hoppin's and let him buy one for us in New York, or rather for himself on our account. Laying up money with which to go to America is as yet entirely out of the question and will be if we continue to lay out what we have so far and are still for the children in the family and other charitable purposes. And I know not how we can afford to retrench in that (or any other) direction. I think we have received all your letters, all, at least, that you have mentioned. I am pretty well convinced that I must perform less manual labor if I would enjoy good health. I shall therefore act upon it though it will subject me to much expense and more inconvenience. But these shall not stand before health and my work here. A good carpenter would find a great plenty to do here as all the missionaries often say. But where can he be obtained? This is one of our greatest wants confessedly. But I must*

close. Love to all. Your letter from Ipswich came to hand one week ago. I have not the time to speak of caste or answer the rest of it fully now.

Your loving son, Bigelow

**From Sarah to Mother**

Oberlin Station  
April 4, 1860

*My dear, dear Mother,*

*This is the day you have attained three score years, and if meeting your expectations, you are at Josephine's with Smith and his wife, celebrating your double birthdays. I have been with you in spirit much of the day and I know very well that you are thinking and speaking of us. When you receive Bigelow's letter you will see that we have been passing through dark days, but thank God light is breaking in and the shadows flee. I am getting quite well again though not very strong (my right breast is quite healed up but the left still discharges quantities of matter though it is over three weeks since it was lanced). We have got a bottle, like Josephine, for the baby, and she is thriving nicely on her goats' and cows' milk diet. I can nurse her only a little on one side. Bigelow does not get well and strong as fast as I wish, though he is better than he has been. I am quite certain that he has been doing too much manual labor, and he intends to give up all but what he needs for exercise. He has hired a man to go on with the painting he has commenced.*

*Sallie was decidedly better when she left for Richmond yesterday. I trust that rest of both body and mind will quite restore her. Bigelow left, too, yesterday morning to attend the mission meeting in Eliot. I had hoped to be able to attend this meeting myself, but my Heavenly Father has ordered otherwise, and I cheerfully yield my will to His. It was the greatest disappointment not to be able to see Mrs. Hall again before she leaves the Island. With all her cares she was unable to visit me and I have not got strong enough to go to see her; but it is all for the best, I know. We intended to send quite a package of curiosities, etc., by them, but sickness has prevented our preparing them. We had some tin cans made in which we intended to can some of the native fruits. I may still be able to send one or two kinds.*

*I have had a box made of different varieties of native woods for Josephine. I have not seen it as it was made in town and is left there for Mr. Hall to take. Bigelow says that it is pretty, but I am sorry there is not a paper with it naming the different kinds of wood. J. will doubtless know some of them. I send the cloak as I proposed. If you have not already you need not buy any pillows. I would rather have the money expended in good strong factory cloth, both bleached and unbleached. However, this latter will be apt to come too late for the barrel and I am sure I don't know what other chance you will have to send unless possibly Mr. Olds should come out. Mr. Fisher is daily expected, but those*

*in the mission who have known him do not seem to have a very high opinion of his adaptation to the Mt. Patience school.*

*Monday April 9<sup>th</sup> – Bigelow did not return until Thursday afternoon from the mission meeting, when Mr. and Mrs. Wilson came too, and we had quite an exciting time talking over the very exciting meeting from which they had just come. The mission had decided that Oberlin should be given up and we go to Brainerd! When Mr. Hall came up from town with Bigelow and told us of the plan, it seemed quite likely to be carried out, but his note of the next Saturday had completely turned the scales and I had settled it in my mind that we were to stay here.*

*Sunday I was out in the chapel and played the melodeon, also attended the meeting in the evening and took an active part. There seemed to be a good deal of interest in this meeting, and we felt sure we had found another means of doing good among the people here. In short, things looked far less discouraging than they had. This was our state of mind before the meeting, and when on his return Bigelow brought me the above decision I was utterly unprepared for it and inclined to look at it in rather an unfavorable light. There were so many things to be thought of. It would be such a trial to the people, to many of whom we felt as much attached I know as they were to us. The place, too, we had spent not a little upon, both of time and money in making the house more comfortable and getting part of the land under cultivation. Then, too, it would be such a task to move and would take so long to get settled and acquainted in another place. Still, it was not quite certain that we should go, for after the meeting the “Committee” concluded not to do anything about it till Mr. Fisher came and we knew certainly that no one had been appointed or was coming out for Brainerd. All these thoughts kept me awake most of that night. The next day I felt miserably, and having taken a little cold, by Saturday I was down with chills and fever and the sore breast seemed to threaten breaking again.*

*I took a teaspoon of nitre twice and when I had got into a little perspiration, B. counted my pulse and it was 130 per minute. The fever came on at nine or ten in the morning and did not leave until far into the night. It was accompanied by one of the severest headaches I ever had. Yesterday I kept to my bed most of the day but the fever was not so high as to raise my pulse above 110.*

*This forenoon I kept very quiet lest it should come on again, but I do not think I have had hardly any. We are poulticing the breast and hope to induce the matter to flow out at the old sore and not be obliged to make a new one. It seems to me a direct answer to prayer that, having been attacked so violently, I have been sick no longer. Still, I am not out of danger while that breast remains as at present and, as Bigelow keeps telling me, I must “be careful.” I do try to be, I am sure. I have not done any housework but have been obliged to use my needle pretty busily as the whole family were nearly destitute of clothes. We have bought Mr. Hoppin’s machine, but if we go to Brainerd it is no use to bring it over here and then have to take it right back, and yet many things have to be made immediately. The last thing I did Friday afternoon was to mend up Bigelow’s best coat once more. It is getting pretty bad, especially under the arms, so that I have to*



*mend it almost every time he wears it. Thomas must have some pants right off, and Phebe a dress. Anna has two dresses to be made; however one of them must wait until we get the machine. So you see we are in a state of "betweenity" about almost everything, and though I am perfectly willing to go or stay as the Lord shall seem to direct, it keeps my mind in a very unsettled state.*

*Master Willie has I suppose left us for good, and it is a great relief. The other children do far better without him. Anna has been a very faithful, good girl through all my sickness, and she is so kind and gentle with the baby that I am not at all afraid to trust it with her when for any reason I cannot take care of it myself. When I can, I yield my place to no one. Phebe has been very good, too. It is wonderful how much she has improved. Thomas, as I told you, works by the hour and pays for his board. He is getting ahead in money matters now that there is no school and he works all the time, but we shall be glad to have him have something to start off in the world with whenever he sets up for himself.*

*He does not care enough for books to make it worthwhile to give him anything very great in the way of an education. If we can get hold of a boy that is young enough and has a quick enough mind, we mean to send him through college and see if there is not such a thing as raising up native help.*

*Little Maria Reynolds, whom we hope to have for the Columbus school, seems quite bright and intelligent. If she does well we intend to take her to America when we go. Her folks are very slow in getting her ready to come. She is waiting to have shoes made now. If I keep improving, we shall insist on her coming directly, ready or not, as we must know more about her before we write to Columbus.*

*Thanks for your long letter written from Ipswich. It did me good like a medicine. How sad for Mr. John Cowles to be entirely blind. I am glad Johnnie remembers us kindly. When you write, please assure him of our love and interest in him.*

*I suppose this letter will find you back in the old Oberlin house, though perhaps not if you do not go till the summer time commences. Much love to Henry<sup>25</sup> and Rachel and lots of kisses for that dear little baby. I wonder if it has black hair and eyes. Mine has beautiful blue eyes. Everybody says it is a handsome baby, but I expect R. would think hers the prettiest.*

*It is quite interesting to have three cousins so nearly of an age, isn't it? Tell Rachel if she doesn't write me before long, I shall begin to feel real bad about it. I would write a dozen letters if I were able.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah Corban*

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<sup>25</sup> Henry Benjamin Cowles was Bigelow's stepbrother. Born in 1834, he was the same age as Bigelow.

Article by Sarah in the *Advocate and Family Guardian*,<sup>26</sup> April 16, 1860

MISSIONARY CORRESPONDENCE

Jamaica. W.I.

Although it is more than twenty-one years since slavery was abolished in the West Indies, it has left marks upon the people more deep and lasting than those of the branding iron. The most serious of these is perhaps a light regard for the marriage relation. This was of course to be expected in slavery times, but it is to be feared that it will take many generations to eradicate from the minds of the people the loose ideas then contracted on this subject. It is almost the universal practice for a girl to go and live with a man upon his simple promise to marry her. A promise, I fear, which is more often broken than kept. And so they live on year after year as unblushingly as if there were no wrong in it whatsoever. "Everybody does so," say they, and it is but too true. If at last they are married it is considered a meritorious action, and they are thought quite ready to join the church.

Another mark is seen in their very imperfect distinction between "meum" and "tuam." In "the palmy days of slavery," it is not very strange that the slave justified himself in pilfering from his master all that he could with safety, and thus his conscience was blunted upon this point, and the mass of people seem to think that it is no crime to take a bunch of bananas or plantain, or a few hills of yam from "buckra" (white folks). Indeed there are those who make their living in this way.

Another "mark" is perceived in the prevalent impression that "freedom" means liberty to do anything and everything they choose, whether right or wrong – that any law which would kindly or firmly restrain them is oppressive. In some parts of the Island there have been manifest tendencies toward insurrection during the year.

In the cruel beating which parents often give their children, we see the results of their training in slavery. They often tie them up by their hands to the branch of a tree, or stretch them out upon the ground, just as their cruel masters used to do to them when as slaves they were flogged.

Another cruel mode of punishment, which is still kept up, is tying the offender over a stinging ants' nest. Anyone who has been annoyed by half a dozen of these troublesome insects at a time can imagine how intense must be the suffering thus inflicted. Indeed if long continued it would certainly result in death. Animals are frequently killed in this way by being accidentally exposed to them.

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<sup>26</sup> The *Advocate and Family Guardian* was a semi-monthly paper published by the Female Guardian Society in New York. The editor, Sarah R. I. (Ingraham) Bennett may have been a relative of Sarah (Ingraham) Penfield. Several of Sarah's articles were published in the paper. They are included in this collection with the letters chronologically according to the date published, though they were probably written sometime earlier.

One would naturally suppose that the remembrance of their own suffering in the days of slavery from these causes would give them a most intense abhorrence of such cruelties. Upon a portion of the people this has seemed to be the effect, and to avoid this extreme many rush to the other. Thus it sometimes seems as if the greater portion of Jamaica children were either entirely ungoverned or treated with great cruelty.

Slavery, too, has left upon the minds of the people the impression that labor is degrading. They will do as little as possible themselves, and seem greatly shocked to see white people work in the field. The American missionaries have taken much pains to rid them of this idea and have endeavored both by precept and example to show them a more excellent way, but it is not uncommon for the people, as they go along the path and see them at work, to shout in contempt, "Hi! Buckra work!"

One of the most serious results of slavery is the very low estimate of the value of an education. Schools are now becoming quite numerous, being mostly supported by different missionary societies, but the attendance is by no means what it ought to be. A great many of the children are never sent to school at all – and those parents who do send them seem to think their children's education quite complete when they become able to read and write with even tolerable facility.

But the picture is not entirely a dark one. There is a sunny side even in this. Here and there, scattered over these beautiful hills and mountains, we find those who are trying to live as people should live. They live industrious lives; they have decent houses and live with legal wives or husbands. Their children are sent both to day and Sunday school, and when you inquire them out, you will quite certainly find that they themselves are members of some of the numerous mission churches in the Island. As a general rule, just in proportion as they are earnest Christians are they prospered in worldly things, and freed from the dire effects which slavery has entailed upon so many about them. Some have inferred from the various social evils prevalent among the people here that emancipation was an evil; but it seems to me that these evils simply show that the curse of slavery is an unspeakable and endless one; and that our whole duty is by no means done when we have conferred the boon of freedom. If the English nation should expend millions and millions of dollars in supporting missionaries among this people, they could never wholly undo the evils they have done them in years past.

S.C.I.P.

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
April 26, 1860*

*My dear Mother,*

*Little Mary Cowles is sound asleep and I snatch a few moments to write so that the letter may go on the vessel with Bro's. Hall and Hoppin on Saturday.*

*I took my first horseback trip last Monday – four miles and back to see one of the English neighbors – and took some cold, which gave me another pull back and for several days I suffered very much pain in my left side. There was a hard lump under the arm and I thought I was going to have a boil, but it grew no larger and I suppose all the pain proceeded from that troublesome breast. I have but little pain in it now though it has still a running sore. I have been able to assist some about the house this week.*

*Bigelow went down to Kingston two weeks ago Wednesday and brought up Mr. Fisher and two of the children. Mrs. Fisher and Sarah Abbie did not come up till the next week. We received by them letters from yourself, Smith, and Mr. Whipple, also a gift from yourself for which I thank you very much. The family have been with us till yesterday when Mr. Thompson came to take them over to Eliot. It was at first decided by a majority of the committee appointed for that purpose that they should go to Providence and the people then turned out to get up their things. Then the mission turned about and decided that they should go to Mt. Patience as they had expected at first, so it will be quite a little while before they are really settled. I like Mrs. Fisher very much indeed. She reminds me so much of Aunt Lucy. I think, too, that he is a real good man and like him better and better the more I know of him. Their children are very interesting and seem to be well governed. Sallie Treat has left us and I miss her very much. She writes hopefully of her present situation. We hope to get a native teacher soon.*

*I have been completely deluged with company for two or three weeks past. We have had from twelve to fifteen here a good deal of the time, and last Monday morning no less than seventeen came over from Chesterfield for Sallie's things that I had to get breakfast for. Of course there was not enough for more than half of them. I do not suppose that either she or Mr. Venning knew how many came. Probably they invited the young people to turn out and sure enough they did. Mr. Venning said I must allow him to pay whatever their food cost, but of course the money is not the only thing expended in such a case, especially where one feels as poorly as I do. Mr. Thompson made a present of \$5.00 when he was here. I know he had in mind our expense in providing for so much company. Indeed we are just about spent out as to money matters though there are five or six more weeks more in this quarter.*

*Our baby is growing finely; is nearly three months old. She looks very much as Charles's little Mary did at her age. She makes us little trouble as could be expected of so small a babe. Sleeps a good deal and lies on her back kicking a good deal when awake. Generally wakes once in the night at two or three o'clock and when her little wants are attended to drops off to sleep again. We have scarcely lit a candle for her since she was born. I let Anna go home Tuesday evening and so have only Phebe's help just now. One of Anna's cousins was to be married and she wanted very much to attend the wedding. I could not well spare her but thought I would as she has not been home since the holidays. After the folks had gone yesterday morning I had a hard job getting the house into order again, and got very tired. Have not had so much to do today and feel better.*

*We got our new sewing machine yesterday. It made me some trouble and I shall almost have to learn over again how to use it. I have plenty of sewing to do and should be driving it now if I did not feel as if I must write. I need to write two or three more this very afternoon. We are in the height of the star-apple season and I enjoy eating them very much. These, with oranges and pineapples, are about the only native fruits I relish. I cannot get to like yam very well either, though there are some kinds that I eat with some degree of comfort. Baby Mary calls and I must close. I need not say that if it were best, I should be very glad to go with the Halls and the Hoppins.*

*Most aff. your loving daughter, Sarah Corban Ingraham Penfield*

**From Bigelow to Mother**

*Oberlin, Jamaica  
April 26, 1860*

*Dearest Mother,*

*My last letter homeward bound was, I believe, written to Charles the 9<sup>th</sup> inst. In it I spoke as though we were on the eve of great changes, and so we were but not so great in all things as I had supposed. So far as giving up Oberlin and going to Brainerd is concerned, I think the end has passed and the change is not made, neither is it likely to be made.*

*On the 10<sup>th</sup> I heard of Mr. Fisher's arrival in Kingston and the next day went down for him. He brought word that Dr. Lane and his wife were willing to come for Brainerd and would do so if the church where they were now laboring would permit them to leave, provided further that his (adopted) father did not veto it. This, of course, again threw us all into uncertainty.*

*Since then I have been prosecuting my inquiries as to the Christian economy of maintaining Oberlin and am prepared to report progress. I have found no more reasons for it but many against it. I believe in my last to Charles I spoke of it as a probable movement that Oberlin would be reduced to the rank of an outstation of Brainerd. I now think it most likely that it will be maintained for the present as it has of late, but that eventually it will be united with Providence under the care of one minister. I think that neither of the two furnishes work enough in itself for one pastor and that neither ought to be abandoned. In this view several of the brethren now concur, though not all. Inasmuch as I have already laid before you the main considerations in favor of giving up Oberlin, I may as well perhaps speak of the leading ones against it. You will at once see the propriety of my request that none of this be published. In general, nothing should be laid before the public that speaks of, for, or against future probable action of the Mission or of its various members. For even if the probability becomes a reality, it is often exceedingly annoying to certain members to have been anticipated in their*

announcement. While, on the other hand, if there come a slip twixt the cup and the lip, it is far from pleasant to have many looking on.

Bro. Starbuck was quite unpleasantly affected by reading in a letter from us published in the Evangelist that he would probably be leaving in the spring. He has since concluded not to do so. I certainly had no idea of speaking of his plans for the future to any besides yourself and the family at home.

But to resume the discussion: Many of the church members here are old and infirm and if they were to leave, what society around us would receive such a burden or care for them properly if once received? Again, upon closer investigation and inquiry into the real state of the churches about us and with which we are in terms of friendship, I do not feel as if I could recommend our members to join any of them. For although, as I hope and am inclined to believe, there is a pure gospel preached at each, yet the churches seem to be very corrupt, and all the more, no doubt, from the system of leaders.<sup>27</sup> A number of members living near each other are allowed to form a class and elect one of themselves as leader. This leader, if not more than ordinarily good, cares more for the number in his class than for their character, and as he has the power to take in members on trial, he generally takes in all who apply. These facts and their disastrous consequences I have but lately learned. I have gathered them from various reliable sources. I learn, too, that though drunkenness, licentiousness, and kindred evils are preached against by the ministers, they are to an alarming extent practiced by the members. Those who commit these sins are rarely disciplined or cut off, but almost all the members conspire together to cover up their sin. I think I am safe in saying that no amount of tippling is considered a disciplinable offense, and that nothing short of "beastly intoxication" is thought to unfit a man even for the position of leader. In knowledge of such facts, how could I ever consent to the giving up of the church here, at least so long as they proved true to sounder principles and practices? In talking the matter over with the deacons of our church, they said that in one week the chapel would be crowded and our number of members would be greatly increased and so on till the house would be too small for us if we would only lower our standard to that of others around us. But this they were determined never to do.

It seems, therefore, after all, that Oberlin is a light to the region round about us on these subjects at least, and if she only were in vital religion, we could scarcely ask for more. I tell the brethren that (to use a homely comparison) I have been on the fence, inclining first to one side and then to the other till I am sore, and that now that I have got off on the same side as at first, I don't intend to be put up again, but to stay still where I am till I am lifted fairly over all at once, which last will not be for some time to come, if ever.

I am quite sure that Bro. T. would oppose my ever going to Brainerd on account of its importance and my particular practice, while I am just as sure if not surer that I shall not change it ever, at least not for the sake of going to Brainerd, or anywhere else. After reviewing the matter we have concluded not to have the children at table with us when we have company. It is right, I am convinced, to bring them even then, but as the

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<sup>27</sup> For further discussion of the "leader system" see Appendix C, page 221.

*rest or many of the mission feel and act, it is exceedingly unpleasant all around. They feel unpleasantly about it and act it out so that the children feel that they are not wanted there. Of course this is far from giving us the most pleasant and comfortable feeling. It sours the children's temper more than staying away just for the time does. We think therefore that the greatest goal (the circumstances all considered) will result from keeping them away when we have company and we act accordingly.*

*Now a word as to Father's coming to Jamaica next fall: I am very glad indeed to hear he is thinking seriously about it. I hope he will come by all means and be able to accomplish the purpose he has in view in so doing. I suppose one great end in view is looking into the apparent caste, and to break it up if possible. I am sure he will be utterly disappointed if he attempts it. He would be considered as prejudiced all the time and his arguments and appeals would fall as lightly as feathers. Mr. Whipple is the only one whose opinions would have weight and even they would, I fear, be considered and treated too lightly to break up a practice that has so entrenched itself among us. The members of the mission all say that though glad to see Father, they can in no wise accept him as a substitute for Mr. Whipple. In this decision I concur. I am sure that neither Father nor any other one than the Secretary can do what we all expect and hope for. In order to act intelligently as our Secretary, it is almost essential that Brother Whipple come to Jamaica and see for himself what we need. Does Father expect to bring you? If he must come alone, he is sure of a most cordial and filial welcome but we shall not be half so happy to see him as if he brings you with him. Now, Mother, do come. We can't be denied seeing you, now that you can have such good company. I have no doubt but it would greatly improve your health.*

*It would be well to start by the middle or the last of September. This is before the cold weather begins to set in there. You will need to bring only your summer clothes, but a good supply of them for they get soiled so fast. If you send a barrel of things, I have one or two suggestions as to their contents. There is nothing that would be more acceptable than a little dried fruit. Sarah would like whatever you may receive from the cloak expended for good factory cloth – one piece bleached, the other unbleached.*

*I send my measure and would like to have you get made for me a pair of boots, of calfskin shoes, and fine congress gaiters. You can draw on Mr. Bateham for pay if father don't come for it himself. I should like a little gourd seed, corn for seed also (evergreen and sweet), a few pumpkin and melon seeds, beets and cucumber, etc., if it is not too much trouble.*

*Sarah finishes this for me as I have a severe headache.*

*Your aff. children, T.B. and S. Penfield*

**From Sarah to Mother**

Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
May 28, 1860

*My Dear Mother,*

*By the date of my letter you will see that my twenty-second birthday has passed. I do not know as I have told you that Mr. Wilson's birthday comes at the same time and we are precisely of an age. Well, we did think of having something of a celebration of our double birthday but we could not well make it out.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Wilson came over and spent the day, however, and we had a very pleasant time. It was some weeks before that Bigelow and I, with Phebe to carry baby, made them a visit. It was my first visit to any of the stations since last August and I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed it. It did me good in body and soul, too.*

*Wednesday, 30<sup>th</sup> – I snatched a few minutes day before yesterday to write the above and snatch a few more this morning to finish it so as to send it to town by Mr. Beardslee. My health is pretty good, though a little cold is sure to make me sick. I have had several such pull backs.*

*I like my little Marie very much. She is a great help to me in sewing and baby tending. I have never had a girl so quick to learn and so cheerfully obedient. She has had a miserable bringing up so far and I fear has not the strictest ideas of integrity, but I have never detected her in a falsehood. Baby grows fast. She seems quite healthy and is certainly very good-natured. She has generally waked once in the night, taken her bottle, and gone to sleep again, but lately she sleeps till four o'clock every morning. Mr. Hoppin's folks gave us a small rocking chair and Mrs. Hall an old wagon, which we have fixed up. When we get a high chair she will be very well furnished.*

*I expect to go to Kingston next week and get her some new clothes as those Josephine gave me are just about gone. We bought Mr. Hoppin's sewing machine but do not succeed in making it go well at all. We have spent days working at it but it will only sew a few stitches at a time. Whether the trouble is with the needles or the machine itself we cannot determine, but many of the needles seem blunted or bent and perhaps they are all the trouble. It is a great trial to spend so much for a thing and get no use of it, especially for such poor folks. I have hosts of sewing to do but am obliged to sit beside my machine and stitch away with my own fingers.*

*We have a young lady here whom we expect will teach school for a few days and she has helped me some. You will not wonder that sewing has accumulated very rapidly in the two or three months that I have been sick. In looking back it seems that nearly half of my twenty-second year has been spent on the sick bed. Some of this year I have been able to be about the house, and for more than this time I could not really call myself well, but I don't feel like attributing this to the climate. After all, I might have been just so in America. My back is very weak now and I cannot do any hard work. Baby seems very*



*heavy to me. I do not feel like complaining in the least. My life in Jamaica has been a very happy one in spite of sickness and poverty.*

*The good hand of our God has been over me and daily has our path been strewn with more mercies and blessings than we could possibly thank him for. When I have had health, I have enjoyed it more than ever before, and now with returning health and my dear little happy baby, I think I have as much happiness as it ever falls to the lot of mortals to enjoy.*

*I think if could get the machine to go, I would sell it to pay for the horse we were obliged to run into debt for. The fact is our salaries are too small and it does not seem possible to live on them.*

*I know Mr. Hall has managed to lay up quite a sum, but he seems to have a knack for saving and has the name of being a very "close man" everywhere.*

*I cannot write another word.*

*Your aff. daughter, S.C.I. Penfield*

**From Bigelow to Mother**

*Oberlin, Jamaica  
May 30th, 1860*

*Dearest Mother,*

*Who should drop in on us last night but our quondam Bro. Beardslee. My wife said she was almost frightened at first, fearing no doubt that he was here in prosecution of a threat he once made to the effect that if we members of the mission would not allow him our pulpits, he would not promise that he would not come to preach nearby our stations, to all who wished to hear, without our consent. However, any such fears were dissipated at least for the present when he told us as he soon did that he had come on business with one of our neighbors and expected to return to town on the morrow (that is, today). He informed us of a vessel to sail for New York in a few days. I therefore embrace this opportunity of sending you a letter. I wrote you last about a month ago I believe. I really should be glad to write you oftener than I do but I am exceedingly busy in one or another way all the time. If you have the perusal of a letter written to Josephine yesterday, you may get some idea of how much of my time is spent. I do not travel as much every week as the one of which I have given her a rapid sketch, for in that week I rode in the saddle between 90 and 100 miles, but I believe it will average over 20 miles, if not 30, a week.*

*I am writing before breakfast and while Mr. Beardslee is still asleep. He seems as cordial as ever and perhaps his threat was but a momentary flash of excitement. I*

*believe him a true Christian but greatly misguided on the subjects of immersion, profession of faith, admission to the privileges of the visible church, and kindred subjects. So far as I can learn from others and himself, he is more strenuous on these points than others and preaches mainly on them. And this, as I told him, is the main reason why we cannot invite him into our pulpits. He would be certain to present his peculiar doctrines and we should be under the necessity of preaching ours to prevent the spread of error. Now this sort of contending in the pulpit we wish to avoid.*

*I am quite glad you have once more settled down at home. Your traveling, though undoubtedly of service to you in many respects, must have grown wearisome before you were through with it. Now that you are going to build, I renounce all hope of seeing Father or yourself this coming winter, and I do so most reluctantly, for we had set our hearts upon it and already enjoyed it not a little in the prospect. But I know that building must be very confining in its nature and will require considerable capital.*

*Then too, I have no doubt he would have to bear his own expense entirely inasmuch as the mission people are unanimous in urging Brother Whipple to come himself.*

*We learn from your letter that Maria Judd is now at Oberlin but do not know whether at your expense or her parents. We suppose the latter. I do not remember having heard of her specially before. She is but a year or so older than the Maria with us, a fine little girl that is being aided by the S.S. of the Congregational Church at Columbus. I suppose from the fact of your saying nothing about it that there is being done nothing of the sort at Oberlin. I am not sure as it is best myself, but shall make the case of the College S.S a sort of test. Has anything been said to Mr. Fitch about it?<sup>28</sup> If there has not as yet, I think it would perhaps be as well to let the matter drop, and if he has been spoken to and seems to take but little interest in it, I am quite certain it would. As prices are, board is worth all of \$2.50 per week here, especially where lights, soap and care are included, and this is not my judgment alone, but in it almost all, if not all, the Mission concur. Miss Treat, who has just gone to Chesterfield, while with us paid only \$1.75. I consider the rest a gift, though she thought she was paying enough, if not too much. If she were to keep house a while herself and set as good a table as she required with us, I think light would dawn upon her mind on this and some other points.*

*She was truly a good sister and helped Mrs. P. greatly in the care of the little one and household matters when she was sick. May the Lord reward her. We would allow her to pay nothing for her board during all this time, but she would have felt insulted had we offered anything more. The Fishers came some month and a half ago. We were glad to see anyone who had so lately seen you. They brought a Scotch pebble pin for Sarah for which I suppose she has expressed her thanks before now. We have had quite troublesome times in getting them located. They came expecting to go to the Brainerd school (Mt. Patience, it is called) but as a mission we feared that a life among the Indians had not prepared him for so difficult a post as that school, and besides, the people were*

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<sup>28</sup> James M. Fitch was a printer in Oberlin and publisher of the *Oberlin Evangelist*. He was also the superintendent of the Oberlin Sabbath Day School.

*dissatisfied with their last two teachers (Mr. Hall and Mr. Hoppin – but don't mention that to their friends I beseech you) that they were inclined to look upon another male teacher with distrust and to wish for a female teacher. A committee was therefore appointed to see Bro. Fisher as soon as he should come out, and, by what we could find of his antecedents, especially how much he had taught and with what success, as well as the present appearance, determine whether he should be sent to Brainerd or to Providence, where a teacher was much wanted. As soon as I learned of his arrival, I went down to Kingston with horses and brought him and two children up to Oberlin. The next day the committee met and decided, from what they could find out from what they saw and from what Mr. Hall said, that he had better be located at Providence. The committee thought they were all present but afterwards learned and remembered that one who was absent was a member of the committee and chairman, at that.*

*The rest of the mission therefore decided that there had been no committee meeting and nothing decided. They called a mission meeting and determined to send him to Brainerd, where he is now. This has caused some bad feelings, but we hope it will soon disappear. There is a great call for forbearance here as well as in other parts of the world. Thank you for what you wrote of the estimation in which we are held by other members of our mission. It is quite refreshing to hear so good an account of ourselves. May we never deserve a more unfavorable report. Our "treasure" is growing fast and she begins to be quite intelligent. She is indeed a treasure and more highly prized day by day. She seems to be perfectly healthy, is plump and happy as the day is long. She is a great comfort to us. But I must write no longer now.*

*Your affectionate son, T. B. Penfield*

**Article by Rev. T. B. Penfield in *The American Missionary*, June 1860**

### Jamaica Mission

Oberlin Station  
February 21, 1860

So far as I have been able to learn, in all our stations there have been tokens for good; and in some, considerably increased congregations since the commencement of the year. This last is especially true here at Oberlin. For nearly two months, the attendance has been steady, and much more numerous than before. But one of our greatest causes of thankfulness is the increasing size of the Sabbath School. Indeed, it would seem that my great work here, whether I will or not, is to be with and for the children; and I certainly am not sorry to have it so. We have Sabbath School at 10 o'clock A.M.; and, before the bell has tolled the last stroke, most of the children are sitting quietly in their respective classes. The first half hour is spent learning and singing hymns especially adapted to children. The second, in hearing and explaining the lessons by the teachers of the various

classes. And the third, in listening to the children as they recite the lesson in concert, class by class, and in giving them a familiar talk, Bible stories, &c. During the last half hour, in which I give what might be called a children's sermon, we have by far the largest congregation of the day; for a large proportion of the adults in attendance upon "the meeting" come early enough for this; and, of course, we have all the children.

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
July 6, 1860*

*My dear Mother,*

*Night before last we were awakened in the middle of the night by messengers from town bringing us the mail. We were disappointed to find only two letters, one from yourself, dated April 30<sup>th</sup>, and one from Mr. Whipple of May 19<sup>th</sup>. These were read before we went to sleep again. The loving sympathy in yours brought tears to our eyes, but some things in Mr. Whipple's grieved us in a far different way. We were made sadder and I trust wiser by both. By yours only as it recalled hard days almost forgotten and made us fear we had not profited by them as we should. I am feeling quite well again now. Have had a nice rest visiting around the other stations. Bigelow was with me part of the time, and baby all. At every place we received a most cordial welcome and great pains were taken to make our stay agreeable.*

*Mr. Thompson is the only one that seems to feel very badly about the course we are taking with our native children, and since he has found it impossible to convince us of our error, his feeling seems to be that of grief at our folly more than anything else. He said himself, I think, that others would feel that our course was a continual rebuke, or what amounted to that, to him. He was perfectly cordial when we were there and on the Sabbath exchanged pulpits with Bigelow.*

*I do think that this is one reason why he does not wish us to go to Brainerd. He did say this, that if Starbuck would take both Oberlin and Providence, he should have no objection to our going to Brainerd. But Starbuck will never do this. Mr. T. said he should propose that the two stations should be joined and under the care of one minister anyhow. What will be the result, I cannot tell. Bigelow is perfectly willing to take them, but of course that is cutting out Mr. S. However, he expects to go home next year and has said to one person that he will not come back. We feel like leaving the matter in the hands of the Lord and have no choice of our own, though we should like to feel that we have a wider field of usefulness than we seem to have just at this station.*

*Bigelow has just found a destitute region about five miles from here where he expects to preach Sabbath afternoons after closing his duties here. He is looking very poorly and feels so, too, though he only complains of languor and general debility. He has not really been well since his overexertion during my illness. I feel troubled about*

him and earnestly wish he might have a little rest. We have thought of going over to Hermitage<sup>29</sup> for a week or two and shutting ourselves out from care, but we do not know as we can bring it about.

We are very much under the weather as to money matters and I am very sorry we bought the sewing machine, especially as I can do little or nothing with it. It is not yet paid for. We are anxious to hear about the money the Columbus Sunday School are to give for Maria's support. But I fear I am getting too much like Martha, troubled about many things. I know I am in the hands of the Lord. Let him do with me as seemeth to him good.

I feel it is a great blessing that our little Mary Cowles is so well and happy as she is. She is a great comfort to us. I think she has traveled nearly a hundred miles on horseback already. Of course we have to go very slow with her and it makes some of our trips rather tedious. I was disappointed about going to Kingston in a carriage and so left baby at home. Was gone over one night only and she got along very nicely.

I have had very little trouble lately with my breasts. Keep a glass on the left one during the day to catch the milk, but at night it wets me all up. The consequence of this long experience in such troubles is that my underclothes are all covered with mildew. I have scarcely any that I am not ashamed of. I would wean baby entirely, but I suppose the cow will soon dry up and I don't know what she would do then, as our goat hung itself the other day. I would write a longer letter but I have a great many to write and very little time to do it in. Wonder if you are in your new house yet. Oh! the changes that are going on at Oberlin. We shall hardly know the place if we are permitted to return.

How is your health this summer? We have a young lady by the name of Norris teaching our school. It is very small, 10 or 12 scholars only. A young man is running opposition close by us. Things look as if we were not needed here.

Yours aff., Sarah Corban

P.S. I have said baby was well. This is true, but she is very much inclined to raw sores. Has one now in the fold of her fat little neck that I have been trying in vain to cure for a long time. I wash it with castile soap and rub on sweet oil very frequently. Some folks think I don't take care of it but it is no such thing. She drools so as to keep it wet a great deal of the time. Mrs. Thompson felt called upon to give me a lecture upon my extravagance in wearing my old silk under my riding dress when I went from one station to another. I told her that I wanted it when I was there, and when I had so many things to carry for baby it was the easiest way to carry it. She thought it must cut the silk. I told her it did not any more than to crowd it in a satchel. She thought I was young, did not understand, etc. Mrs. Douglass wore a silk tissue to meeting under her riding skirt, but she is so large they dare not attack her. Never mind, my conscience and not Mrs. T. is my guide.

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<sup>29</sup> A remote mission station, in the vicinity of Chesterfield, now unoccupied but still maintained as a health retreat. Sarah described her visit to Hermitage in her September 1860 article in the *Advocate*.

**From Bigelow to Parents**

Oberlin, Jamaica  
July 10, 1860

*Dear Parents,*

*Yours of April 30<sup>th</sup> came to hand the night after "Independence Day," and as usual was warmly welcomed. But I was reminded by it of the miserable farce, so often acted off in the United States, of celebrating the day by rejoicing and firing of cannon, while no other is so notoriously a slave country. I realize much more deeply our country's shame since coming to Jamaica than before. I am to give a lecture on American Slavery before the Baptist congregation near us on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. My main object will be to show how far the northern states are implicated and how far innocent as to slavery. There is a very prevalent impression here, I find, that all the states hold slaves more or less and that all Americans are to some extent in league with slaveholders. Of course the better-educated class of persons know better, but there are enough evil disposed men to circulate such reports, and they have far too much influence with the common people. It has been charged, and believed by many, that missionaries who on their return to the United States have taken native children to educate have made slaves of them. I heard a report but recently, that was obtaining many believers, that the United States were seeking to get possession of Jamaica in order to reduce it once more to slavery. The fact of American Slavery being as it is, I do not wonder that such slanders should obtain some credence, nor that there is prejudice in Kingston and to some extent in the country against Americans. Our Missionaries however are I think living it down, but so long as the procuring cause, Slavery, exists, there may be some of it to encounter here.*

*Your last letter had been more than two months on its way to us, but had lost nothing in its journey, as it came fresh from your heart of love and sympathy. O, if you could only see how much good your letters do us, how they encourage our hearts and strengthen our hands for the duties before us, how much more cheerfully and hopefully we toil on, after each of your messages of love, and how fervently we thank God for them, you would not, I am sure, grow weary of it, neither do I fear at all that you ever will. Our trials of sickness and suffering to which you alluded have passed by and can scarcely now be realized. Your expressions of sympathy have stirred the fountain of remembrance, and I now fear that they were magnified in my estimation, and that I have failed to improve them spiritually as I ought. O for more of the love of Jesus. I believe I do grow in grace, but still too slowly. I feel like writing bitter things against myself. The work here at Oberlin goes on quietly, and much as ever. Our congregation on the Sabbath is very small, numbering not much more than 30 on an average. Last Sabbath I preached here at the usual time and at four o'clock was at Salisbury Plain, some five miles distant. It was the first Sabbath of my preaching there, and as I came upon the ground there were but two or three of my audience there to greet me. But messengers were soon on their way hither and thither to call the people. Meanwhile a chair was brought for me and placed upon the greensward under the dense foliage of an immense mango tree and my horse tied with a long rope where he could feed upon the grass. We were upon the margin of a small plain, containing a few hundred acres of almost level*

land, but hemmed in on nearly all sides by lofty mountains. As I gazed upon the distant summits, the passage was forcefully brought to my mind, "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, etc." In the course of half an hour I had a good congregation in the shade of the tree, mostly seated on rude chairs and benches which they had borne on their heads from their little huts among the cane. They paid good attention throughout and I hope some good was effected. I left another appointment for two weeks, and they all responded in chorus to my "good evening" as I rode away.

July 12. Last evening I had a magic lantern exhibition in the chapel for the Sabbath School children and others. I showed them a set of slides on astronomy and another on different animals, quadrupeds and birds. Those of the Sabbath School children who had been in school ten mornings out of twelve before the last stroke of the bell came in free; others paid 3 cents and grown people 6 cents. My object was mainly to instruct, entertain, and encourage the children. Just now the church members are coming in with their families at my request, two mornings a week, for private conversations with me. On Monday morning last before breakfast two families came to the chapel and, having been one at a time in the study with me, we had a short interview together, closing with prayer. Tuesday morning two more came in and thus we are to continue until all the church have had a similar opportunity. So you will see what kind of means we use to benefit the people among whom our lot is cast.

Ever yours, Bigelow

The foregoing letter was published, under the title "Missionary Correspondence," in the *Oberlin Evangelist*, September 26, 1860.

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Oberlin Station Jamaica  
August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1860*

*My dear Mother,*

*We send our boy Thomas very early tomorrow morning to Kingston with a bundle of letters as we hear there is a probability that an American steamer will call about this time.*

*We have some hopes that Dr. Lane is aboard. Some of the missionaries have received a paper containing a notice of a farewell meeting which he held, being under appointment for Jamaica. We shall be very glad to see him whenever he does come. Our prospects here at Oberlin seem to be brightening somewhat. For the present, Bigelow preaches half the time about five miles from here in the open air after his service here. Has been going to Brainerd once a month, but if Dr. Lane comes that will no longer be necessary. He has a great many demands upon his time and strength in the way of*

*sermons, lectures, speeches, etc., in every direction. He is on terms of considerable intimacy with Baptist, Wesleyan and Episcopal ministers near us.*

*I think he is doing a good work in breaking down sectarian barriers here. He had three or four invitations for addresses on the first of August. Made one at Mt. Charles on American slavery. Think the people got some new light upon that subject.*

*Our missionary society seems to be doing good work, too. We have members from several churches around us and many who belong to no church. Each member gives so much a month. Bigelow gives 2/, i.e. 48 cts. I give 1/- 24 cts. Anna 6d - 12 cts. Thomas and Phebe began with 3 cts. but of their own accord changed it to 6 cts. per month. Our house is almost always full at the meetings the first Sunday evening in the month. They are especially interested in Africa and voted to devote their funds to missions in that country. Little Mary has been a member from her birth and we give 6 cts. a month for her. I am secretary and treasurer of the Society. Bigelow is president. Two neighboring ministers are members. Our school is closed; when it will go on again I cannot tell.*

*Think I shall teach our children at home. My health is pretty good, though I feel very miserably some days. Bigelow is better, though rather worn down just now. Baby is well, was six months old on Thursday, weighed eighteen pounds. So you see she is not large, though she is quite plump. Is trying to talk some. I have not time to write more now. Adieu.*

*Your loving daughter, Sarah C. I. Penfield*

**From Sarah to Father and Mother**

*Oberlin Station, Jamaica  
August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1860*

*Dear Father and Mother,*

*Your joint letter of May 22 was very thankfully received though as it came by the steamer we were rather disappointed in not getting any later dates. I suppose you have learned before this that the Aspinwall line of California steamers call here twice a month now, so we are brought some hundreds of miles nearer home.*

*We shall hope to have at least one letter from Oberlin by every steamer. Has brother Charles forgotten us? We have not had a letter from him this long, long time. I am glad he has been able to make a short visit to Columbus. We have received a letter from Josephine dated July 16 in which she speaks as if the barrel were already sent off. We have not heard from it yet but very likely we shall when we send down these letters. Mother's advice about overdoing is no doubt very good, but with our small salary it seems impossible to put it into practice. Our labors and expenses are greatly increased by having so much company, and an effort has been made by some of the Mission to have*



*our salary increased on that account, but we have objected to it for several reasons. In the first place, the proposal was not unanimous, several we know were opposed to it, and secondly if it was understood that we were paid for it there would be more than enough extra demands made upon our hospitality to make up for it. In that case, they would expect us to put ourselves out for them more than we feel called upon to do now. Bringing up the subject in Mission meetings once or twice has seemed to have the effect to make the brethren more careful about putting burdens on us, and our more recent guests have many of them been out of the mission.*

*I think I said in my last that our school was given up, so for once I am without a boarder. This lightens our cares and expenses not a little. We can live much plainer. The price for board has been quite too low in the mission and the single teachers' salaries in proportion to their expenses are nearly double ours. We have boarded for \$1.68 a week, providing everything, even to pasturing a horse.*

*You will be sorry to hear that we have sent for the money in Mr. Bateham's hands, but it seemed to be the only thing we could well do. My long sickness and our many losses had obliged us to draw in advance so much of next quarter's salary that we did not see how we could get through with what was left, especially as our cow was about drying up and we needed another very much. With this we shall be about square with the world again and by rigid economy we hope to keep so after this.*

*It is very pleasant to know that we have your sympathies so decidedly with us on the caste question. Mr. Wilson's family is the only one in the mission that is entirely so, though I believe the Fishers are taking the same stand. Matters are very quiet on the subject now. We keep the children away when we have company and our mission friends seem to think it best to let us have our way.*

*Mr. Starbuck is laying definite plans for going home in the spring now, I believe. Hardly seems determined whether he shall come back or not. If he does not, very likely we shall have Providence joined to Oberlin. How long we shall think best to remain here I cannot say, of course.*

*If we leave it will doubtless be only to enter another field. I think if the way was open to us, we should both prefer to labor among the real heathen, those who have never heard the Gospel. In proportion to its population, I suppose, Jamaica has more preachers than the United States. To be sure, they are not all of the best quality, but still, they have the Bible and might hear good preaching if they would. Bigelow and I have had some serious talks on these subjects.*

*I must say that in my own mind I had rather thought to spend my last days in the States if my life were spared many years, but I can see that he feels like spending his life in the field, and I should be very sorry to hinder it. If either of us loses our health, the state of the case is, of course, very much changed.*

*I said we were without boarders, but I believe I was mistaken. I think we wrote you some time ago of a poor man living close by us who had lost the use of his feet from dreadful sores upon them. We have nearly supported him ever since we came, as his relatives did little or nothing for him and he sent every day or two to us for food. The little hut he was living in was leaking very badly and we could get no one to thatch it. He took a dreadful cold and lost his voice. So we concluded to take him to our hearts and home and make his last days as comfortable as we could. Thomas put the saddle on the donkey and he rode down on Saturday morning. I shall not soon forget how pleased and happy he looked as he came by the window and I bid him good morning.*

*He has the little room off the kitchen to himself and the girls have the one between the study and our room. I am giving him some of Dr. Fitch's cough medicine that Mr. Thompson gave me. He seems a little better but does not get his voice yet. Perhaps he never will. Till he came here he had not heard a sermon for years. I trust he is one of Christ's little ones but can hardly judge.*

*I hope B. will have time to write tomorrow. He is gone from home today.*

*Very aff. your daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*

*P.S. Tell Josephine that a draft for the \$40.00 is received.*

**From Bigelow to Parents**

*Oberlin, Jamaica  
August 23, 1860*

*Dearest Parents,*

*I have been exceedingly busy for some time of late in making out reports and writing letters to the Society whose servants we are. We expect that a steamer has already come in or will be in tomorrow from the U.S. and we are just starting off a messenger for Kingston with these documents and letters. He travels to town in the night as is the custom of the people here pretty generally. He is waiting now so I must not write you to any great length. We are in usual health and spirits, laboring on, hoping on and quite happy. We could be happier to be sure and should be if we could see the Lord's work prospering in our hands. We are quite disappointed to learn that you have given up your project of coming and giving us a visit this winter. The steamers would give such a quick and easy passage. However, no doubt all is for the best. We are rejoicing in the prospect of a regular communication with the U.S. twice a month. I say prospect, for though we are already enjoying the reality, we are not certain that the arrangement is to be permanent. We hope so, however. If I had time I should be glad to write you fully about hosts of things, but now in the midst of so many I am like the man to double duty bound and both or all neglect.*

*We are quietly jogging on in our own way as to having the children eat with us, etc., etc. and at present are quite unmolested by those whose practice is different. For the sake of peace and at their request we have yielded so much as this, that when we have company, the children shall wait. I am still preaching about twice a month at Salisbury Plain and have pretty good congregations under the shadow of the great mango tree. I might have had some trouble about it possibly had I not taken quite a conciliatory course. A Wesleyan missionary has been at the same place before me and preached some three or four times there and so imagined he had a right to the place. He seemed inclined to consider me an intruder there and my movement sectarian.*

*He lives some 20 miles or nearly so from us and is over in the Plain only once a month or so. Having learned how he was feeling about it as well as his name and residence, I set off one morning on horseback and paid him a visit. I finally succeeded in convincing him that my intentions were friendly, and he seemed to be gained over as a fast friend. I learn that he is not thought highly of by other ministers, many doubting that he is a Christian at all.*

*Of this, however, I know nothing personally. Next Sabbath I expect to go to the Plains in order to hear him preach if he keeps his appointment and to supply his place if he disappoints the people, as I learn he has too often done.*

*Yours truly and aff'c't'ly, T. B. Penfield*

**Article by Sarah in *The Advocate and Family Guardian*, September 15, 1860**

#### MISSIONARY CORRESPONDENCE

While spending a few days in the family of a good missionary brother a short time since, I was invited to accompany himself and wife on a visit to a former mission station, now tenantless. This trip is in many respects a sample of Jamaica – the scenery of this island, it often seems to me, must be unparalleled in beauty, especially in the mountainous regions. My friend's residence was perched upon the side of an almost inaccessible mountain and the ride to his station from our own required not a little courage and self-possession, but I had been told that the trip now proposed would require still more. Still, having a great desire to see the place, it being the scene, in years past, of some of my father's missionary labors, I determined to accept their kind invitation and trusted that my courage would mount with the occasion.

The distance being only about three miles, we determined to take the cool of the day for our ride, and, accordingly, a little before three o'clock our horses were saddled and at the door. Very quickly equipped in our riding habits and broad brimmed hats we were mounted and away.

Now don't imagine an equestrian company cantering off on a smooth road, side by side. No, indeed. We are obliged to go very slowly, one behind another, and the road for most of the way is so steep that our great care is to retain our seats in the saddle, and keep a good tight rein, lest our horses stumble and send us over their heads. A little of this difficult traveling brings us to a more level way, and we lift our eyes to gaze at the glorious scene spread out before us.

We are skirting along the side of a mountain which forms a part of the boundary of an immense basin stretching away in the distance and, just below us, thickly dotted with the native thatched huts of wattle and daub. But this basin, though much lower than its mountain boundary, has scarcely a level spot on its whole surface. One is reminded of the ocean when heaved and tossed by some fearful tempest, but such waves no sailor ever saw, some of them thousands of feet high!

What terrible convulsions of nature must there have been that heaved these vast mountain ranges from the bottom of the sea. Clothed in perennial verdure with their ever-varying panorama of sunshine and shadows, rainbow and cloud, they stand monuments at once to God's power and love.

Now we are going down again, and still down, over slippery rocks and loose stones, our trusty beasts stumbling occasionally, as if they would surely fall, but we jerk up the reins, they recover themselves, and we are again winding our way down this long, long mountain. Suddenly our friend halts, and waiting till we come up, remarks, "We are going to have a little steep now, but you must hold on." We obey orders and follow closely as he leads the way down the winding and scarcely discernible footpath. An old ruined house is pointed out to us, far down in the valley, as the termination of our descent. We look up to see how far we have come already, and the eye is almost wearied in seeking the summit of the mountain hanging over our heads.

All at once, at a sudden turn in the pass, we come upon a beautiful cascade tumbling down the side of the mountain. How eagerly our tired horses drink of its cooling waters, and as they do so, we trace its course over those huge rocks, as it leaps from one to another, sometimes twenty feet at once.

"Oh! how beautiful!" we exclaim, and wish we might stay for hours in that shady nook, drinking in the lessons of this beautifully illustrated page in the book of nature.

As we ride on, the sound of a stream of water dashing over rocks and stones comes up to our ears and occasionally, through the dense foliage, we catch a glimpse of its foaming surface. "This," our guide says, "is the Ugly River." "Why do you call it the Ugly River?" we exclaim, on hearing this. "You'll see when we come to it," is the satisfactory reply.

On the opposite bank rise abruptly cloud-capped mountains, whose sides are covered in unbroken forest. There is the huge cotton tree, with its heavy drapery of parasites; there is the tall trumpet tree, whose bare arms are beautifully dressed and

festooned with creeping vines; there is the graceful mango, with its dense, dark green foliage; the stately palm, with its huge crown of leaves, each twenty or thirty feet long; the guava, with its golden harvest of fruit; and many, many others whose names we do not know and, worse than this, cannot find out. Sounding out from these unbroken wilds, songs of strange tropical birds are heard, forcing upon us the thought that we are in a foreign land and far from home.

But it will not do to dream. We are riding along the edge of a fearful precipice overhanging the river, and a false step would send us down, down on the fatal rocks below. We shudder as we think, "What if we should go down?" Ah, that is a fearful "if," and one we do not like to think of, as our own feet hang over the frightful abyss.

At last, after nearly three miles of continuous descent, we come to the river and stopping in the middle of the fording we exclaim, "This is not Ugly! It is grand! It is sublime." Just above us, immense boulders are piled up, one above another, over which the water roars and dashes so madly that one is reminded of the rapids above Niagara, while in deep basins at their feet scarce a ripple disturbs its glassy surface. "Well," says Mr. V., "it is ugly when it is down, anyhow" this being the Jamaican term to express the state of the rivers when swollen by heavy rains at their headwaters. "It would at least be an ugly piece of business to attempt crossing it at such a time."

But we pass on, and now are ascending the opposite bank in regular corkscrew fashion. As we ride along our three horses stand one above the other on different turns, and I learn that upon one occasion almost all our American missionaries were thus suspended one over another between heaven and earth! Was not that a sight to behold?

Our path soon begins to open out before us and we say to ourselves we must be near some human habitation. Sure enough, here is a bit of stone wall, and in a moment more of a house is in sight. Ah, yes, this is Hermitage. We ride through the broken gate and are soon at the door. The saddles are thrown off and while the horses nibble the nice green grass in the yard, we take a tour over the place.

Entering the house we are pleased to find it so far furnished as to have a very cozy, home-like air. It has been used somewhat as a health retreat by the missionaries since its former occupants removed. But my friends have gone to another part of the house and I hear them calling, "Grandma Burton, Grandma Burton." So Hermitage is not without its Hermitress it seems. Of course I must see her and soon join them.

Says Mr. V., "Do you remember Minister Ingraham?"

"Member, too much, me minister. She look like him," turning to me. "Too much, minister, too much."

"She's his daughter."

“He!” she screams and claps her hands so sharply I start involuntarily. “He, me missus! God too good! I never spect this!” And eagerly shaking my proffered hand, she seems unable to express her joy.

We go over the house, and then out to the old deserted chapel. Only the bare walls and the thatched roof remain, and it looks dreary enough. The owner of the land in this region would not sell to the people, and weary of renting they have bought land in another place. This made it necessary to abandon this station and establish another.

An immense sand-box tree grows close beside the chapel, and seems endeavoring, with its wide-spreading branches, to hide its desolation. Going through the graveyard, we notice ebony trees planted at some of the graves and are told that their wiry strong branches were used for flogging slaves in slavery times. Oh, slavery! Is there no end to thy horrors?

On a grassy slope apart from the rest is a little grave, enclosed by a neat paling over which blooms the beautiful legustrunea. There lies little Willie. No wonder the now childless parents bend lovingly over the grave and, with hushed voices and tearful eyes, tell how one beautiful day he sickened and died. How mysterious God’s dealings with His children often seem! But “the end shall tell, the dear Lord ordereth all things well.”

We visit a little stream that dances down by the house, and then come in to rest and talk with Grandma Burton.

It is getting late, and soon remounting, we are winding our way back again. How tedious that long ascent seems, and how we pity our poor horses as they strain every muscle in clambering over the rocks. We talk of alighting, but our friend positively forbids this, and we ride on, thankful that we are not heavier.

How cheerful is the first sight of our friend’s neat abode, and we fall to musing on the time, perhaps far distant, when such snug little cottages shall take the place of the miserable native huts all around us. If we did not know that our ancestors dwelt in worse abodes than these, we could hardly believe that time would ever come.

One more hard pull and our panting horses are at the door. The little trip just over is in many respects a sample of traveling in Jamaica. Many rides are longer, but few over steeper roads. Still, if one has a brave heart and trusty beast, there is much enjoyment in them.

S.C.I.P.

**From Sarah to Mother**

Oberlin Station  
September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1860

*My Dear Mother,*

*It must be three or four weeks ago that I wrote you in great haste, hoping my letter would go to America by the steamer, which I supposed would go the next day. But our messenger returned with word that the steamer left that very day, so our package of letters was just too late. Very likely it is still in Kingston. Bro. Wolcott and wife are just recovering from dangerous attacks of fever and by the advice of Kingston physicians are making preparations to visit the States very soon.*

*A mission meeting is called in Eliot today to consult upon matters growing out of this sudden movement. Bigelow has gone to this meeting. What arrangements will be made I cannot say. Brother Walcott has been pastor of the church at Brainerd since Mr. Hall left, in addition to his duties at Richmond. Who can take his place? The hope of seeing Mr. Lane or someone to take charge of the Brainerd church so long deferred has made our hearts sick. Mr. Thompson seems to think he can do it, but his health is quite miserable and any addition to his present duties will almost certainly break him down. Bro's. Venning and Starbuck are both in poor health and the latter fully expects to return to the States in May and probably will not return. As for poor Bigelow, he has been just as nearly sick as he could well be and looks so haggard I am sure he cannot bear up under much more.*

*This completes our list of ministers. If we don't get help soon we might about as well give up the ship and all go home, don't you think so? But his word is sure who says, "As thy days are, so shall thy strength be." His cause is far dearer to him than it can be to us, and no doubt he will provide means to carry on his work either with or without us.*

*Since I last wrote I have had heaps upon heaps of company which has kept me wearied constantly both in mind and body. Dear little Mary is in the midst of teething and for a few days past has seemed really sick. She is feverish and restless night and day.*

*The poor man whom I wrote you we had taken in to our house in such a sad state died yesterday. By sitting up half the night to help make a coffin, Bigelow was able to attend his funeral this morning before he left for the mission meeting. Poor Finn. He had been a great sufferer. The disease in his feet seemed to go to his vitals. He had a dreadful cough, and for the past few days his breathing has been exceeding difficult and painful, though much of the time he seemed quite unconscious.*

*Yesterday the ants got at the sores on his feet, but he seemed to know nothing of it. Still, he was in such a state that B. thought he must be bathed. We called in two of our neighbors to help do it. They raised him and the phlegm in his mouth seemed to choke him, for he gasped once or twice and was gone. When B. came to say that he was dead, I could but exclaim, "It is better so." If like Lazarus, he was carried to Abraham's bosom,*

*how infinitely better! Last Saturday he seemed to be much worse and I talked with him about dying. He repeated over and over, "I am a sinner, I am a sinner, but I trust in Jesus. If he call me this moment, I glad to go." This was in a forced whisper, the only way he has conversed for a long time.*

*He had one acre of land, and this with his small stock of clothing (given him by Bro. Starbuck and ourselves) he gave to a little boy by the name of Robert who has been feet and hands to him in all these long years of helplessness. We sent for one of his uncles a few days ago to come and see him, and last night he helped make the coffin. No other of his many relatives has been near him. Our children have been very kind in helping wait on him, especially Annie and Marie. He would always call on the latter if it was anything she could do.*

*Sunday, the second of September, little Mary was baptized by Bro. Venning, but I consider that it was only the public profession on our part of a consecration made at her birth. I try to keep in mind constantly that she is given to the Lord and twine the tendrils of my love so loosely about her that when ever or wherever her heavenly Father calls her, I may say, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away and blessed be his name."*

*I fear it is bad for baby for me to get so overworked and heated. Am looking about to see if there is not some way in which I can favor myself more. The hardest work I do is helping about our washing and ironing. If I could hire these done, at least in part, it would be a great relief. We cannot afford it, but B. says we can, better than to have me sick, so perhaps we shall try to manage it somehow.*

*Bigelow is trying to spare himself more than he has, but recently there have been so many extra demands upon him in the way of long horseback rides that he has rather gone beyond his strength.*

*October 3<sup>rd</sup> - I take up this unfinished letter to say that it is decided to join Oberlin and Providence under Bigelow's care and send Bro. Starbuck to Brainerd, while he stays. This decision makes us feel more like making Jamaica our home, and we are talking about spending our lives here, excepting short visits to the States.*

*I want to write two or three more letters this P.M., so goodbye.*

*Your Sarah*

*I must not forget to tell you that Mrs. Wolcott called here on the way to Kingston and gave my machine such a nice cleaning and oiling that it goes nicely now. SCP*



**From Bigelow to Josephine**

Oberlin  
October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1860

*Dear Sister Josephine:*

*In consequence of so much sickness as has visited the mission this summer, I have not been able to write the letter to the Columbus S.S. children which I had hoped to do.*

*I have been exceedingly busy in one way and another, though I can scarcely tell how. I suppose that your quarterly meeting will be next Sabbath, and the children will be sorely disappointed. I am sorry indeed, but it is too late to think of sending them a letter this time. If I can secure time to write soon, I will do so and will endeavor to send them another also for their January meeting. Please explain to them how it is that they have been disappointed this time. Maria is still doing well and, we think, is trying to improve her privileges.*

*I have already sent you a letter asking for the \$75 together with whatever interest should be due at the time of sending it. I understand that a part of the interest (you did not say exactly how much) was sent to Father. I suppose he will lay it out in boots, etc. I hope that my request for the money will not at all inconvenience you. I am quite cramped pecuniarily just now and hope to receive the money by or before the 1<sup>st</sup> of December next. In order to do this, it should be sent to Mr. Tappan<sup>30</sup> by the 1<sup>st</sup> of November.*

*I have already acknowledged the receipt of the \$40 you sent for the support of Maria.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Wolcott have been very sick and are obliged to return to the U.S. for a season for their health. Thus Brainerd is again left altogether destitute, for Bro. Wolcott was its pastor since Bro. Hall went home. The mission thinks it best that Bro. Starbuck should go there until spring (when he is to return to America, not expecting to come back again), and that I should at once become pastor of Providence as well as Oberlin. All expectation of giving up the station here has itself been given up.*

*Bro's. Starbuck and Venning have had the fever, though they are better now. Miss Woodcock is having fever and ague and is entirely laid up by it. The rest of the mission are quite worn down. Pray for us that strength be given as our days and above all that our faith fail not.*

*It is a time of darkness with us as a mission. There are but few to do a great deal of work and that work is of a most disheartening nature.*

*Yours truly, T. B. Penfield*

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<sup>30</sup> Lewis Tappan was treasurer of the American Missionary Association as well as a prominent leader in the abolitionist movement

**From Sarah to Mother**

Oberlin, Jamaica  
October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1860

*My Dear Mother,*

*I have just sent off a letter setting forth the feebleness of our little band of missionaries, and now I take my pen to tell you of a heavy blow that has fallen upon us in the death of our dear Sister Douglass. She was sick only one week with what we supposed was ague and nothing else.*

*When Mr. Wolcott's people left for America, they, Mr. and Mrs. Douglass, moved into their house and she was almost immediately taken sick. Mrs. Thompson was over to help take care of her Monday night, the 9<sup>th</sup> inst., and not thinking her at all dangerous, went home early in the morning (Eliot is only a mile and a half from Richmond). Soon after she left, Mrs. D. was taken with very distressing wandering pains, and after trying in vain with hot applications to relieve them, her husband saw that her countenance was changing and told her he feared she was dying. She replied very calmly, "Well, if this is death, all my pain and trouble will soon be over and abundant grace will be given to you."*

*Mr. Douglass heard the foreman riding up into the yard and, stepping to the door, asked him to ride to Eliot for Mr. Thompson immediately. But before he came, she was dead, and Frank and one attendant alone with her. His wife's words have seemed to be wonderfully verified to him. "Abundant grace" has been given to him so that he bears up most remarkably under this heavy trial. Dear Elise! A life of great usefulness seemed to be opening before her, indeed she had entered upon it, and in a moment "she was not, for God took her." We feel sure that, like Enoch, she "walked with God." They were trying to build a large house to accommodate many more pupils and she especially felt in great haste to get into it, but now no doubt she has a mansion, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

*I think I spoke of a serious illness she had a few months ago. We thought her life in great peril then and, as a mission, made her an earnest and especial subject of prayer. Our prayers were answered then, but now God seemed to take her before we had a chance to pray for her recovery. I have seen her but twice but loved her from the first. Indeed, she was universally beloved. In July I had a very pleasant visit with her. In speaking of her recent illness she said, "I felt like a little child who had got within sight of his father's house but he put out his hand and beckoned me back saying, "Now my child, go back for a little while." I think she felt in her heart ever since that she had but a little while to stay.*

*It was 7 o'clock Tuesday morning that she died and the messenger brought us the word about noon. Bigelow was not at home. He was accompanying Henry Wolcott part of the way home. I sent a messenger back to him and he sent back a horse for me. I left baby in charge of Anna, and getting ready as quickly as possible mounted my horse and rode alone as far as Grateful Hill where B. was waiting for me. As we started on from*

*there it began to sprinkle and soon heavy rain set in which lasted all the way to Mt. Patience where Mrs. Fisher lives.*

*It was so late that we thought we would spend the night there and go on to Richmond in the morning to attend the funeral. Mrs. Fisher gave us dry clothing and a warm supper and as we talked mournfully together of God's mysterious dealings with us as a mission, a knock was heard at the door and Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were announced. They had got word about the same time we did, but having seven miles in addition to our ten to ride, had been riding for two or three hours in pitchy darkness over roads that in daylight were almost impassible. By securing guides they had at last reached us in safety.*

*We woke before daylight the next morning and had our horses at the door for starting on when a messenger brought word that we were too late. They were unable to keep the body and Mrs. D. had been buried the night before. The funeral sermon was not to be preached till Sunday. So, under the circumstances, it was not thought best for all of us to go on, though Sherman (as we call Mr. Wilson) and Bigelow did so. It was from them that I had the particulars. Nellie and I stayed with Mrs. Fisher and hoped our husbands would return so that we might reach home that night, but another rain set in and it was dark before we saw them.*

*I felt very anxious about baby, but committed her to the care of our kind Heavenly Father and slept sweetly. Early the next morning we started for home, where we arrived before noon.*

*Baby had been very good, but was very glad to see "Mama." The roads have not been so bad since we came to Jamaica as they are now, so much rain has fallen lately. In one place my horse, in going around a bad slough, went right under a crooked tree that hung over the "pass." I saw that I was coming right against it and took hold of it if possible to pull myself beyond it but lost my balance in so doing and fell off. It stunned me and for a moment I could not get up, but Bigelow and Sherman came to my assistance. The horse stood perfectly still. As soon as I was on my feet I bowed my head on the bank in thankfulness to my kind Preserver. I was but slightly hurt though badly muddied. We were near a stream of water where I bathed my face and my friends cleaned off some of the mud. If we had been riding at all fast, coming against that tree with all my force would have killed me, but the Lord was my keeper.*

*I have had new views of his goodness of late and my heart overflows in love and thankfulness. I want to walk so close with God that if Bigelow or I should be taken next, I may be equally prepared.*

*Bigelow has preached at Providence today and I have read a sermon to the people here. I have done this a good many times lately and have been blest myself and a blessing to others in it, I hope. We are pretty well.*

*Yours aff. S. C. Penfield*



Grace Hill

## JAMAICA 1861

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Providence, Jamaica  
January 18, 1861*

*My dear Mother,*

*I think Bigelow mentioned in his last that we expected to spend a little time at this station. Well, we moved over on Monday of this week and are now quite comfortably settled. No family has resided here since Mr. Hall moved away to Brainerd several years ago and the place has rather gone to decay, but we are doing what we can to renovate it. We spent the day Wednesday in papering the hall or sitting room, having covered the old lounge the day previous, and now having added our melodeon and large rocking chair to the scant furniture, it looks quite home like. The house is a very old one and the outside looks quite weather beaten, but we are making arrangements to have it whitewashed. When this is done, the other members of the mission will hardly know the place.*

*The people here seem very much pleased to have us stop here awhile and have sent in many presents of yam, chickens, etc. They seem to appreciate our presence far better than the people at Oberlin. The tone and piety in the church seems much deeper. Just now there seems to be something of an awakening among them. If things continue so pleasant, we shall be loath to leave.*

*The week of prayer was observed more or less in all our stations and we trust it was the beginning of better days for us. Union meetings were held at various places, which were deeply interesting. I attended one at Eliot (Mr. Thompson's station), which was very refreshing.*

*We were all delighted to see Julia Treat. She had a very quick and safe passage, just two weeks from the day she left Mesopotamia.<sup>31</sup> She was at Richmond, Jamaica, her field of labor. Sallie had hoped to get her to go to Chesterfield and so go to Richmond herself, but at our mission meeting it was decided to make no change. (I do hope she will make up her mind to be contented where she is now. Her great desire to go to Richmond has been quite a trial to some of us, for some reasons, especially since Mrs. Douglass's death).*

*It is a time of general health in the mission now. I am better myself than I have been for a long, long time. I weaned baby a few weeks ago and no doubt this has something to do with it.*

*Our barrel was quite satisfactory. It had been so long on the way that I feared its contents might be damaged, but was very happily disappointed. The boots and shoes*

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<sup>31</sup> Mesopotamia, Ohio, a small town east of Cleveland. Julia was Sarah's classmate at Oberlin.

*fitted nicely, though the morocco ones were rather large. The new cloth was just the thing, though I could have made good use of it if there had been twice as much, especially of the bleached.*

*The clothing was very acceptable as well as the beans and dried fruits. The draft for \$100.00 and the contents of the barrel made us richer than we have been any time since coming here, though a large share of the money had to go to liquidate our old debts. I am sick of running in debt I can assure you and mean to go without anything and everything rather than try it again.*

*The letters in the barrel were rather old, but fairly good for all that. I am very glad you have decided to propose the plan of supporting a child to the Oberlin Sunday School. We have two or three bright little boys in mind that we should be glad to do something for.*

*In regard to Baby Mary's picture, I intended to have it taken when I went to town last month, but the artist was too busy to attend to it. We will try again and have it done as soon as possible. She is well and happy as ever. Has a great idea of talking, though not much of walking. Rachel's baby will beat her in this. She has a very comical way of creeping on one knee, which I know would amuse you. Of course she gets her clothes very dirty in this way of traveling.*

*I am pained, though not very much surprised, to hear that under such a weight of cares your health is beginning to suffer. Do take good care of yourself. We are so anxious to see you well and strong if we are permitted to return to the States in a few years. Your account of the revival in Oberlin interested us deeply. The power of the Lord seems to be felt in an unusual degree throughout the world in these days, and we can only pray that He will go conquering the nations of the earth until every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ.*

*We are putting our Thomas out to learn a trade and have a little brown boy named Willie Magg to take his place. Bigelow devotes three hours in the morning at present to teaching him and Maria. Mr. Fisher's oldest daughter, Mary Emma, may spend some time with us and study with them. She wishes to learn to play the melodeon. Our home in Providence is much more quiet and retired than the one at Oberlin, and I enjoy the change very much.*

*Your very aff. daughter, Sarah*

*Mother, do you know whether John and Ionie ever received a letter we wrote them long, long ago? Love to them both. How I long to see that baby. Of course it has a white head, blue eyes, and is fair as a lily.*

**From Sarah to Sarah Cowles**

Providence, Jamaica  
January 28, 1861

*Dear Sister Sarah,*

*Your short letter in the barrel was very thankfully received, for I really did not know as I should ever get another letter from you. Baby Mary was very pleased with her presents, though at first she was almost afraid of the doll.*

*The present of factory cloth from yourself was quite acceptable. I hope you find the cloak some return for it. No doubt this very day you are wrapped up in it. The thought of a northern winter almost makes me shudder. I don't know how I could keep warm if I were to return, I am sure.*

*At this season of the year the nights and mornings are quite chilly with us, but the middle of the day is just comfortably warm. Some of our coolest mornings a fire would be quite comfortable, but I keep warm very well by flying about to help get breakfast and sweep out this house.*

*I take it for granted that you are enjoying good health, as I hear nothing to the contrary. The climate in Columbus is far better for weaklings than that of Oberlin in my opinion.*

*You have never replied to my queries about your coming out here. I suppose you did not think it your duty to do so. Perhaps you would like to support one of our native children. We take a little boy by the name of Charley Lawrence into the family next week. He is only seven years old, but "smart as a steel trap," is only slightly colored. He lived a while with Mrs. Douglass and can read quite well. I am sure you would like him very much. Our Anna is his mother's sister.*

*Thomas, who has been so long with us, goes to learn the shoemaker's trade. A brown boy named Willie Magg takes his place. He is quiet and faithful in the performance of his duties but not remarkably bright.*

*Bigelow teaches our children three hours every morning. When he is gone from home, I take his place.*

*Baby Mary is happy as the day is long. Has six teeth and more coming. Is just learning to walk, though she is nearly a year old. You will remember her birthday is the anniversary of our dear Mary's death. Nearly two years she has spent in the company of that blood washed throng which ceases not, day nor night, singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." The last year of her life she seemed, like Mary of old, to sit at the feet of Jesus, but now she is like him for she sees him as he is. Like her, may we choose to do that good part which shall not be taken from her. I fear I have been too much like*

*Martha, careful and troubled about many things, but hereafter Mary shall be my pattern. Though that name is so common, there is after all none more sacred. "One should love the name of Mary for the sake of her who bore" etc. I should like to get hold of those words.*

*Yours very aff. Sarah Penfield*

**From Sarah to an unnamed aunt**

*Providence, Jamaica  
January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1861*

*My dear Friend,*

*I am trying to complete my package of letters to go by the next steamer today, as I expect to go to Chesterfield tomorrow and from there to Eliot, where Mr. Thompson lives, to get him to attend to my teeth. I have had a toothache off and on for two or three weeks and it is now getting quite unendurable. I thank you very much for your letter, as I know in the multiplicity of your cares it must be quite an effort for you to write.*

*I have pondered much upon what you said about the difficulty of retaining the first warm love between husband and wife, parent and child. I do believe it is very seldom done, but do not see why it may not be. Shut out as I am from almost all other society, I do not see how I could live without it. By the help of God I mean to keep it if such a thing is possible. I have seen very few couples that came up to my idea of conjugal happiness. We scarcely do ourselves, but we come nearer to it than I feared we should. I am sure we both feel like sacrificing almost anything to attain it.*

*You wished me to write about baby, and I cannot say that I am at all unwilling to do so. She is by no means precocious, but she is healthy and happy. It seems to me she makes as little trouble as a baby well can. She is a year old Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup>, but does not walk, though she stands up by chairs, etc. Creeps all over and gets her dresses very dirty, of course. I find it takes a deal of sewing to keep her clothes in order. Everybody says she looks like her father, though I can scarcely perceive it myself. She has dark hair and blue eyes.*

*Your babies are all off your hands now I suppose. What a family you have about you. May you have the joy of seeing them all walking in the fear of the Lord. A little of your experience in training little folks would be of great service to me. I mean to begin in time, anyhow, and already Mary is learning what "No, no, mustn't touch" means. She is quite a chatterbox and amuses us with her merry prattle.*

*She was given to missionary work at her birth and we mean to train her up with that constantly in view. I often think of Alonzo and Amanda and pray that they may be led to devote themselves to the service of God and so bring up their children in the*



*nurture and admonition of the Lord. Much love to them as well as all enquiring friends. I have written them a second time and hope to hear from them soon.*

*Your aff. niece, Sarah*

The following note, presumably from the unnamed aunt, accompanied this letter:

*Tabor, June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1879*

*To Miss Mary C. Penfield – these letters written by your mother to myself and daughter I think will be very valuable to you. I have kept them many years and have enjoyed reading them over and over again. I presume you have seen many of her letters written to your friends, but this will be nonetheless welcome.*

**From Bigelow to his parents**

*Providence, Jamaica  
February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1861*

*My Dear Father and Mother,*

*I hope ere long to be able to write you at some length in respect to the glorious work of grace with which our God is reviving this island. It is a time of great searching of heart among all classes of the people. Oh such depths of iniquity as are thus revealed in the church as well as out. Yet I believe God is smiting in order to heal. The wound must be probed before it is thoroughly healed.*

*There was great excitement in the time of cholera as I am told, and the multitudes ran to the ministers and through the churches, but there was not then such powerful conviction, such hearty, full and free confession of sin as now. The revival has been spreading through a great portion of the island gradually and has now reached our side. It is astonishing to see how it pervades all classes of society.*

*But for the present, I must leave this general phase of the work that I may come nearer home, for my reason for writing you now is that I may say that God is drawing very near my own soul and seeking to revive it, and also that I may confess my sins and backsliding to you. Many of the sins of my youth have been brought up freshly before me and I feel as if I wished to confess them before the whole world. This I know is impossible, but my relations to you and our family as well as the Oberlin church are such that I feel it my privilege to pour out to you and to them my long pent up convictions of sin. I cannot tell you how the time past of my life now looks to me, only that it has been all wrong. I seem to have lived so far to no purpose except as a testimony to the undeserved and uncovenanted mercies of God.*

*Had the church known the tenth part of my sins in either word or thought it would have been their duty to have excommunicated me. During all the years of my connection*

*with the church, I seldom if ever partook of the Lord's Supper without feelings of condemnation. The thought of death always brought terror to my soul. In fact, I doubt if I lived a truly Christian life one week at a time during all those years. My spiritual history, if written, would be only the record of almost daily conflicts in most of which Satan had the advantage. It might have been said of me in truth, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." My conscience was too strong to suffer me to neglect prayer altogether, for even a few days at a time. Yet as I had no regular time for secret prayer in the morning, it was generally crowded into a few set sentences or delayed till I was in the midst of my daily occupations. At night I generally knelt down and began to pray but too often found myself going to sleep and so crept into bed.*

*Whenever I did pray in private or public, I tried for the time to rise and draw near to God, that the curse of the hypocrite might not rest on me, but would almost immediately fall back as deep as before if not deeper. Thus my life might be properly set forth as one continued series of attempted risings and successful fallings.*

*I still think (strange as it may seem) that I was converted when a very little child, but my walking has been much more in the broad than in the narrow road. Such being the truth in respect to my heart experience, you will not be surprised to hear that I committed many outward sins, though of course not openly. I was dishonest in my dealings with what the world calls little things whenever I felt pretty certain of not being found out. I was sure to let a mistake made in my favor go uncorrected. I have more times than I can at all number or remember taken what I wished from my parents' cupboard, drawers, storeroom, orchard and library, contrary to their known wish. My word could not be depended on in such cases, as to have spoken the truth would have been to criminate myself, unless there was evidence against me so that the fear of being proved a liar overcame the fear of being detected in other wrong doing. I was so fettered by conscience or public opinion that I did not dare commit what the world calls great and outbreaking sins, but judged by the standard laid down by Christ, in heart I have broken all the laws of God and man. My heart has been too often the abode of lust and impure thoughts. Pride and vanity have had great power over me. My time was taken up with manual labor and the regular studies of my course, while little attention was paid to prayer and the study of God's word. I soothed my conscience by saying that I was preparing for God's work. Meanwhile I was doing Satan's, as it now seems to me. May He whom I have so deeply wronged forgive me. I believe He does. And now my dear parents, I ask you also to forgive me for all the wrong I have done you. I ask John's forgiveness that for so many years I was a stumbling block to his soul. How could I have been anything else without the spirit of God? And that I did not have.*

*Please read this letter to both parts of the Oberlin Church in their regular meetings. Ask them to extend their forgiveness to me, who was as a dead branch among them, and to pray for me that henceforth I may abide in Christ the vine and so yield fruit to his glory.*

*Your affectionate son, T. Bigelow Penfield*

**From Sarah to Mother**

Providence  
March 6, 1861

*My dear Mother,*

*I know your heart will be pained when you receive the letter which Bigelow has just written you. Still you must rejoice that the Lord is drawing so graciously near us. I, too, have been led to look over the past and to lament deeply that I have wandered so far from my blessed Savior.*

*Those words, "If a man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his," has been pressed home to my heart with crushing weight, and in view of them I am condemned. I know that while in your family, too often my spirit was anything but that of God. I know I often felt hard against John and Sarah and sometimes (How can I say it?) toward you and father Cowles. Do forgive me, as I pray that God will, for Christ's sake. In regard to Sarah and John, I felt that they wronged me, but that is no excuse for me, and if I did not forgive them their trespasses, how could Christ forgive mine? I cannot say that I did not strive against those wicked feelings and often I really had grace to overcome them, but not always. I wish to ask their forgiveness for this.*

*But that part of my life which looks the worst to me is that since I came to Jamaica, especially after I was taken sick. I was greatly tempted to think my lot a hard one, and too, too often I yielded and in my heart murmured at the Lord's dealings with me. When the Lord was in love chastening me that he might draw me near to himself, like a naughty child, I rebelled against him. Though I was scarcely conscious of it, I had less and less access to the throne of grace, and my prayers seemed only to go out into the air.*

*A few weeks since, I attended a mission prayer meeting at Chesterfield. The hearts of the rest seemed to be much drawn out in prayer and I was led to contrast my feelings with theirs, and my distress in view of it was almost insupportable and I could scarcely restrain my grief. When all of them prayed except myself, I broke down and told them I could not pray. I was all wrong and if I had ever been converted, I must be converted over again. Mr. Thompson said he was obliged to pass through just such deep waters when he first came out here, before he learned the lesson all we missionaries must learn in one way or another, i.e. to depend entirely on Christ for religious life.*

*In America, especially in dear old Oberlin, we are borne along on the wave of religious feeling and it requires very little effort to take the right course. But here the case is reversed. There is nothing (but the grace of Christ), nothing external to keep us up but everything to pull us down, and first we know, we find ourselves in the slough of despair.*

*This should send us right to Christ, but as for me I had groped on in darkness, and I might almost say despair, for a long time. Christ's grace was sufficient for me and now I saw it was only unbelief that kept me in the dark, for does he not say, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Before I came home I had a long talk with Bro. Douglass, which did me much good. I determined that henceforth the fact that Christ was mine and I was his should be forever settled, that if I really gave myself to him, it was wrong for me to doubt that he accepted me. I count not myself to have attained, but laying aside every weight and sin that doth easily beset me I seek to run with patience the race set before me, looking only to Jesus for help. Let this yearning for Christian intercourse and the innumerable haps of enlightened society be forever crucified and Christ be my only dependence.*

*We are feeling deeply our need of a richer baptism of the Holy Spirit and are rejoicing at cheering manifestations of his presence among us. A work of thorough cleansing is going on in our churches, and the shocking confessions of sin which are made are painful to listen to. Plainly these secret sins have been the cause of the deadness of our churches. Now all these hidden things are being brought to light. Many are obliged to confess adultery and fornication, others stealing or malice. This day has been set apart for fasting and prayer in view of the state of the church. The members of the inquiry class, many of whom have gone off with these bands of revivalists and who seem to be in great peril, have been specially remembered, and this evening we hear that five have returned and more are coming. It has been a blessed day for us. Though some are still under conviction, there have been a large number of conversions already and the backsliders reclaimed are about as numerous as the church itself. The good work is going on at Oberlin and indeed at all our stations. Glory to God. Our days of dearth and darkness seem to be past and the light of the sun of righteousness shines in upon us.*

*We have just received per steamer a large package of letters. Two from you and father and one from Josephine. The last date is February 16<sup>th</sup> when Margaret was confined. I long to hear how it has turned with her. Perhaps she has already passed away, but the will of the Lord be done. If Sarah doesn't get better, you would be well to send her to Jamaica I guess. No doubt her life would be much longer here if she is not too far gone. Love to all.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah Penfield*

**From Sarah to Father**

*Providence  
April 16<sup>th</sup> 1861*

*My dear Father,*

*I think I have referred in my letters several times to the "Bands" without stopping to explain their nature and origin, and it is but just that I should take time to explain the matter more clearly. The first band that I heard of came from St. Mary's over to Montego Bay. They were a company of people (over 100 I believe) who had enjoyed the*

*blessings of the revival themselves and wished to extend it to others. They had songs of their own which they sang as they went. People were startled by such a strange thing and flocked together in great numbers at the Bay, where many were stricken down under conviction and eventually formed a band of their own.*

*Then these went out and formed other bands, so they have multiplied till this part of the island is full of them. From all I can learn, the symptoms of those stricken are very similar to cases we read of in Ireland, but this band movement seems quite original. It is customary for those connected with them to wear as a badge a white handkerchief bound across their foreheads. When they enter a chapel, after marching and singing for a while, all kneel and the leader, or Shepherd as he is called, offers a prayer. Sometimes if the minister is present, he is asked to do this and read a portion of scripture.*

*Then the marching and singing begins again and members of the band go to the impenitent who may be gathered by this time and labor faithfully to bring them to Jesus. Sometimes they get them to kneel and pray with and for them. Many by this time begin to rock back and forth and soon throw themselves upon the floor, often throwing themselves about with great violence. Their feet are tied and often several persons are required to hold them. When they "come to" they are urged to confess their sins and cry for mercy. To outsiders, the place seems a perfect Babel. In the middle of the room a company are marching round and round singing very loud and many gesticulating with their arms. Some are screaming and rolling about the floor, others praying at the top of their voices for mercy, and others still pleading with the sinners with strong crying and tears to come to Jesus.*

*After a time, the Shepherd clasps his hands and all is still. Spreading his hands he says, "Let us pray." Everyone drops upon his knees and then as they say they "lift up their thoughts to God." There is much responding and for the time you seem to be in a Methodist protracted meeting. Some of them make strange prayers, asking the Lord to "shake them over the gulf, but not to let them drop in," and such like. "Flog the body for the good of the soul" is another petition we sometimes hear, but where they have proper instruction these things gradually disappear. The same is true of many superstitions and odd notions they have. Many think judgment is just at hand and, interpreting the last of the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Joel as applying to these times, are looking for all kinds of signs and wonders. Some think themselves favored with communication from the other world, and in many bands such persons, calling themselves Messengers, do great mischief. One of their superstitions is that no one must eat anything salt within nine days after they are stricken.*

*These messengers have been saying that if any of the band went back to this world they would eat grass, and sure enough many, when they have been doing anything wrong, do rush into the "bush," eating grass, crowing like cocks, and all manner of strange things.*

*Many of the young people who had joined our inquiry class went off to meet some of these bands and were stricken. They were formed into a band by themselves and by*

great watching and care, Bigelow has been able to keep them from most of these delusions. The inquiry class at Providence now numbers over fifty and we expect to receive 35 at our next communion.

Almost all the mission have set themselves against the bands, but after our people went off to them, Bigelow felt he must keep hold of them. Sometimes we have been ready to despair of ever leading them into the right way, but still clinging to them as with a death grasp and pleading with God for them, one by one we have seen them coming into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God. Oh, it has been sweet to hear their experiences of the love of God! Such experiences we scarcely expected to hear from such an ignorant people. I wish you could have sat down with us at the young people's meeting yesterday morning and heard one after another speak from their full hearts of the love of Jesus. One such with deep feeling said, "O, Jesus is worthy to be praised. I feel his love in my heart like a little flame burning more and more."

When one is stricken, they call it "having the revival." This morning Mrs. Batten came to me and said that Anna (who is spending a little time at home) had the revival last night. I was quite surprised, as I had considered her a Christian for a long time. But she soon came to speak for herself. "Ah," she said, "I never knew Jesus before. Yes, according to your faith be it unto you. I did not know what faith was before. Now I believe."

I have been interested to see how Bigelow within a short time has seized upon faith as the center of all Christianity. His preaching has a new power. No sermon of his has seemed to do more good than one last Sabbath from the text "Oh Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help." Many have referred to it as the means of great good to their souls. The church here has been much revived and a few of those at Oberlin also, but the work is by no means great there. We feel as if we must devote ourselves almost entirely to the work here. The house here is small and we are wanting to build. There is talk of buying land on the new carriage road to Kingston, a mile or so from here, and moving the station down there.

Yours aff. Sarah Penfield

P.S. I should say the bands hold their meetings in the night, many of them keeping up all night long, but at Providence, Bigelow generally prevails on them to sleep part of the night, the men in one room and the women in another, camping down on the floor.

**From Sarah to Mother**

Oberlin  
April 19, 1861

My Dear Mother,

Our missions are holding a series of joint meetings at different stations in turn every Friday. The meeting is at Brainerd today and I had expected to go until the rain

*came down, so that I was obliged to give it up and Mr. Wilson and Bigelow went on without me. It has not rained any since they left and the sun is shining brightly now so that I might have gone, but in stead of wasting my time in vain regret, I have devoted it to letter writing.*

*We stopped at Providence until the mission meeting the first of April and then came back here, but B. still spends much of his time there. There seemed to be some shaking among the bones here on Wednesday morning and we are looking earnestly for the outpouring of the spirit here.*

*Bigelow has all he can do at Providence, and the old story of giving up Oberlin has come up again. He feels that there are faithful ministers enough in the field to do all the work and has suggested that the church here invite a Wesleyan minister who has a small church about a mile each side of us to make the three churches one at this place. A few are willing but many are not. Some are quite jealous of the Providence people for "getting us away from them." Hall called the other evening and asked how I liked Providence. I told him I did not like the place much but I liked the people well. "Better than Oberlin?" said he. "I don't know," I replied, "they like us better." and B. echoed the remark. This got out among church members and came up in meeting. Many were grieved at it and protested that they did love us very much. B. said it was perhaps unwise for us to say what we did, but as we had said it, he could prove it true, and he went on to show them how neglectful they had been in keeping up the station, etc., until rather than ask them again he had either done the thing himself or hired it done. As we say, they were quite used up and one after another said, "Minister say true. We do neglect. I am well ashamed." What the end of these things will be we cannot tell, but we only ask the Lord, "What wilt thou have us do?"*

*Our little Mary is cutting her double teeth now and is quite worrisome. She is often quite a trial to my patience, but I have a much larger stock, I trust, than formerly. "My grace is sufficient to thee." is my sheet anchor and, pleading that promise, I come boldly to the throne of grace for help in my time of need. I often feel that I am perfectly unfit for the task of training up this little immortal in the way to Heaven, but I know His strength is made perfect in our weakness. I want to see her brought into the fold as soon as she shall know to choose good and evil. Do pray for me that my faith fail not. We did not move our things back from Providence as it seemed likely that we should not stop here long and so have some inconveniences to put up with, but I must say I care far less for such things than I did. The fact is I have been too worldly-minded. I have not written half I want to, but I am too dull to write more now. This languor and lassitude is a great hindrance to my work. I am glad B. does not feel it as much as I do, but he is looking worn. He has been up so much with the bands that he has lost much sleep.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah*

**Article from Rev. T.B. Penfield in *The American Missionary*, May 1861**

## Missionary Correspondence

Oberlin Station

Our mission is “sharing largely in the blessing” already, though not in the measure we are yet hoping for. There is an intense and all-pervading excitement on the minds of the masses on every side. Bands of “revivalists,” as they are called, are going from chapel to chapel all through our part of the island. There is an immense deal of evil, but, as I believe, much more good in the movement. Where the bands are composed mainly of converts there is but little evil. But in too many cases a band contains more unconverted than converted members. Where this is true, we find plenty of mischievous results and more especially if there is no minister at hand to counsel and guide them.

As you will probably learn sufficiently as to the evils, I may speak more particularly of the good results. And first, the sin of concubinage and fornication is being torn and broken up, root and branch, and multitudes are getting married on all sides. Rum shops are being in great measure deserted, and rum sellers are complaining that if this state of things continues long, they will not be able to pay their license. Besides this, I believe the bands have been instrumental, in God’s hand, in turning a multitude from their sins to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus.

Thus believing (and on the best evidence), I have thrown myself heartily into that part of the work which I believe to be that of God. Had any warm-hearted Christians been where I was last Monday night and, in the midst of apparent confusion, listened to the fervent, intelligent and scriptural prayers of the band, their earnest invitations to the impenitent to come to Jesus, their exposition of the way, their warnings to those who refused to come, I have no doubt they would have wept for joy and thanked God with full hearts, as I did for the wonders he has wrought. Many of those who are stricken are making a pretense, I have no doubt, but multitudes confess their awful sins with such evident sorrow and even agony, that we are compelled to believe them sincere.

The bands are working mainly upon a class that it was almost impossible for us to reach, a class steeped in sin: ignorant, degraded, and superstitious. If we remember that it is from such material that the bands are formed (many to joining them immediately on their conviction without change of heart) we cannot be surprised at many “extravagancies” and even positive evils.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For further explanation of the Great Revival in Jamaica see Appendix C, page 220.



***From Sarah to Mother***

*Providence Station, Jamaica  
June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1861*

*Dearest Mother,*

*I wrote one sheet of a journal letter to you over two weeks since, but it is at Oberlin and I must begin anew so as to send a letter by this steamer. I hope you have seen Josephine's letter, which I sent by the last one. By that you will learn that we were in trouble about the Oberlin people. In the paper which I copied, they spoke of giving themselves up to the trustees, of whom very unfortunately Mr. Beardslee is one. Well, the upshot of it all is that they have extended to Mr. Beardslee a call to become their pastor and dismissed Bigelow, though it is not so much him they find fault with but the mission.*

*Bigelow has had many trying things to go through with them of late endeavoring to show them what they were doing and seeking to keep them from taking a dangerous step, but less than a third stood by him. This minority will probably join us at Providence. If they had chosen anyone but Mr. Beardslee we should have felt quite reconciled to their leaving us, but as it is it is a cause of great trial to all the mission. Mr. Beardslee made an unsuccessful effort a short time since to draw off the people at Brainerd, now he has got Oberlin people and is trying for those at Chesterfield. As Mr. Starbuck said this morning, he goeth about as a roaring lion, taking whom he will swallow down. But after all he is in the Lord's hands and cannot do any more evil than he is suffered to. Indeed, he seems so sincere in his belief that he doubtless feels he is doing God's service teaching these poor people baptismal regeneration. He says there are three conditions of salvation: repentance, faith, and baptism, i.e. immersion. Wonder how he gets over the text, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."*

*He told the Oberlin people that much as he thought of Mr. P. personally, neither he nor any of the mission would preach to them the whole Gospel. But enough of this, henceforth, the Lord willing, our work is at Providence where we find a people far more loving and appreciative than those at O. ever were. The house is not as comfortable, but with some repairs it will answer our purpose nicely. The chapel was so crowded that we took down the partition between that and the sitting room, but we intend to have a moveable curtain in its place. Back of those are two bedrooms, one of which we shall occupy and have the other for company. Bigelow has been very busy this week, plastering one room with mud, which we hope to whitewash, and building a closet in one corner. This will be almost invaluable to us. We can keep things so snug. At Oberlin, we only had a curtain across the end of the room, which had no protection from dust and dirt. Our room opens into a back room, which we shall use as a kitchen. From this we descend into the lower rooms, study, girls' room, etc.*

*We hope to start a school very soon and are wishing we might have Rosa Prunty for a teacher, as we hear she is willing to come out here. I suppose the society will hardly be able to send her out at present, however, as they are obliged to withhold our salaries this quarter. We are looking anxiously for news from the States and praying most earnestly for the downfall of slavery. The steamer is probably in town already,*

*bringing us papers and letters. May God prepare us for whatever news they may bring. Sometimes I am almost afraid to receive letters. The state of Margaret's health when you last wrote filled me with apprehension, but I may hear that she is better and some other dear one whom I believe to be in firm health has passed away.*

*How blessed to look away to that world which parting and death cannot enter. Yet a little while and we may all hope to meet there. I have just been spending a couple weeks with Mrs. Fisher at Brainerd. I think the visit did me good, though it has taken some days for me to recover from the fatigue of the ride home. The roads were very bad, and in one place the horse mired so badly that he fell flat, and with baby in my arms I was obliged to spring off. Neither of us was hurt, but I was so startled that I could not get over the trembling for some time. These long horseback rides are so hard for me that I always think after each one that I will not try another in a long time, but after all I weary of staying home too long, and when there is a gathering of the mission, I do not like to be missing and my former resolves are apt to be forgotten. It is only five miles from here to Brandon Hill and I feel as if I must visit my good friend Nellie once in a while.*

*Poor baby has been very much troubled by worms, for which I gave her medicine and brought away over twenty. She has had several boils on her head, which were very painful. These troubles, together with teething, make her rather worrisome. She runs everywhere now and says many words quite plainly. It is a great comfort as well as care to us.*

*Bigelow is pretty well. Hope he will get time to write a little.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*

*One of the people has just brought us in a small basketful of mangoes which I should like very much to share with the good folks at home. This goes by the hand of Brother Starbuck who goes home for a visit but will not be in Oberlin before Commencement when I suppose you will see Miss Woodcock also. She went last month. S.C.I.P.*

**From Bigelow to Mother**

*Richmond  
July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1861*

*Dearest Mother,*

*I think you and all my friends might justly complain of my negligence in letter writing. It has been quite inexcusable I own. I was not aware myself of how culpable I was in this respect till I called myself to an account the other day. I am not a good correspondent under any circumstances, and when I have plenty to do that seems more immediate duty, as of late, I become exceedingly poor. With this frank confession in place of an apology, I pass on.*

*I am just now in Richmond working at the carpenter's trade "from sun to sun." I came over last week Monday morning and stayed till Wednesday evening. I expect to do the same every week for the present, reserving the remainder of each week for my duties at Providence. I am likely also to have laid upon me the care of the church at Brandon Hill, which is about three or four miles distant by a most shockingly bad road, and six by a tolerably good one.*

*While speaking of working at Richmond, I ought to say that Mr. McDonald has been sent out by A.M.A. as a carpenter as long as he is needed in that capacity and a teacher thereafter. We are building over from the foundation of what used to be the "great house" of the estate. It is to be the residence of the teacher of the Industrial School. I call myself an apprentice sometimes, but of course there is no such definite arrangement entered into. Yet I am deriving much benefit and getting many a useful hint about the use and care of tools. At the same time I am making myself quite useful. We have the frame up now and I have been working on the roof so far this week. We hope to have a part of it sufficiently finished by the sickly part of the year so that it may be used in case it should seem as unhealthy again as it did last summer where Mr. Wolcott's house stands, near the works and the river. The house we are building is higher upon the hill and farther from the river, so that we hope to find it healthy in all seasons.*

*I think Sarah has told you of our leaving Oberlin in consequence of the people's becoming dissatisfied with the course of the mission toward them. They decided to leave the mission and invited J.O. Beardslee to take charge of them. Our mission would have held on at Oberlin, but unfortunately the deed of the station was so worded that whoever could get two thirds of the members to give him a call to become their minister, with the concurrence of two thirds of the trustees, could have lawful possession of the premises. This Mr. Beardslee obtained, and we of course were obliged to yield, which we did with as good a grace as possible under the circumstances. Since then Mr. B. has grown bolder and is attempting to wrest from us Hermitage, an outstation from Chesterfield under the care of Bro. Venning, upon which he has and can have not the shadow of a claim. He seems to have thrown away all love and honor in the battle he is waging against us. He told the people at Oberlin before me, and while I was still their pastor, that neither I nor any of our Mission would preach the whole Gospel to them. He told us that if we would not let him into our pulpits we were all a pack of sinners. He said in a letter to Bro. Venning a few days ago that as a Mission we had sown the wind and would reap the whirlwind. Also that now, wherever the way was open, he should go without reference to those who pre-occupied the field. This, interpreted in the light of his acts at Hermitage, which he was justifying in the letter referred to, means I suppose that he will enter our houses and chapels to preach Campbellism if he can. For though told distinctly that if he went in he was committing trespass, he went in and said that if that was trespass he hoped to commit it as long as he lived.*

*At Hermitage he has baptized a great number of the most ungodly people of the whole neighborhood, people who give no evidence of a change of heart, and gives to such communion every Sabbath. But I had not intended to trouble you so much about the matter. I am in good health and fine spirits and manage to keep myself busy as ever. We*

have had glorious times at Providence since the commencement of the revival. Our church there has just about doubled its numbers already and next Sabbath we are to receive twelve more, eight on profession of their faith and four by letter. The church as a whole has been greatly blessed and quickened in the divine course, and several of the backsliders have been reclaimed.

The work seems to be going on gradually still, though the excitement has mainly passed over and all are at their usual occupations again. At Providence we are among a kind, loving and appreciative people. The house was sadly out of repair when we commenced living there, but it is much more comfortable now. Indeed, I think it may be more cozy by far than ever our Oberlin house was. I suppose you are in the midst of great excitement consequent upon the great rebellion.<sup>33</sup> We here cannot help the cause much except so far as going without our salary may help. We drew nothing from the treasury this quarter and I am not sure that we shall next. We have rather pinching times, but expect to get on some way if we even have to labor with our own hands as Paul did. I saw in our last mail a notice in the Oberlin Evangelist of Margaret's death.<sup>34</sup> Do assure Bro. Charles of my deepest sympathy in this the great sorrow of his life. May he look for sympathy and consolation in Christ. I will try to get some time to write him soon. I hear that the steamer is in and I hope for letters from home, but must be prepared for disappointment. Dearest Mother, I cannot tell you how I yearn to see you once more. But I do not see my way clear to return to America yet. If in the course of a few years I should return, it will probably be only on a visit. I am well and satisfied with my place and the work assigned to me in the Providence of God.

Your loving son, Bigelow

I should have said that all our churches are praying most earnestly that slavery by be brought to an end and the government sustained.

**From Sarah to Mother**

Providence, Jamaica  
July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1861

My Dear Mother,

For a week or two past a cloud was brooding over our dwelling, but I rejoice to say it is already lifting and fleeing away. Bigelow has had a serious attack of bilious fever, and for a time he seemed dangerously ill. He had taken cold and been feeling rather poorly, and a week ago Friday, while attending the morning prayer meeting, he had a real ague chill followed by fever which went off toward night and I gave him chinoidine. About noon Saturday he had a slight chill and the fever this time did not leave him till Monday morning. During the day Sunday he had such a racking pain in his head and was so wild that I feared brain fever.

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<sup>33</sup> The Civil War began with the attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina on April 12, 1861.

<sup>34</sup> Margaret died on April 15, 1861

*We did not have any meeting in the chapel, but the people gathered in the old schoolhouse and poured out their prayers for "dear minister," and toward night I saw there was a change for the better. The delirium was gone and I thanked God and took courage. Monday he was better again but Tuesday the fever returned and I sent again to Kingston for advice. I should have said that I sent on Sunday and received advice and medicine from Dr. Bowerbank.*

*For a few days after this there were indications of inflammation in the bowels, but by giving plenty of physic and using cold applications, by the help of our kind Heavenly father we were able to subdue them. Mr. Douglass was with us from Tuesday until Thursday, which was a great comfort as I was nearly sick myself, and he took hold so handily in nursing the invalid. Mr. Wilson preached for him Sunday, and Monday morning he sat out in the chapel in his rocking chair during the prayer meeting. I think it would have done you good to have seen the joy in the faces of the people and their eagerness to gather around and shake hands with him at the close.*

*The Sunday School were to have a picnic on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, but we have been obliged to defer it for the present.*

*B. seems to be gaining quite rapidly and we hope will soon assume his accustomed duties. Don't think he will go to Richmond "carpentering" any more. He is not fit for such work in this climate, at least.*

*Baby is well. I send a little curl from the back of her neck. Hope to have her picture next month. Maria is going home tomorrow to spend her August.*

*We talk of "taking a change" somewhere but it is not certain where. We are very anxious to hear from you, as our last letter was dated in March. Perhaps you had better send direct to Kingston, Jamaica, care of Henderson and Savage. I do believe they are careless with letters at the AMA office. Try it at least. Love to all, especially those little motherless ones.*

*Your loving daughter, Sarah Corban*

*"Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life."*

**From Sarah to Parents**

*Providence Station  
August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1861*

*My Dear Parents,*

*We were very much rejoiced to receive your letter of July 3<sup>rd</sup> by the last steamer. I am sure you must have written one in regard to Margaret's death which we have not received, but as we have the account in the Evangelist, it does not so much matter. The mention of the State Teacher's Association reminds me of the gathering in Columbus*

which I attended and enjoyed so very much too, and all the more from the number of Oberlin people connected with it.

I am glad to know that father's services have been called for in the Theological Department and I hope they will again. I am sorry that the war should interfere so much with the operation of the Institute, and I hope that the derangement will be only temporary. We are hoping to hear speedily of the Emancipation of the slaves. Our people held a prayer meeting on the first of August in which much earnest prayer was put up for their brethren in bonds. Indeed the poor slave is seldom forgotten in the prayers of the people.

You have doubtless heard before this of the painful termination of our labors at Oberlin. J.O. Beardslee has made the mission generally as much trouble as he could by drawing off their people, but we know that he is in the Lord's hands and can do no more harm than he is permitted to. It seems an unfortunate thing that he should be one of the trustees which hold the land at several of the stations. I am glad to say that he has no claim here. We were directed by the mission to remove the bell from Oberlin to this place, as it belonged to them, and we did so. He has made all the fuss he could about it, threatening to go to law and ordering it back, but he has not done any serious harm yet.

He has put a cousin of his wife's at Oberlin Station and goes but seldom himself. I understand it is his custom to invite forward those who will say they believe in the Lord Jesus after service Sunday and then take them right to the river Monday morning and immerse them, telling them the Lord will meet them at the river and they shall receive the witness of the Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

As this is just about Commencement time, you have perhaps received calls both from Miss Woodcock and Mr. Starbuck. I hear that it is very doubtful about their rehiring on account of the state of our treasury. We have not been suffered to draw any salary for six months. If we could draw again in September, we should manage very well, but the Society have not given us permission to do so and I suppose we shall have to "live on faith." It scarcely seems justifiable in the Society to cast us off so unceremoniously. They seem to think the people here ought to support us. I do not suppose this church, straining to their utmost, could raise much over a hundred dollars a year.

It might be possible for us to live on that, but our health would surely suffer. I suppose we might get that place at the Reformatory with a salary of \$1,000.00 dollars a year. If Providence Station had not been given to us in addition to Oberlin, we should have been more likely to go, but we seemed to be led here by the hand of our God and he has seen fit to bless our labors here richly, and we scarcely feel that we ought to leave.

We have been spending a little time at Chesterfield on account of Bigelow's health. He had another attack while there, but has been slowly gaining since. Mrs.

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<sup>35</sup> Beardslee, in keeping with Disciples' theology, put more emphasis on the profession of faith, as a requirement of baptism, than on the confession of sins, which would have been Bigelow's priority.

*Venning has had an attack of dysentery and I remained for a few days, after B. returned, to take care of her. It is so damp here that Bigelow complains much of pain in his flesh and bones. We were disappointed in getting Baby Mary's picture while there, as the artist who was up from town had only stereoscopic apparatus with him and could not take photographs. I hear there are two American artists in town who are likely to run him out by their low prices. We talk of selling one of our cows to raise the money, and then we may go to town to get it done. I have got a hard cold and feel too dull to write, so I know you will excuse me if I stop off short.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah Corban*

**Letter by Rev. T.B. Penfield, *The American Missionary*, October 1861**

### Missionary Correspondence

Providence, Jamaica  
August 28, 1861

The little church at Providence, which I found with but thirty-eight members when I took charge, now numbers ninety. Since the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, forty-six have joined upon profession of faith in Christ as their only Savior. Several who were under the censure of the church have been restored. The experience of almost all these dear young people (for most of the new recruits have been received from among the ranks of the young) was full of interest, and still continues to be.

I should love to give you a few incidents to illustrate this, but will have to defer until I write you again, which I hope to do soon.

When I assumed the pastoral oversight of the church, the members were mainly elderly people, many of them parents of large families. They were aroused in some manner to see their own state, and especially their neglect of their ungodly children, by the accounts which reached them of the revival in progress in the Western part of the island, by the effects of the week of prayer, in addition to the usual means of grace, which at this time were providently brought to bear upon parental obligations and duties. They were moved to most earnest prayer for themselves and their unconverted children.

It seemed, and no doubt really was, in direct answer to their prayer and corresponding labors that many of their children soon afterwards rose in our meeting for prayer, which were held nearly every day, and expressed their determination to serve the Lord.

I formed them into a class for religious instruction (called here generally an inquiring class) by which those who have held out were better fitted for the duties of

Christians, and a hold was given me upon any who might seem to be returning to their evil ways.

It has been a common idea in Jamaica that people must wait for the revival until in its regular onward march it has passed over or through all the places intervening between them and the nearest place yet reached by it. Such a march was generally to be observed resembling somewhat the advance of an army.

It is worthy of remark, however, that these tokens of the Lord's presence, already mentioned, were enjoyed by us long before the first onward move of the excitement had reached this side of the island. When at last it came, it was like a hurricane, prostrating everything before it. Several of our young people, merely out of curiosity, went some three or four miles to the nearest meeting of "the bands" who were going from place to place spreading the excitement, and fell to the ground (as they afterwards said) in great agony for their sins, which they now saw, as if for the first time.

They returned to Providence scarcely knowing what had been done to them, but determined to confess their sins, both privately and publicly. These confessions implicated many in the church, and then commenced such an outpouring out of their own corruption by the members of the church, as one after another they arose and with strong crying and tears and deep agony of soul, confessed their heart wanderings from God, and in many cases, gross immorality.

We listened and wept hour after hour as they continued to expose their corruption and hypocrisy, until it almost seemed as if we should be obliged to disband the church. Many crimes confessed, however, were committed years before, had been confessed to God and put away, but concealed from the church, and the confession seemed at last to lift a heavy burden from off their souls.

All the confessions too were so full and free, and accompanied with such evident marks of true repentance and revived love to Christ, that we could but thank God and take courage. From this time, old and young have taken hold together, and the blessing of the Lord our god has been upon us. We are still striving to gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing is lost.

At the communion season in May, thirty-one were added to our number, and since then quite a number more have been received. There are about twenty still in the inquiry class, though they are not all as regular in their attendance as I could wish. Several are expecting to join the church but some, as I have reason to fear, are returning to their wallowing in the mire. We rejoice greatly over those who seem snatched from the power of satan, yet with trembling for they are yet weak in the faith, and are surrounded in great measure still with the same temptations which have heretofore swept them away as with a flood. We are in the midst of a corrupt and superstitious people; and the strange and exciting scenes of the revival laid hold of many who were not greatly affected for good. As might be expected, such are either turning back to the world or holding on to the evils of the movement, without ever having known the true meaning of the revival. Still the



face of society about us is greatly changed for the better, so that with full hearts we are constrained to praise the name of Him who hath remembered us so graciously.

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Kingston, Jamaica  
October 3, 1861*

*My Dearest Mother,*

*By the last steamer I wrote to tell you of Bigelow's illness and now I have to inform you of my own. Four weeks ago tonight Bigelow was away from home. I had put out the light, and on getting into bed found the sheets very damp (as is often the case in Providence after rain), which set me into a violent fit of coughing. I went to the next room to try that bed but the coughing increased almost to strangling and I found that I was spitting something that tasted like blood. Lighting the candle I found that it was truly blood. I sent Marie for salt, and after spitting nearly a teacupful succeeded in checking the flow. The day before I carried three pails of water from the basement upstairs, which was perhaps one of the inducing causes of the attack. During the night I suffered much from pain in my left side and had little doubt that the blood came from my lungs, but when Bigelow came home the next day, not understanding how bad I was, he was rather inclined to think, or at least make me think, it couldn't be.*

*Still, I felt so poorly and the dampness of the place seemed to induce coughing, we concluded to come to Kingston to consult the physician. Accordingly we came down in the gig Saturday, but as I had to hold the baby some of the way, the ride was quite wearisome. In the evening the bleeding returned, and B. at once concluded that it must be from the lungs. Early the next morning it came on again and B. went for Dr. Bowerbank. He confirmed our fears but said we must not be alarmed and ordered medicine which he thought would check it at once. But the medicine was so disagreeable that it brought on vomiting, and this kept up the bleeding nearly all day. At night I was quite in despair of being able to check it, but Dr. had the medicine put up in pills, and as these staid down, the bleeding became less frequent and after Thursday did not return.*

*During this time, I went without food, taking nothing but iced water or iced milk, not permitted to move in the bed and scarcely to speak, and suffering much of the time from fever. Indeed, it has scarcely left me yet as every night I have more or less of it. By the advice of Dr. Bowerbank, I have put on flannel and find it a great preventative against taking cold. He examined my lungs when they were sufficiently healed from the bleeding and said there was a deposit on the top of the left lung which might have been there some years, adding that by proper care I need not fear a return of the bleeding for a long time. Proper care includes not living at such a damp station, so we must bid farewell to Providence, but where to go is a difficult question to answer.*

*The Reformatory question has been up again, but the situation seems productive of fever and the post a very trying one, so we are less inclined that way than formerly.*

*We may go to Brainerd, but it is all uncertain and we can only commit our way to the Lord.*

*It has truly been good for me to be afflicted. It seemed almost certain that I should run right into quick consumption for a time, and I tried to look calmly at death as just before me, and I seemed wonderfully upheld. My soul rested down on the promises. You can imagine what a time my illness must have been to Bigelow. He intended to write this letter himself, but has so much to do packing up Starbuck's books just at this time, that he has not time, and by taking a little at once I have managed to do it without much weariness.*

*We had a letter from Smith by the steamer but none from you. B. and Mary both suffer from the heat here, but I don't mind it.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah*

**From Mother to Bigelow and Sarah**

*Oberlin, Ohio  
October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1861*

*Dear children,*

*I am exceedingly sorry that last month's steamer carried you no letter from me, unless one had been left over from the previous month. I did not know that the steamers left New York at a certain time with regularity, until informed of it by Miss Woodcock about the 20<sup>th</sup> of September as I was then just about commencing to write you a letter, but learning by her that the vessels sail from New York about the 18<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> of each month, I saw I was too late for September and so deferred until this time. Since then we have received a letter from you, Sarah, informing us of your having spent a few days at Chesterfield, and of Bigelow's illness there. But I comfort myself that he was not very sick or you would not have suffered him to return to Providence without you, while you took care of Mrs. Venning. Indeed I was comforted that he was able to go back so soon. But after all, we very much fear that such frequent attacks will undermine his constitution. You must both judge as wisely as you can and act accordingly. I hope if a return to this country should prove to be necessary, it will not be too long delayed.*

*October 10<sup>th</sup>. We sympathize with you most deeply and sincerely in your deprivation of salary, hope you have received something before now. Your father would have sent you a little aid before now, if we had not had the prospect of sending by Miss Woodcock. I believe she intends to return (bearing her own expense) in about a month, but I hope to see her and learn more definitely, before I close this letter. I hope to send by her a box or trunk of goods to you, and your father intends, if he can, to send ten dollars in money. Josephine writes me that she hopes to send you very soon, something from their Sabbath school. Mr. Bateham has been very much out of health for more than a month past, but he has improved very much lately, but I think that his illness and their*

*pecuniary straits have been blest to Josephine at least. In her last letter she speaks of her soul being "full of the love of God," of "Christ's dwelling in her," says that she has "no will but the sweet will of Jesus, and no desires but what center in him." This letter made me so glad that I could hardly sleep the following night. Sarah seems very satisfied and happy in her new situation, but perhaps, after all, you do not know what it is. She is in Zanesville, Wisconsin, principal teacher in the State Inst. for the Blind. She went the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. She expected to return to Columbus surely, until the last week or two of her vacation, when this offer came. I had a letter from Smith day before yesterday – they are both in excellent health though there will probably be a change in this respect in about four weeks. They are very desirous of having me visit them at that time, and if I am able I intend to. I have not been as well as usual this summer, though no one disease seems fastened upon me, but various ailments admonish me that this frail tabernacle will not last a great many years more at the longest and may fail at any time. Charles and his children are well. Mr. Wyett's family live in his house and board him and the girls and Freddie is yet with us. John will probably accept the Chaplaincy in the 35<sup>th</sup> Ohio Regiment and go into the service of the country, though it is not quite certain yet. The Plymouth Church in Cleveland would like to get him for their pastor, I suppose, but he prefers the Chaplaincy if he leaves Bellevue at all. They are greatly attached to him there, and would be loath to part with him for anything except the war, after which they would hope for his return to them.*

*Henry and his family I suppose have arrived at Kansas about this time, though we have not yet learned the fact. We fear they will have trouble there, as the orders are that every able-bodied man there hold himself in readiness to go into the army at any day. What will become of our poor distracted country I know not, but I do not believe the Lord will grant us victory until the right stand is taken in regard to slavery. I suppose you read papers that keep you informed of the essential things relative to the war. So I will not attempt to tell you that which you probably already know. I cannot refrain from mentioning that Captain G. Shurtleff<sup>36</sup> is a prisoner of war in Charleston. More than a hundred young men have gone into the army from our Inst. and only two deaths have occurred among them as yet, that we know of. A recruiting officer is now in the place urging on enlistments.*

*October 11<sup>th</sup>. I have just seen Miss Woodcock and learn that she knows not yet what she shall do. She wants very much to go back to Jamaica, but having learned through Miss Trent that the missionaries, in endeavoring to retrench according to the express wish of the A.M.A., have cut off her school and one or two others, she knows not that she can be sustained there except as she depends entirely upon the natives. She has written to Mr. Whipple upon the subject three weeks ago and gets no answer as yet. She thinks she cannot stay and wait in Oberlin more than a week longer but must go to her relatives in Western New York. I am afraid we shall not be able to send the things by her*

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<sup>36</sup> Captain Giles W. Shurtleff, formerly a theological student and tutor of Latin, commanded Company C of the Seventh Regiment of the Ohio Volunteer Infantry made up of volunteers from Oberlin College and the town. In their first engagement in August 1861 at Cross Lanes, Virginia, he and thirty-four members of the company were taken prisoner. He was exchanged a year later and in 1863 became Colonel of the 5<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Regiment, which saw action at Petersburg. After the war he was appointed to the Oberlin faculty.

*which we had proposed to. We do not like to send through the Society because we think they would then be less anxious to send on your salary. We cannot send gold in a letter to Kingston, and our bills I suppose will not answer your purpose.*

*Perhaps some other opportunity will offer and perhaps your father can write to some friend in New York to ship a box for us to Kingston. We will try to contrive farther. Yesterday we had a letter from Henry. He went from here the last of August with his own team and wagon, household goods and family, expecting to purchase a farm of his Uncle Knapp in Adams County, Wisconsin, but on arriving there was greatly disappointed by the kind of land, and unwilling to settle upon it and sell his own good farm in Topeka. So they concluded to load up again and travel on in their own conveyance to Topeka. When he wrote last, they had crossed the Mississippi and were in Iowa, had been detained by heavy rains and sickness of the children, their money was running low and (we think) times must have looked rather dark. I hope your father will try to raise some money for him if there should be need, though our income is very limited now and each dollar seems to be needed in several different ways. We are willing and glad to practice self denial for the sake of doing good to others (especially do we feel called to it when our own children are in want), and we cannot bear that the gospel should be stayed in its onward progress, nor the interests of our country should suffer for the lack of anything we can do.*

*October 12<sup>th</sup>. We have concluded to wait a few days longer for Miss Woodcock's letter from Mr. Whipple, but if none is received in the course of a week, your father thinks we had better write to Mr. Whitlock, a friend of ours, in Brooklyn, asking him to forward to Kingston for us a box directed to you at Providence Station, and we will not forget to enclose in it a list of the articles with the nominal value attached. And as to money, your father is rather of the opinion that New York bills will pass in Kingston, but will endeavor to inform himself more fully soon. If we find it so, we may conclude to enclose a little money in a letter and direct it to Kingston for you at Providence.*

*We hope you are going on to experience more and more of the love of Jesus in your own souls, while striving to do good to the souls of others. Your letter in the American Missionary, Bigelow, looks indeed encouraging as to your success in Providence. May it continue and increase.*

*Your loving mother, M.D.P. Cowles*

**From Bigelow to Mother**

*Brainerd, Jamaica  
November 2, 1861*

*Dear Mother,*

*I fear I am quite your worst correspondent. Not, however, because I am by any means losing interest in the correspondence, as I am sure you will give me credit. Your*

*letters are devoured with as great avidity as ever and I believe I write in reply to you oftener than to any other of my correspondents. By this you will be able rightly to estimate the infrequency of my correspondence.*

*But not to fill my time and room with this. We are just settling at Brainerd. From our last (i.e. Sarah's) you have learned the particulars of her illness and partial recovery. Since that time she has been slowly gaining most of the time. Just as the last steamer was about leaving, I was making arrangements for going up to the mountains and was so busy up to the moment of leaving town that I was unable to write you a few words as I had intended to do. The same is likely to be true this time, but I am determined not to let this opportunity slip by without sending you a few lines. The heat in Kingston seemed to agree so badly with the baby, covering her with a rash and making her fretful, that we thought it best to take her to the mountains, although Sarah had not sufficiently recovered to attempt such a long ride.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Wolcott, having come down to meet the steamer, were going back in their carriage by way of Spanish Town, and I accordingly accompanied them on horseback while Mary rode in the carriage most of the way. We started about 6 o'clock one evening and reached Richmond a little later the next, having spent the intervening night at Spanish Town. The distance via Spanish Town is 40 miles. This is ten miles farther than the road by way of Brainerd and Oberlin but has this advantage over the last that in good weather we can drive in a carriage all the way.*

*While in the mountains this time, I preached at Brainerd some 4 miles from Richmond and during the following week attended Mission Meetings at Richmond. At this meeting it was considered as settled that we could no longer reside at Providence on account of its dampness, it being by far the dampest station in the Mission. The matter was fully discussed and it was thought best by all that we go to Brainerd, provided the church saw fit to give me a call. This they have done, and I have today accepted the call. Tomorrow (the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday in November) I am to preach my first sermon as their pastor.*

*Three years ago the first Sabbath in November I bid farewell to my native land and preached in the cabin of the steamer that brought me one week later within sight of my adopted country, Jamaica. Three years, how quickly gone, yet what changes have they wrought in and about me. The changes over and around you too have undoubtedly been great. The thought is deeply sad. The children that were in Charles and Josephine's families must be stretching up toward man and womanhood and will be well nigh it before I shall be permitted to see them again. You in your new home, too.*

*My thoughts of late have been quite sad about you. I dreamed a few nights ago that I went home to see you and was only in time for your funeral. The bitterness of my grief was such that I awoke. I do not believe in presentiments or dreams such as this having any relation to things to come or I should still be saddened by it. The time before we can be permitted the expense of returning to the States may be long and is likely to be somewhat lengthened by the war, but it will seem short when once passed over. Who of us will be alive then is known only by Him to whom all secrets belong. When I think of*

*your delicate health I have fears. For my dear wife, too, I am distressed. She is threatened, I fear, with a return of bleeding. She complained today of pain in her left lung again from which she has been free for two or three weeks. I should not have said complained, however, for she merely mentioned it. She is perfectly free from a complaining spirit. All through this unexpected and sore trial, she has perceived the hand of her Savior and has borne her pains without murmuring or repining.*

*I brought her up from Kingston two weeks ago. We came in our gig about 18 miles from Spanish Town, when it broke down, and she was obliged to ride my saddle (which I fortunately had in the gig) while I walked until we found a horse and side saddle which we hired for the rest of the journey. It was very hard on her and I think she has not been as well since. We came to Brainerd yesterday, five and a half miles from Eliot. We are boarding at Mt. Patience, about 8 or 10 minutes walk from here. Sarah is there most of the time, while I am at the Brainerd house more. We hope to resume housekeeping in a week or two. I am in good health, but am somewhat sore from a boil under my left arm. Mary is troubled somewhat with worms, just now, but is well otherwise. Children suffer here more from this cause than they do farther north. Please tell Josephine that she may look for a letter from me by the next steamer. I will try to find time before then to write the College S.S. Maria is improving in most things as fast and well as we could ask and is quite happy. I think her quite a consistent Christian for one so young. Love to all.*

*Yours truly and affectionately, Bigelow*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Brainerd Station, Jamaica  
November 15, 1861*

*My Dear Mother,*

*Once more we find ourselves in a new home. It is just three years yesterday since we landed in the island and yet this is our third change of residence. Change seems to be a necessary part of my existence. Perhaps you remember a reckoning I made when I was seventeen years old of nineteen different places that I had lived. Rarely, if ever, have I exceeded two years of continuous residence at any one place. But here perhaps I reach the perihelion of my eccentric orbit. Here "the two ends meet," as a friend suggested the other day.*

*Over twenty years ago Mr. Beardslee lived here and my mother spent the time of my father's absence in his family when I was a little older than my baby. There perhaps is the identical orange tree from which my mother picked an orange, which I asked for, and so offended Mrs. B.*

*At Mt. Patience, not more than half a mile from here, lie the remains of a baby brother, who just opened his eyes on this world and then closed them again. So perhaps*

*here will close my earthly mission, be it long or short. It would seem to be better, both for us and those for whom we labor, that this should be the end of our wanderings.*

*Almost nothing auspicious marks our arrival. The people manifest very little joy in it. The weather has been almost one continuous rainstorm, and I dread dampness above almost everything else. I have no stove here, but by laying down old tin and earth on the kitchen floor, we have extemporized a fireplace and dried the air what we could. We miss the little kindnesses to which the Providence people were so much given, bringing us yams, etc. There are breadfruits growing on the place, which we have to use almost exclusively and my appetite is so poor I can hardly make that go.*

*Religion seems at a very low ebb. At the church prayer meeting this morning, only four were present though the church numbers 158. Beardslee has been the means of unsettling the minds of some, and it is quite possible that they may still go over to him. However, 2/3 of the members have given Bigelow a call, and he has accepted, and I know he means to take hold of the work in good earnest, and I have no doubt we shall soon see the clouds clearing away and the work of the Lord prospering in our hands. As perhaps you remember, our good friends the Fishers live at Mt. Patience. We thought of stopping there till our things could be moved over, but finding her so poorly and fearing we should be burdensome, we concluded to come over and get on as we could, hiring a woman who lives near to do our cooking for us. A week ago Wednesday we came over. This week Tuesday three mules and about twenty people went over to bring our things; but each of the twenty could only carry a small load of their heads and the three mules only brought our books, so all the things are not here yet.*

*The people say we are very rich and have so many things. To illustrate, let me mention that to carry our twelve chairs requires six persons and our bedstead takes four. We find several pieces of furniture belonging to the station, which will add to our comfort. I worked hard this forenoon covering the lounge with furniture polish and it looks quite nicely. The house is quite large and roomy. Once in repair it will be quite comfortable. From our northeast windows we have a fine view of the sea. The chapel, for a wonder in our mission, is separate from the house, and a very nice building it is. We have only Willie with us at present, but we shall recall Maria very soon. I expect to hire a good strong girl to do my work, washing and all. The son of a Baptist minister, Mr. John Thompson, will probably board with us, so that with baby we shall number seven.*

*We hope to finish moving next week. It is a great comfort to have the Fishers so near, though their school is so small there has been some talk of their going to the States in the spring. This we most sincerely hope will not be. Mrs. Fisher is one of the good souls of the earth and her children will be such safe companions for little Mary.*

*Tuesday, the 19<sup>th</sup>. I spent the day Saturday at Mt. Patience, though I felt so poorly that I lay down with Mrs. Fisher about half the time. It is arranged that Mary Emma, their eldest daughter, is to come to me every evening for lessons on the melodeon. Sunday the instrument was carried over and I played it in Chapel. We have great many inconveniences to put up with, having our cooking done so far from the house and having*

*so few of our things moved over, but we make the best of it and hope for better times. I was expecting to have the girl now with Mrs. Fisher, but if she does not soon get better she cannot spare her and I shall have to find some someone else. Maria will probably come over the last of the week.*

*Bigelow is having another set of boils under his left arm, and Mary, as I wrote Smith, has a bad swelling on the side of her neck. I think it has been bad for her to go without milk so much. We get a pint a day now from the Fishers. Our red cow seemed unlikely ever to give us milk again and we had it killed. It is doubtful if the black one ever does. These Jamaican cows are queer things. If we had a good American cow it would be almost invaluable. Mr. Hall had one which was a mine of wealth to him.*

*We understand that the Ohio 7<sup>th</sup> met with a defeat, in which the Oberlin company shared. Do give us some particulars. We have never got the list of them for which we once asked. Neither of the last two steamers have brought us letters from Oberlin. This is a sad disappointment. We must believe you have written. Do tell me if John and Ionie ever received a letter from us. We wrote about a year ago. Do you think they feel quite cordial toward us? It would be a great comfort to think so. I suppose that Oberlin ladies are doing what they can for the poor wounded soldiers. When I read the appeal of the Committee in the Tribune, I felt proposing to the sisters in the mission that we get up a barrel of things. I don't know what they will think of it. Perhaps it would be treason against the English government. You may be sure we tremble a little when we think of the possibility of a collision between the English and the American governments, though I suppose there is less danger of this now than sometime since. If Emancipation was once declared, then sympathies would of course be with the North. Oh, how long shall this be delayed? I wish Congress might be deluged with petitions or somebody who has the power till they were compelled to declare what a wrong course has been taken toward Gen. Fremont.<sup>37</sup> But the Lord reigns.*

*Please give me Rachel's address and let me know what you hear from her.*

*Your loving daughter, Sarah Corban*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Brainerd, Jamaica  
December 28, 1861*

*Dear Kind Mother,*

*Your very sympathizing letter brought tears to my eyes when I read it. We talked over your proposal that I should go home in the spring and it seemed to us that it must be*

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<sup>37</sup> A year before the Emancipation Proclamation, General John C. Fremont, commander of Union forces in Missouri, declared that in areas under Union control, all slaves of masters in rebellion were emancipated. This was contrary to President Lincoln's policy at that time. Fremont was made to retract his order and was relieved of his command.



*done, I going alone in the spring and B. coming after me in August and spending a couple of months. B. asked the advice of the Mission in regard to it at their meeting last week, but they were not inclined to look at all favorably upon it. In the first place they think it would be very improvident for me to go alone, and in the second the effect on the people here would be very bad, they think. They would say now she is gone he will soon follow and we shall be all unsettled again.*

*If we had not accepted a call to this place, it would have been very easy for me to remain in Kingston during the winter and in the spring we could have both gone. We think we followed the leading of Providence in coming here and the same Kind Power seems now to indicate that we should remain. Of course I should not seek health by going out of the path of duty. It is quite probable that my health will be as good here as anywhere.*

*Your feeble health makes me fear that deferring my visit will deprive me of the privilege of ever seeing you again face to face this side of the dark river, but at farthest it cannot be many years before we may hope to meet on the Shining Shore beyond.*

*Besides giving up this proposed visit, I am also called upon to relinquish the society of the Fisher family, which I have enjoyed so much. They are to go to Providence. The Mission have decided to support no more American teachers at any of the schools except Richmond and depend on native help under the supervision of the minister at each station. This involves the return home of none but Miss Veazie, as Messrs Fisher and Wilson will enter the ministry at once. Sarah Treat is now Mrs. Douglass and of course goes to Richmond where Julia is already located. I hoped to attend the wedding, but was so poorly that I was obliged to give it up. Our tea meeting (which I mentioned in Josephine's letter) came off yesterday, but under such stormy sky that it was not such a success as we had hoped for. I took things easy and got through the day very well indeed. I quite enjoyed it. I have a good deal of pain and soreness in the upper part of the left lung and it hurts me more than it did to cough. Still, while the right lung remains sound, I suppose I may live many years. I think I am threatened with asthma, which you know my father had. I have had several turns of great difficulty in breathing. When the weather is dry and pleasant, I feel pretty well, but dampness seems to affect me very unfavorably. We hope to have more settled weather soon. We thank father for his present. It is very acceptable in these times. The assurance of John's sympathy in our affliction is very grateful to our feelings. Give our love to all the dear ones at home.*

*It is not absolutely certain that I shall not go home in the spring as I could have Miss Veazie's company. Bigelow intends to consult one physician in town and follow his advice if practicable.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*



A Bell for Africa

## JAMAICA 1862

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Brainerd, Jamaica  
January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1862*

*My Dear Mother,*

*As the month draws to a close, we are reminded that it is time to prepare our letters for America, and as usual yours stands No. 1 on my list. We are still surrounded by clouds and tempests. Occasionally the sun penetrates the gloom and we rejoice in its life-giving rays, but this has been decidedly the most severe rainy season we have experienced in the Island. Doubtless our close proximity to the sea brings more storms from the sea than we should have further inland. My health has not suffered as much as we feared, though I have a cold most of the time. Have not as much difficulty in breathing as I did a month or two since, though perhaps I cough and raise more. Last Friday we were invited over to Richmond to celebrate Mr. Wolcott's fiftieth birthday. I was feeling so comfortable that I ventured to go, but had to ride in the rain the last half of the way. I took a little addition to my cold, though I changed throughout as soon as I arrived. There were about a dozen of us together and we had a very pleasant time. Dined on roast pig. I suppose you are aware that their son Henry is at Saratoga Springs. He is their only child and quite delicate. Mrs. Thompson's health is very poor. I should not wonder if she went home in the spring, though not much is said about it. Indeed, almost every sister in the mission is more or less indisposed, though none are seriously ill.*

*The Douglasses have just commenced housekeeping in the "great house" which Mr. McDonald has been building since he came out. It is not finished, though three or four rooms are usable I believe. I like her better since she was married than before, though she is a perfect contrast with her sister. Julia is a great hand to "carry on." I sometimes think she laughs and talks at once too much, but Sarah scarcely speaks in company. Sometimes she is quite a damper on the enjoyment of others.*

*Mr. Wilson is to be ordained the fourteenth of next month, and if the roads and weather are not too bad, I shall try to get over and make Mrs. Wilson a little visit. I have not seen her since last August and there is not one in the Mission that I think as much of.*

*I suppose the Fishers will be in Providence by that time, and I shall spend a few days there, as the people seem anxious to see me. Things here at Brainerd do not seem quite so discouraging as when we first came. The Union Meetings held during the week of prayer seemed to be greatly blest and daily morning prayer meetings have been held ever since. Some of the church and some of the impenitent seem to have been awakened, but the church, as a church, do not take hold of the work. They are too much divided. I think we are slowly gaining in their confidence and esteem. The rainy weather has interfered very much with our meetings, as the people are very much scattered and few have umbrellas.*

*My own soul has been greatly blest of late. When we first came here I was in a very unhappy state of mind – dissatisfied with myself and everybody else, and restive under the dealings of my Heavenly Father with me. But a crisis came, and by God’s help I was able to say “not my will but thine be done,” and my soul has rested calmly and quietly on God ever since. I think I can say my peace has been as a river, though sometimes for the moment ruffled on the surface, down deep in my heart it has flowed steadily on.*

*We are expecting a couple here to be married and I must see that things are in order, so goodbye.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*

*Dearest mother: I had hoped for time to say a few words, but the mail closes in a few minutes. I am well, in good spirits and enjoying the light of God’s countenance. I have a hard and almost thankless task at Brainerd, but the Lord has directed us there and will sustain. Your loving son, Bigelow*

**Article by T. B. Penfield, *The American Missionary*, May 1862**

Brainerd, Feb.28, 1862

Permit me to relate a few circumstances connected with the happy death of Edward B., for many years a consistent member of the church at Oberlin station of which I was the pastor for nearly three years.

Bro. B. was one of the most reliable and sober-minded men in the church of which he was a member, yet so modest and retiring that he was never called upon to fill its offices.

A few weeks ago I received a message from Bro. B. that he was quite ill, not expecting to recover, and wished to see me. On account of a previous appointment I was unable to comply his request at once, and when a few days after I called at his house, I found his wife a widow, and his children fatherless.

He was sick but little more than a week and from nearly the first, was impressed with the belief that he should die. He told his friends that if he had left his preparations for eternity to be made on his deathbed, he should be most miserable, but the Savior whom he had sought in health was his comfort in sickness, and would take his soul in death. He reminded his wife of the song, “I have a father in the promised land,” and said, “My Father calls me and I must go to meet him in the promised land.” Not a shadow of doubt rested for a moment on his mind. He trusted the Savior for salvation and Heaven. When asked by the doctor (a Romanist) if he felt any pain, he replied, “Yes, but not to

compare with what my Savior suffered on the cross.” At another time the doctor asked if he could taste his medicine. “Yes,” said he, “but it isn’t such a bitter cup as Jesus drank for me.” His patience and piety were such as to draw tears more than once from the doctor and his attendants.

A few days before the death of Bro. B., his former master came into the district to sell some land. While standing with a dear brother in the ministry, examining a bridge near Bro. B’s little cottage, word was brought him that one of his former slaves being near the point of death wished to see him. He consented to go, provided the minister would accompany him, which he most gladly did; and the minister of the gospel of Christ and the follower of Moses entered between the same mud walls to administer such comfort as they had to the dying man. The Jew said, “You were always a good servant. I never knew anything against you. You have now only to trust in the Almighty.”

The Christian minister, though expressing satisfaction at the master’s commendation of his former slave, warned the dying man against trusting to such a broken reed for support. He set the Gospel forth in its fullness and simplicity, and to his great joy, as he told me himself, found that B. knew it all and was expecting salvation only through faith in Jesus Christ. Death had no terrors for him even when in near prospect, and when he fell beneath its power it had no sting. He passed away as gently as when a weary child falls asleep, not one struggle or groan.

All through his sickness he was greatly exercised about the destitute state of the people in Africa, often making use of such expressions as, “Oh the poor heathen, the miserable heathen; what will become of them?” At last he said, “I know what I will do. I will send a bell to Africa.” His wife, thinking that he might not be in his right mind said, “How will you send it?” He replied, “Give the money to Mr. Penfield and he will send it to the society (meaning the A. M. A.), and they will buy a bell and send it to Africa, and when it tolls it will call the heathen to come to Christ.” He repeated the same, substantially, over and over for two more days before he died, convincing his wife that he was perfectly sane and deeply earnest in the matter.

He left his wife in what we should consider deep poverty, with a large family of small children, yet she generously said, “I will make him have his wish.” She told me that he had planted a field of peas (what we would call beans) and as soon as they were ready for market she would sell them and give me the money for the bell. If Bro. B’s means had been equal to his heart he would have set apart a sum sufficient to send such a bell as would have sounded far and wide over the mountains and plains of Africa. As it is, the bell must of necessity be small, yet may not God bless to the salvation of many in that benighted country the lowly and simple story it shall speak of the Christian love of one of Africa’s sons for his fatherland?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> This article gives an explanation for the picture from the family collection that is reproduced on page 130. The large inscription on the bell reads, “PRESENTED TO AFRICA.” Light reflection obscures the bottom lines, except for “SON . . . . . ERS.” I take the liberty to guess that the inscription reads in full: “PRESENTED TO AFRICA BY ITS SONS AND DAUGHTERS.” CGG

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Brainerd Station, Jamaica  
February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1862*

*My Dear Mother,*

*I have been doing sewing and housework so hard, to get through in time to write you, that I find myself tired to begin with, but writing will doubtless rest me.*

*First, I must tell you of a traveling tour from which I have just returned. My good friend Sherman Wilson was ordained to the Gospel ministry Tuesday the eighteenth of this month. Monday the seventeenth we set off soon after breakfast and went as far as Grateful Hill before the heat of the day. This is a Wesleyan Mission station about five miles from here where our friend Mr. Reeve has been living. We found him packing up to remove to a circuit some fifty miles off, on the north side of the Island.*

*The minister formerly filling this place has been removed by death and Mr. Reeve has been appointed his successor. Mr. Harding takes his place at Grateful Hill. He has a family of seven children. When we called he was there, reconnoitering as it were. Mr. John Thompson was also there. We had dinner about two o'clock and at three were once more on the road. I should say that little Mary was on the horse with her father. We stopped with friends very near our old home in Oberlin overnight so as to make the journey as easy as possible. Heard the particulars of the death of one of our old people who stood by us to the end. I suppose Bigelow will publish them in the American Missionary. Early Tuesday morning we were up and away. We got a girl to carry Mary across to the road while we went the long way around. This part of the trip the roads were excellent and we cantered along nicely. Met baby at the appointed place and pushed on. Then, leaving the main road, we crossed the Wag Water and climbed a long, long hill till Brandon Hill Chapel with its white walls and thatched roof came in sight. Of course we had a hearty welcome when we got there. Most of the brethren of the Mission were present, but none of the sisters beside myself. I had not rode so far before in a long time and was lame for sometime after my eighteen-mile ride. You will doubtless see printed notices of the ordination so I need not enter into particulars here. I had a delightful visit with Sherman and Nellie the rest of the week, Bigelow returning to Brainerd Wednesday. I had promised the Providence people to spend the Sabbath with them and intended to go over Saturday evening, but was obliged to defer it till Sabbath morning. A good strong boy went with me to carry baby. A pleasant ride of seven miles brought me to the door from which I went out when I went to Kingston last September. I was glad that the Fishers were there or the place would have seemed gloomy enough. A very unpleasant riot had occurred in the chapel yard the Monday previous, and Bigelow preached from the word, "Though I fall I shall rise again," setting before those who had fallen under temptation their duty to rise and go to their Father at once.*

*Many were so conscience stricken that they stayed away from the communion table. The next morning the matter was brought before the Elders and took up a good part of the day. In the evening Bigelow (who I should have said met me at Providence) went over to Chesterfield to attend a Sunday School teachers meeting. Mr. Venning was*

*very anxious that I should come too, but I was so lame I did not think it prudent, and besides Mary had a severe cold.*

*That night I was really afraid she would have the croup, but a warm footbath and wet compress on her throat seemed to relieve her somewhat. Tuesday morning Bigelow returned, and the same evening we rode eight miles to Eliot, where we spent the night. Mrs. Thompson was sick a bed. We took breakfast the next morning at Richmond and were home in good time.*

*We had Mary brought over a shorter way so we could go on horseback Wednesday morning, but she did not get home until about noon. Her cold still hangs on and last night was very bad. Bigelow, too, was about sick with a cold and swelled face. They both took a sweat and seem better today. Mary has just got a burn on her forehead from a hot flatiron. We have eight in the family now. I told you in my last that I was to have a son of Mr. John Thompson here to board and attend school. Now I have another minister's son besides him. Mr. Troy is a colored minister from Canada who is here partly as an agent for colored people wishing to emigrate here and partly to secure funds for completing a house of worship. His oldest son, seven years of age, being somewhat of an invalid, he brought along for his health. He engaged board for him at Eliot, but Mrs. Thompson's health being so poor, he persuaded us to take him. He is a bright boy but rather forward, wants a good deal of looking after. Mr. Troy spent that Sabbath before we went to Brandon Hill with us and interested the people very much. They voted to take up a collection for his chapel last Sunday, which they did in our absence, Mr. Douglass preaching for Bigelow. It amounted to \$7.00. Next Sunday they are to take up another for the "Contrabands" and mean to sing the Contraband song.<sup>39</sup>*

*The eighth member of our family is Peter Wilson, a black boy who works for us. All the rest of the family are either white or brown. I like my hired girl Mary McReady very well, though she is not very strong. The stove has not come yet but the weather is quite pleasant and we do not miss it as much as we did. We are quite troubled for water. The cistern leaks and is nearly empty now. We hope to have it mended soon.*

*Yours in more love than haste, Sarah Penfield*

**From Sarah to Parents**

*Brainerd  
March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1862*

*My Dear Parents,*

*We were sorry to hear of mother's illness and fear she may be a long time in regaining her usual health, but we rejoice and trust her in the hands of our Kind Heavenly Father. The state of Henry's health has caused us some anxiety. We had*

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<sup>39</sup> "Contrabands" were fugitive slaves during the Civil War who had fled to the protection of the Union Army.

*thought him the least likely of any of the family to suffer from long difficulties, but very likely the whole family must succumb to them in one form or another.*

*We wish that instead of removing to Kansas he had come to Jamaica. The trouble and expense could not have been much greater and I have no doubt he would enjoy much better health here and live much longer. Now the winter is over I trust his suffering will be less. It must have been a trying time for Rachel. I will write her by this mail if I have time. Have been very busy preparing for a meeting of our Mission here next Tuesday and have just snatched a little time this Saturday afternoon to write letters.*

*My health is pretty good, as you would infer if you knew the amount of work I had turned off this week. Bigelow has been gone since early Monday morning on a tour to the north side of the Island with Mr. Troy of whom I spoke in my last. I shall look for him home this evening. I suppose you will understand from our recent letters that I have given up all thoughts of returning to the States in the spring. My health does not in the least require it. Before many years we hope to come together. Still talk of 1865, but leave the time to be determined by circumstances.*

*Many thanks for Father's good long letter. We rejoiced to find him so good a correspondent. His cordial invitation for us to enter his "wide open door" is very fatherly surely. If we all live we shall hope to accept it some day.*

*Little Mary Cowles is a very busy happy child. As I write she is constantly asking me for cakey, booky or something else. She spends a great deal of time looking over books, examining pictures and pretending to read. Has quite an idea of singing. Her favorite song just now is "Go down, Moses, Let my people go." By the way, the people here have taken quite a collection for the contrabands and promise another by and by.*

*Things in the church look more favorable than they did.*

*Love to all from your aff. daughter, Sarah*

**From Sarah to Parents**

*Brainerd, Jamaica  
April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1862*

*My Dear Parents,*

*My letter last month was written in such haste that I omitted several things which I meant to say. I should have told you that our stove had arrived and proved a great comfort. In the last stage of its journey it had the front hearth broken off, which made me feel a little badly at first, but when I reflected how much better it was that it should be broken in that part than in almost any other, I felt quite reconciled. It is Stewart's*



smallest size (3½) and has the reservoir and back oven attached, as well as a very comfortable supply of stove furniture.<sup>40</sup>

Mary and Marie seem to appreciate its good qualities quite highly and give it a good greasing every day. I don't mean to let the rust eat this one up quite so soon as it did the other. We have another addition to our comfort in the replastering of the cistern, which leaked so badly as to be almost useless when we came. We now have a pretty good supply of water though it is very dark colored from the shingles on the roof being so old and rotten. The chapel has a zinc roof which seems to be far the best for this country. The water from such a roof is always pure. We keep a jar at one corner of the chapel, which furnishes us with most of our drinking water. The roof at Oberlin was of this kind. It seems almost indestructible, though it is rather expensive at first. If we stay here many years, we shall hope to have such an one on the house we live in.

When the supply of water at the chapel fails, we have to send to the spring in the pasture. While our cistern was dry we had to get all our water from that. I don't know what you would think of the pasture, it is so steep. Mr. Hall made an estimate of the descent from the house to the bottom of the pasture. I think it is 350 feet, but I am not sure. The fences were in a shocking state when we came and we have spent a good deal of money to get it in repair, but even now we are tried occasionally by either the horses or cow getting out and injuring our neighbors' yam fields. This is almost sure to be the case when Bigelow is away from home. Yesterday he preached at Providence and has not yet returned. Well, while we were at breakfast, a man came to the door with a very doleful face to say, "Cow destroy me, Missus – destroy me much." I told him he must see Mr. Penfield about it, advised him to put a fence round his field if he did not want the cow to trouble him.

It is Johnny's business to tie the cow under the shed every night, but he failed to do it last night and this is the result of his carelessness. Our colt is a great rogue. I don't know how much money we have had to pay for his depredations of people's grounds. The other night he got into the cornfield and went to about a hundred hills, breaking off the ears to eat and leaving the stalk standing. B. talks of selling him. Our other horse is in very poor condition and will not bring in nearly what we paid for him.

Speaking of corn – we pay for one bushel what farmers out west get for twenty, i.e. \$2.00. We need it very much, for our horses are obliged to do without most of the time. We are trying to raise a little ourselves, but it does not seem to yield so largely as in the States. The people make very little use of it and only raise it in small quantities, which they peddle out at 6 cts. a quart.

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<sup>40</sup> Philo Penfield Stewart was Bigelow's father's second cousin. He, with John Jay Shipherd, was one of the founders of the Oberlin colony in 1833 but left it in 1836. He was also the inventor of the "Oberlin Stove" and later of the very successful "P.P. Stewart's Air Tight, Summer and Winter Cook Stove," patented in 1838, enlarged and improved in 1853 and 1859, and manufactured in Troy, Buffalo and St. Louis. He always offered his stoves to missionaries and ministers at the wholesale price.

*Sugar cane chopped up makes very good feed for horses as we found at Oberlin, and we intend to plant some for the purpose here. Our support from the Society is so intermittent and seems so uncertain for the future that we feel called upon to do what we can to provide for ourselves. We are planting our own yam and have made something of a garden, though it requires some outlay to hire workmen, buy yam heads, etc. If we are prospered, we trust it will not be in vain. At both the other stations we have spent time and money in this way, but remaining so short a time it has not proved very profitable. However, somebody gets the good of it, even if we don't.*

*By the way, another thing which I should have mentioned in my last is that our doctor's bill has made its appearance and somewhat startled us by its dimensions. How much do you suppose it is? Only 12L, i.e. \$57.60. I shall be careful how I make up another one I suppose. We talk of selling one steer and the gig to meet it. The fact is we need a lighter vehicle and may as well go without any until we can get one to our minds. In fact, the roads are so steep and the horses are so weak that very little traveling is done on wheels in these parts. Mr. Wolcott has a nice light buggy, but in the rainy season it is next to impossible to get to town even with that. My trip up from Spanish Town convinced me that I did not know anything about bad roads before, and yet we met lots of carts hauling wood to town. But, oh, the poor beasts! It makes me shudder now to think how cruelly they were beaten and how dreadfully cut up by the harness to do it. It is a common thing for draft beasts, mostly mules, to have deep cuts on both shoulders from the wearing of the collar. The roads on the plains (for instance, between Kingston and Spanish Town) are excellent, but it will be a long time before the same can be said of those in the mountains. There is quite an interest here in emigration from Canada and the U.S. Those who have gone to Haiti are very discontented, but the few who have come here like it well. We look for a large company by the steamer now due. Well done! Haven't I spun quite a yarn? Not through yet, but will leave the rest to another time.*

*Our school is not well attended. Does not pay the teacher and as the Society no longer supports our school, we fear we will have to give it up.*

*Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup>. I see that I have not said a word about little Mary Cowles, for as we have another Mary in the family she goes by that name altogether. She is cutting double teeth, has a sore toe and a bad cold, but is happy as the day is long. Talks almost every moment and sings quite sweetly. Has just brought a book to me and asks me to sing. Mr. Douglass is quite dissatisfied with his post. Indeed has a great dislike for teaching and will doubtless prepare for the ministry. A Mission meeting is called at Richmond next week to take the matter into consideration. Mrs. Wilson has a little girl a week old today.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Brainerd  
July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1862*

*My Dear Mother,*

*Will you be glad to hear that you have another granddaughter? Doubtless, although it makes the one sided business more one sided still. Odd isn't it that out of 14 grandchildren, 11 should be girls. However, if they all grow up to be good women, the world will be richer for them. The little lady I now introduce to you made her appearance in our humble abode on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>. We made her quite welcome and are taking as good care of her as we can. She weighed only 8 pounds and seemed rather puny at first, but it is already "picking up" some. Employs herself industriously in eating and sleeping and seldom cries.*

*You are aware that Mrs. Fisher spent some weeks with me before my confinement. Just the Friday previous I told her I could not keep her any longer and sent her away with my blessing. She was not willing to go unless some of the sisters would take her place and charged me that if I needed her to send for her again. Julia Treat took her place. My cough had left me and I was feeling much better. Sunday evening I took a short walk with Bigelow and Julia. I had hardly been outside the door for 2 months previous.*

*Monday night on retiring I told B. that I was thankful to be so much better, for when the hour of trial came, I should be better able to go through it. At 6 o'clock the next morning the baby was born. I was sicker than with little Mary and have got up more slowly.*

*We called in one teacher's mother to dress the child as Julia seemed rather fearful to undertake it, but as before, B. was my physician. Thursday I seemed to be threatened with a return of my former troubles with my breasts and we sent off for Mrs. Fisher. Called in the teacher's mother also. The trunk of things from the dear Oberlin friends had just arrived and Louise's present was put into constant use. She will be glad to know it probably saved me from having a broken breast. After Mrs. Fisher came Friday, she kept herself and everybody else busy drawing out the milk and putting on this and that. Both breasts were caked some and the left one quite badly. Indeed, around the place where it was lanced there is still quite a lump, but it gives me no trouble now. The liniment we rubbed on or something else has seemed to dry it up some so that it does not afford baby half the nutrition that the other does.*

*I am very thin in flesh but this is probably in my favor as I have been quite free from fever. I kept very still and not till baby was a week old was I dressed and drawn to the armchair in the other room. I now (baby is over two weeks) sit up most of the day, sew some and treat baby but cannot walk across the room without hurting me. What does ail my back? Since the summer I was seventeen I have suffered much pain in it. I have used sit baths a great deal and always feel better for them, but nothing cures it. For*

*two months before my confinement it was only with difficulty that I walked across the floor. I hope I shall be getting better of this now, but I have some fears.*

*I have a very slight cough but do not cough hard and raise as I did before I was sick. Little Mary is cutting some more double teeth and is not quite as happy as usual. Has had one large boil on her head and another is starting. Bigelow is very busy, will be gone from home a good deal the next two weeks attending meetings.*

*Thank all the donors for their gifts in the trunk. Every article is acceptable and will be turned at once to account. Little Mary is delighted with her toys and Rollo book.*

*I had hoped that Bigelow would be able to write this, but he was called off and I have done the best I could, but my back is aching like the toothache and I must stop.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*

**From Sarah to Parents**

*At Douglass' Residence  
Thursday, August 28<sup>th</sup> 1862*

*Dear Parents,*

*Bigelow dated this page for a note to Mr. Troy and dropping his pen for a personal interview I take it up to write you a few lines.*

*I am out on my first visiting tour since February and today find myself in the home of my old classmate, now Mrs. Douglass. They occupy a nice large house on the Richmond property, built on the foundations of the old great house and still unfinished.*

*Have lived here since February but are now expecting to move to Chesterfield as he has resigned his post as teacher here. (It is quite likely they may return to the States in the course of the year.) We had planned a tour around the whole Mission but the rains will probably prevent our going further than Eliot. There is a meeting of the Association at Brandon Hill week after next, which I want very much to attend, as well as to see Mrs. Wilson's baby.*

*Friday morning. I snatch a few moments while baby is asleep and Sallie is busy about the house to chat a little with you. How I wish you could sit with me a while in this pleasant room. When complete this will be by far the best house in the mission. It is two stories high besides the basement which is to be done off eventually. The rooms in the middle story are large, high and airy – much cooler for not being next to the roof. The frame is 70 X 58 and a wide piazza extends around two sides. The view in front is very fine. Below lies Mr. Wolcott's pasture land, an unusually level spot for this country, of triangular shape, bordered on this side by a fine stream of water, on the left by a*

*beautiful fringe of bamboos and shut out from the road leading to Eliot by a log wood hedge.*

*Looking down on it, dotted here and there by its grazing occupants, I am reminded of home, but the high hills shutting it in on every side and the peculiar type of foliage soon dissipates the illusion. Just below the house, on this side of the river, stand grouped together a great number of coconut trees, whose language as Livingston remarks of all its tribe is "far from home." On the right is a beautiful hill completely covered from top to bottom with the peaceful, feathery foliage of the bamboo. On other hills these are mingled with the mango and other trees, with here and there cleared reaches of pastureland. One hill near the house is covered with sugar cane. To the left we have a fine view of the sugar works carried on by water power.*

*They are built of white stone and comprise several buildings, the grinding house – where is the immense water wheel used also for grinding corn and driving a saw – the boiling house and the school house, used formerly as a distillery. On the brow of the hill above the works is the old overseer's house, occupied by Mr. Wolcott and his large family. It is of a faded red color and rather going to ruin. They will probably move up to the great house before a great while.*

*I have had one of the Richmond girls with me since baby was born and, as she was to be married this week Wednesday, I came over to attend the wedding. She is but partially colored (has a white father) and is married to a carpenter from the States just about as light. We managed the ride over (five miles) very nicely. Bigelow carried baby, who slept nearly all the time. We got a boy to bring Mary down the long steep Mt. Patience hill, and I took her on my horse the rest of the way. She is getting old enough to enjoy riding and going about very much and made many remarks of things she saw, which kept us lively. Within a mile of Richmond we stopped at Mr. Rennie's. He is a member of Brainerd Church, a Scotsman with a Creole wife and has a nice family of children.*

*Mary had a nice play with them and their little pigeons. We got cooled and rested and then started on to Richmond where we took dinner and after the rain went up to the Beattie House for the wedding. Mr. Thompson performed the ceremony and Bigelow made the prayer, after which we partook of cake, pineapple, etc.*

*Spent the night with the Wolcotts and came here the next day. After all this I need not tell you that I am quite smart. Indeed I have not felt so well in a long time. Have an excellent appetite and am filling up my hollow cheeks considerably. Have some cough but do not raise as I did a while ago. My back seems decidedly better. Baby is as fat as needs be and generally very good.*

*I suppose this is Commencement week with you. You are doubtless aware that we have just passed the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our wedding day. It hardly seems possible. Have you seen the account of Coffing's death? B. loved him very much. Bigelow seems in good health and spirits. I do not think I was any happier in my life than I have been the*

*last few weeks. I take so much comfort with my two children. I must tell you one funny thing Mary did the other day. She came tugging into my room a large calabash that had fallen from the tree in the back yard and I heard her saying, “Where come from?” She boosted it up into a chair by my bed and called out, “Mama, see here Grandma send it from Merica.”*

*I have ripped and turned the dress Sarah sent and it looks quite like a new one. I shall hardly dare wear it much till I am done nursing. If we go to town to get our pictures taken, it will be just the thing. If I do not get time to write her, please give her our best wishes for her future happiness. Love to all.*

*Your loving Sarah.*

*Don't mention to anyone that the Douglasses have any thought of going home, for they may not after all. SCIP*

*Can father advise me what book to procure which will contain the best forms such as for giving letters to members about to leave, etc. etc.*

*In haste and love, Bigelow*

### **Sarah's Article submitted to the *Advocate and Family Guardian***

August 28, 1862

#### Travelling in the Mountains of Jamaica

It was a bright sunshiny morning when in the company of my husband and two children I started off on a tour of the stations where were located our brothers and sisters of the American Mission. Of course we went horseback, for this is the region where very few of the roads admit of any other kind of traveling.

One of the pupils of the Richmond Industrial School who had spent a little time in our family was to be married that day, and “On to Richmond” was the watchword of the occasion. The first part of the journey was the descent of Mt. Patience by a steep, narrow and winding path, or pass as it is called here. The services of a trusty negro boy were chartered to take little Mary down the hill, while baby rode safely in her father's arms. Once at the bottom and through the gate of the Lewisburgh Estate, Mary was mounted in front of me and the boy dismissed.

We cross a clear running stream, climb a steep bank, then suddenly go down a little pitch into a sort of marsh. Just here I almost lost my little Mary. Right above us is the Estate House and on the left side of the path are the ruins of the old sugar works.

In slavery times this Estate doubtless sent off many hog's heads of sugar yearly, but now it is turned to the more quiet use of cattle raising and in Jamaica parlance is termed a "pen." The large farms (as they would be called in the States) are here called by different names according to their use or products. Thus we speak of such and such a Coffee Property, Sugar Estate or Cattle Pen.

Each of these generally include several hundred acres and are usually owned by whites or mulattoes. But here we are at the rum shop and further gate of the pen. A little boy runs out to open it for us and we pass on. The native houses, with their thatched roofs and whitewashed walls peep out on every side. Toward one of the best of these we wend our way, crossing as we do a little laughing brook. We are to make a pastoral call. The "pater familias" is not at home but the "mater" meets us with a hearty welcome and we alight to rest a little and get cool.

Mary has a nice play with the little folks and the pigeons. But we must not tarry long or the noonday shower will be upon us, so once more we are off to Richmond. After crossing some pretty deep fordings and skirting along the banks of the Richmond River for about a mile we arrive safe and sound. The sugar works and the schoolhouse are on a sort of flat near the river and the dwelling house overlooks them from a hill a little back.

This is always a busy place, sugar making, cattle raising, corn grinding, board sawing, carpentry, masonry, farming, and housekeeping all going on at once so that you conclude at once that it merits the name of an industrial school. Just now it is vacation but in a week or two four hours every morning will be devoted to study. Already some twenty pupils are on the ground. Two of the maiden sisters of the mission meet us at the door, but Mr. and Mrs. W. are so busy that they do not make their appearance for some little time. It seems they are in the midst of preparing corn stalks for stuffing beds, and the floor of the spare room is covered with the dry rustling "trash" as it is called here. Mr. W. pulls off the saddles and tucks them under the house while the horses are allowed to nibble the green grass in the yard. Mr. W. is toiling away, laying stones for a new kitchen chimney. One of the W. girls is doing double duty. She is heating flatirons and getting dinner all at once.

By this time the rain is coming down merrily. Some doubts are expressed about getting up to the wedding which is to take place at a native house on the brow of a hill, ½ mile off. It's no matter what we have for dinner but some of the dishes are quite unknown in the States, for instance young plantain and breadfruit. By and by the clouds clear away and all are busy preparing for the wedding. Of course the path is wet and splashy but we go on horseback and don't mind that. Rev. T. performs the ceremony, after which we are regaled with bread and cake and pineapples. Wishing the married pair all manner of blessings we go to Richmond for the night.

After breakfast the next morning, we go up to the former Great House of the Estate, the present building rebuilt as the teacher's house and occupied now by Mr. and Mrs. D., the latter an old classmate of mine. Thursday and Friday pass pleasantly,

closing Friday evening with a fine sing. Early Saturday morning we are off for Providence, our old home, where Mr. P. is to preach on the Sabbath. The roads are perfectly shocking, muddy, slippery, steep, narrow, and overgrown with long grass. Fortunately a trusty person is going the same way who takes little Mary on before him and I have only myself and Nora to look after. The latter persists in grabbing at the grass so temptingly laid every foot of the path, to the great risk of breaking my neck by tumbling me off into the "gully" to the depth of a hundred or two feet. Baby passes her time in sleep. About half way we stop at the (illegible) river school house to rest a little and then remount for another four miles. The last two are the most uncomfortable of all, and baby begins to cry. The last mile I take her into my own arms and hush her crying, but the sun is so hot that we are nearly roasted. You may be sure we are thankful to arrive safely, though we find Mrs. T. has had a fall which prevents her being about the house and has a houseful of visitors already. But we know she is glad to see us for all that and determine to make the best of it.

The seven children have a merry time together, especially just at night when their parents join them, for a great family bed is made on the floor and five are huddled together in it. At meals two tables are set, one for the children, at which Mary presides with all dignity, and the other for the old folks.

The Sabbath congregation is not large but we are welcome among them and very sweet is our communion around the Lord's table. The chapel is a part of the church house. After the Monday morning prayer meeting and breakfast, our city friends start off for their home going on horseback a mile or two where their carriage awaits them. Wednesday morning we are off for Chesterfield. Baby is carried over the hill by one of my old Sunday school scholars while we ride around it to meet her on the other side. We ford a small stream 6 or 8 times. The Wag Water, of which this stream is a tributary, is quite swollen by the rains or "down" as people say, and we cross this in some trepidation, the man who carried Mary over going back for the baby. Need I say that I watched his little pony struggling through the rushing stream bearing this precious treasure with some anxiety. But by our Father's kind care we all got safely over and commenced climbing the long Chesterfield hill. No hill in the region is steeper or longer than that, indeed it is quite worthy the name of mountain. The ascent occupies nearly an hour. When we arrive we find their morning meeting is not closed yet. Something of importance seems to be on hand by the earnest talking in the chapel, which occupies the lower story of the house. From the upper windows we have a beautiful view of the sea as well as of mountains in every direction. In certain states of the atmosphere we can discern the western point of Cuba.

Things seem to be moving on quite lively here. The people have had an addition put on the chapel and paid for it themselves, besides paying more than ever for their minister's support.

Friday morning we have a very pleasant ride on to Brandon Hill . . . (The rest of this article is missing.)



**From Bigelow to Mother**

*Brainerd  
October 1, 1862*

*Dear Mother,*

*By the last mail, which was received about three weeks ago, we had letters from you and father bearing the dates of 15<sup>th</sup> August 1862 as also 26<sup>th</sup> April 1861. These last explain many things about which we had wondered somewhat. Bro. Whipple says they were mislaid in the office and only of late had they come again to light. Yours and father's references in them to my (then) late religious experience, coming to me long after, have brought to my mind most vividly again those days of silent heart searching, of deep repenting, and of joy well nigh unutterable. If none others had profited by the revival in Jamaica, I at least will ever have cause to thank God for it. The savor of good things then received still remains in a measure, though the deep feelings both of sorrow for sin and joy in believing and laboring for Christ have subsided. I scarcely think they could have remained as they were without wearing away both body and mind. Since the time alluded to, though still far below the standard for which I aim, I am yet conscious of a greater steadiness of aim, of love to God and zeal in his cause than previously.*

*Had I received your letters when due, I should have endeavored to give you fuller accounts of the revival in accordance with your request. However, during all the times of excitement my hands and mind were filled so that often I had no time to eat, and during the time that the excitement was at its height I lost as much as one night's sleep out of every three or four. At Providence after excessive anxiety and labors in watching over, instructing, warning, counseling and praying with and for the young people, I had the joy of seeing many of them apparently born into the Kingdom and of welcoming them to the fellowship and watch of the church. But in the case of most of them I now doubt and fear. Many have turned back openly, others promise better things still, but few are throwing themselves heart and soul into the work of the Lord.*

*Your letters, written so long ago, also contained an account of Margaret's triumphant death and of the afflictions that thus and otherwise fell to the lot of dear Bro. Charles. This account, though late in coming, was exceedingly welcome. The fact of M's death we had of course learned but could only imagine the circumstances.*

*I am not sure that I have acknowledged the receipt of the contribution of the Oberlin S.S. toward the support of a child in my family, alluded to in the same letters. It was received only two or three months ago, on account of negligence at the rooms in New York.*

*Now that it has been received, it will be applied for the purpose for which it was sent. The Columbus S.S. have ceased to contribute for the support of a little girl in our family. Her name, as you probably know, is Maria Rennals. We still keep her and had some thought of applying the contribution of the O.S.S. toward her support. We could not of course take a child and keep it for the small sum sent by the O.S.S. We are*

however thinking of taking a boy to train up by the name of James Mackay, irrespective of any help from abroad, and if we should finally conclude to do so, we might add the name of Fitch and apply what has already been received so as it will go toward his support together with any other contribution they might in the future send. We will write further about this when we have determined upon our course.

Our congratulations to Sister Sarah upon her marriage, though coming a day after the affair, are as hearty as if we had been with her on the happy day.

From the picture of John received when Miss Woodcock returned we would imagine him to be about 10 or 15 years older than we know him to be.

After all I am not sure but the years passing over our heads are leaving less impression on us in this salubrious climate, in spite of tropic sun through the whole year, of deluging rains long continued at seasons, breakneck roads, occasional scarcity of provisions, lack of medical attendance, etc. etc., than upon those of the family who are in these things more favored.

When you write to Smith, assure him and his Sarah of our deep sympathy with them in their heavy trial and our prayer that it may be sanctified to their eternal good.<sup>41</sup>

I learn from a round about way that the steamer is in and that it brings good news from the seat of war. A few days and we will know the particulars from letters and papers. As you may well imagine, we get exceedingly hungry for news in the intervals between the monthly arrivals of the steamers. Our greatest fear for our country is that she will fail to emancipate the slaves or doing so will expatriate them, in either of which case only the wrath of God can be expected as the nation's portion from Him who ruleth over all. We in Jamaica need greatly an increase of population to develop the resources of this much neglected island. The government are waking up at last to see the matter in its true light and will probably hold out some inducement to those who are so oppressed by prejudice against color in America to come here where a man's a man for a 'that.

I am most happy to be able to allay your fears for Sarah's health and comfort. I believe she never was better as to health, all things taken into consideration, than now. She still sees the necessity of great care and prudence and to this in great measure is to be attributed, under God as I believe, her present improved and improving health.

Little Nellie (Ellen Josephine) is fat, good natured and healthy. Mary Cowles, as she styles herself, is tolerably well though rather thin from an attack of worms, of which she is recovering. We hope to send you a picture of the family group in the spring when Bro. and Sis. Douglass return to the States. Our plan is to come home on a visit two years from next spring. May the Lord direct us in this as in all things.

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<sup>41</sup> Smith and Sarah's first child, Clara Josephine, died at nine months on August 3, 1862.

*We rejoice in the hope and assurance that you still remember us in your prayers. The prospect at Brainerd is in some respects encouraging.*

*Your loving son, Bigelow*

### **From Bigelow to Parents**

*Brainerd  
October 30, 1862*

*Dear Parents,*

*We have news from the U.S. by a sailing vessel to the effect that the decree has gone forth so anxiously looked for and so longed for by friends of the slave.<sup>42</sup> In a few days the steamer will either confirm or contradict the report. The news is so well vouched for that we have scarcely a doubt, and it is to the effect that "the President has in a contingency almost certain to occur (though not stated by our informant) proclaimed that the slaves of Rebels shall be free on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1863." Our joy and thanks to God are hearty and full. Yet there mingles fear with rejoicing.*

*How are the slaves to gain their liberty but by wading through a sea of blood and will they have courage to set out or perseverance to achieve it at such a cost? May the Lord who has by the mouth of his servant given the decree, "Let my People Go," bring the 4 million to the promised land of freedom.*

*We surely can trust him, and so we will though he slay us. We in Jamaica are in no danger of being slain at present, of course, but we feel identified with our countrymen, bond as well as free, quite as much we think as if we were still on American soil. The war seems near us here as you can well understand from the fact that all of our mission have near friends and relatives and most of us brothers already in the army. You know, of course, that Brother Edward has enlisted.<sup>43</sup> His regiment was just ordered to Kentucky as he finished his last letter to Sarah.*

*The war is felt in another way by us at present also. Many articles of food, especially those which are imported, and almost everything made of cotton being raised to such high prices. This, however, would not affect us much but for the fact that our salary is quite in arrears and that what little we get comes very irregularly and with great difficulty. I believe in fact that we have drawn from America in the last six months scarcely more money than the salary of one of us. At present the rate of exchange is so high against the U.S. that we lose about 10 per cent on bills of exchange. Our usual way*

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<sup>42</sup> President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on September 23, 1862

<sup>43</sup> Edward enlisted in the 101<sup>st</sup> Ohio Volunteers, was wounded six months later and taken prisoner. He was recaptured and discharged in January 1863. He studied medicine at the University of Michigan and served as a doctor in Grand Rapids before his death in 1877.

*of drawing money is for the Treasurer, Bro Walcott, after receiving from Mr. Tappan permission to draw a certain sum, to sell the draft to merchants in Kingston who are in debt in New York. As a general thing before the war, the rate of exchange was 4 per cent of which the A.M.A. lost 2 and we 1 and the merchant who bought the bill paid 1. Of late, since the reverses of the war, we have scarcely been able to sell drafts at any rate.*

*We are at present ordering more large goods from America in order to get our salary in some way. I believe we have drawn more of our salary than most of the Mission, that is, have had more than our share of what money has come. However, it resulted from having to meet a Dr's bill of \$50 or thereabouts and from having as it were to begin life afresh. On leaving Oberlin we had to lose whatever we had expended on the improvement of the station, which was about \$50, and so again at Providence, though there we had not laid out more than half that sum. When we came to Brainerd the fences were all down and the place covered with brush. The people have "turned out" to hill the pasture but we have had to expend several pounds in fencing, gardening, etc., etc. The grass at Brainerd is very poor and I have paid \$5.00 to plant an acre with guinea grass.*

*The house was for the most part out of repair and much has been done to set it to rights, though the people have footed the bills for this mainly. I send you a plan of the upper floor and basement. You will see that the house is quite roomy and required more furniture than if it were smaller. The articles marked a, b, f, i, n, o and r belong to us, the rest to the station. I have cut through to the basement. I have spent \$5.00 in repairing the cistern which when we came would hold no water. Besides these money expenses we have paid \$70 for a Stuarts cooking stove, including first cost, freight to N.Y., telegrams, ocean freight, duty, town dues, wharfage and freight 40 miles in the country (as we are by a good carriage road though only 26 by riding road), and part of this expense being met in N.Y. made no immediate draft on us as it was charged on the account and went to fill up arrears of salary. The roof of our house is just about gone, may last another year with patching, and we are about ordering an iron roof from America, the climate being so hard on shingles. This will cost from \$50 to \$75 but the people will probably raise the amount. We are to have a "Social Meeting" to start it, on the 30<sup>th</sup> December coming, tickets one shilling. The entertainment consists of lemonade, cakes, etc., music and speeches, much like the Cong'l reunion of New York city, or tea meetings generally.*

*We consider ourselves very busy with all our duties (and who does not?). Yet I believe we are as happy and contented as if we had less to do. If my sheets were not full and I had a little more time to spare just now I would give you some account of my weekly duties and perhaps I may be able to do so another time before long.*

*Will you not send a plan of your new house that we may better realize your present surroundings. From Father's last letter we are led to fear that the Evangelist is about to be given up.<sup>44</sup> If so, what are your plans for the future? We hope you will still*

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<sup>44</sup> Falling subscriptions and other financial difficulties caused by the War forced the closure of the *Oberlin Evangelist*. It published its last issue on December 17, 1862.

*reside in Oberlin if it is best, for when we return two years from next spring we want to find you there. However the Lord directs as to your and our plans.*

*Your aff. son, Bigelow*

**From Bigelow to Parents**

*Brainerd  
November 29, 1862*

*Ever Dear Parents,*

*I have been writing Bro. Whipple on the subject mentioned in your last and think I will repeat to you my communication which so far as it related to the future support of this mission was as follows: "Both Father and Mother have written me of the doings of the A.M.A. at their anniversary in Oberlin and especially in respect to the question of seeking English aid for the Jamaica Mission or of handing over the Mission to some English society.*

*I have long thought, or least ever since I have become acquainted with Jamaica and its relations with the rest of the world, that American aid would of necessity be ultimately withdrawn. I am not at all surprised that such propositions have been put forth for consideration, especially since the President's Proclamation of Emancipation. Of the two measures I propose, I am decidedly in favor of the latter.*

*From what I know of the English and especially of English Societies in Jamaica, I am satisfied that very little aid will be gained for our Mission in England as long as we remain an American society. The Mission could be sustained, however, full as liberally as at present, with scarcely any change in men or measures if it were incorporated in some English society.*

*Right here I have known was the rub, and until lately I have feared that the friction would prevent motion in that direction. I have supposed that when American aid should be withdrawn we would be obliged to depend upon the precarious support of the people, pieced out by our own Yankee wit and labor, and for that reason I had conceived that no English society with whom we and our people would consent to be connected would be willing to adopt us as part and parcel of themselves. This point I now see in a different light, as I will show. Father suggested the London Missionary Society. So, while in Kingston two or three weeks ago, Bro. Thompson and I had a free and private conversation with the missionary for that Society in Kingston, and he assured us that in case such a measure were proposed he would advocate for it heartily. He told us that while in London a few months since he had conversed freely with the officers of the L.M.S. as to their policy and learned that they were prepared to extend operations in Jamaica whenever their doing so would not interfere with other bodies.*

*He seemed confident that if it was proposed by the A.M.A. to give up all control as well as support and care of their Mission in Jamaica to the Lond. Miss. Soc., the latter would undertake the charge of the different churches and the support of needed missionaries. He thought they would require fewer men than are now in the field but that they would be glad to retain such as most likely would choose to remain. If the Lord permit, I intend to remain at my post whether supported by the A.M.A., the L.M.S. or as was Paul by the people and my own hands. I have been thus minded ever since coming to Brainerd.*

*I have thought it best to write you privately as above and presume that Brother Gardner (referred to above) has written privately also to the Sec. of the L.M.S., though I do not know. Our Mission could labor well with the Independents under the L.M.S. as our principles are in nearly every point the same and we esteem their missionaries with whom we are acquainted very highly as Christian brethren as well as for their work's sake."*

*Thus much to Mr. Whipple and now for news. We have been experiencing the heaviest part of the rainy season for a month now, yet thanks to a favoring Providence it has not been the infliction to us this year that it was last, on account of a stove in the kitchen, ceiling overhead and a patched roof, not to speak of a field full of yam, etc., which comforts we greatly missed on year ago. I am putting in half an acre of coffee, which will probably begin bearing in two or three years. Coffee is often called Jamaica gold, and not improperly. Its cultivation costs but little and its value is high. Two or three of the cedar trees on the station have just been cut down for lumber and will probably be turned into a board fence. We all have light colds from the wet weather but are happy and contented.*

*As ever, your aff. son, Bigelow*

**From Sarah to Parents**

*Brainerd  
November 29, 1862*

*My Dear Parents,*

*I was sorry not to write you by the last steamer and must tell you how it happened. I have been having trouble with my teeth for some time and hoped to get Bro. Thompson, who knows something about dentistry, to attend to them, but he insisted on my going to Dr. Becket in Kingston, and all on a sudden I decided to do so. The last week of the month, which I had devoted to letter writing, had to be devoted to preparations for going. We thought best to have little Mary go to have her picture taken, and as I could not leave baby, both the children had to go. One of the Elders of the church went along on an extra horse to carry Mary and Old Prince carried Maria to help take care of the babies when in town.*

*We got off before light Monday morning and had accomplished half the journey (26 miles) before the heat of the day. Here we rested a while and then went on in company with Mr. Fisher and Mary Emma, Mr. Wilson and Mrs. Thompson. Baby slept in her father's arms most of the way, but going over Stoney Hill she began to cry and I had to take her and we fell back from the rest of the company. As we got down onto the plains it became very warm and baby, feeling very tired and uncomfortable, began to cry. I tried to carry her some myself, but it added to the severe pain in my side I was having and I was obliged to desist. Four miles from town we stopped and rested a while, then pushed on though baby cried and my side ached so that it seemed as if we never should get there.*

*You may be sure that both mother and baby were glad to dismount at last. Bigelow went downtown to make an appointment with the dentist but I did not try to do anything but to bathe and rest. We laid baby on the bed and she scarcely wished to move until the next morning, when she seemed well as ever and I left her with Maria while I went to the dentist. I had several sittings and when through had two teeth extracted, one filled with gold, and two with succedaneum. Dr. Becket himself had been very ill with fever and his brother did most of our work. Mr. Fisher and daughter had some done as well as Bigelow and Maria.*

*Bigelow took little Mary to the artist and had her picture taken sitting on his lap. (We have not been able to get them up from town yet. If Mr. Wolcott can get them, we will have him enclose one in this letter.) If we had not been short of means, I should have had mine taken with baby on my lap.*

*I went to town and did some shopping on credit and helped select some wall paper for our dining room. Friday noon we were ready to return, and just see how nicely I was provided for. Dr. Becket was wishing to go to the country for a little change and we most cordially invited him to come to our house. He decided to do so and, as he was too weak to ride horseback all the way, hired a carriage to take him as far as Oberlin and myself and two little ones had seats in it. I was so thankful and it seemed so comfortable. From Oberlin we rode horseback, and as night fell and I had to carry baby, the last half of the way seemed rather tedious, but eight o'clock found us safe at home. The Dr. stayed till Wednesday morning when B. went with him to Eliot, but the fever returning he was obliged to go back to town Friday. We have been quite busy since, trying to fix up the house and surroundings before the holidays. We have papered the walls, painted the ceiling, doors, etc. and put matting on the floor so that it seems like another place entirely. There was some money on hand for station purposes, which we used for glass and paint, and we paid for the paper ourselves.*

*I had a fall off the back steps the other night, striking on the side of my head, and have scarcely recovered from it yet. Besides I did not rest very well last night and am in no mood for letter writing today, as you will readily infer.*

*Mary McReady's sister died in childbirth last week. We are having dreadfully gloomy weather now, rain rain all the time. Though my heart jumped at the thought of your coming to make us a visit, I should hardly want you to come just for the rainy season and return. Still, the rains began to hold off the first of January last year and we hope they will next. We are not sorry the Jamaica question came up at the Annual Meeting of the A.M.A. It is quite time. They have not nearly paid up our salaries the past year and being war times we have to pay a heavy discount on what we do get. All the Mission have been dreadfully scrimped, some have run into debt. Some have sold stock to get on for the present, looking for better times.*

*We thank Mr. Bateham very much for his present. It will doubtless swell our credit on the books, but when we shall get it is doubtful. If we had thought to mention it, he might have sent it in gold. Some of my friends in Michigan have sent me small pieces of gold in letters, which come through quite safely. However, we do not appeal for charity – we are getting on very well at present and can trust the Lord for the future.*

*I am glad you have a stereoscope and hope you get some Jamaica views, but am sorry to say no views have been taken of this place. B. has a pencil sketch which I hope he will finish and send some day.*

*Baby Nellie woke up with a swelled eye this morning. She seems inclined to follow her father's example in having styes. Mary has a slight cold. Since I put flannel waists on her she has had no serious ones. Bigelow is wearing flannel too and with evident advantage. He is turning some attention to the study of medicine as we deal it out more or less to the people. We hire a boy to do chores for us and have only the two girls, Mary McReady and Maria, in the family.*

*Love to all, your aff. daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*

*We rejoice in the President's Proclamation and expect to have a sort of jubilee the 1<sup>st</sup> of January to celebrate the freedom of the slaves. Will they really be free? God grant it.*







*Sarah Ingraham Penfield, 1864*

## JAMAICA 1863

**From Bigelow to Parents**

*Eliot*

*January 1, 1863*

*Wish you Dear Parents and all of the family*

*A Happy New Year*

*My wife and little ones are all at Lewisburgh, a pen near Brainerd, for a change of air, etc. Sarah has been threatened with fever but seems by the help of quinine to be getting the mastery of it. I am improving the opportunity of her absence in painting and whitewashing certain rooms of the house that were very dingy.*

*I am well as usual. Had a morning meeting for prayer and thanksgiving for the President's proclamation this morning at Brainerd and have since come to a mid-day meeting at Eliot.*

*Thinking that a line will be better than nothing, though exceedingly pressed with duties just now, I write in great haste these lines.*

*Yours in the bonds of truest affection, Bigelow*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Brainerd*

*February 27, 1863*

*My Precious Mother,*

*I have just been reading your kind letter of January 15<sup>th</sup> and I can almost imagine myself sitting by your side and listening to your voice, so plainly does your mother's heart speak out in every line.*

*I often long to ask your advice in regard to my children and many other things and I know Bigelow does the same. We often speak of the good talks we used to have with you, especially Sunday evenings and wonder if we shall ever have such again. B. says he has faith to believe that we shall see you once more face to face this side of the dark river and I do trust it will be so. You must be looking much older than when we left. Is your hair quite grey and your form bowed? I know you must have some lonely hours and I sometimes wish I might be with you to cheer and comfort you. Still I am quite aware that you have friends near you who will not suffer you to lack the services I would gladly render you.*

*Did I ever tell you how much I had wished to have someone in our family who would be congenial society for me and cheer the lonely hours of B's absence? My wish is gratified at least for the present. I have a nice American lady boarding here. It is two weeks since Mr. Penfield brought her up from Kingston. Her husband is an English gentleman whose business calls him away from home a good deal and after spending about a year in the city she has resolved to try life in the mountains. She has a little boy something over a year old and the three children make the house quite lively. I love her very much already.*

*Things are pleasanter without as well as within doors. The clouds have cleared away, the rains have ceased and all nature rejoices. Indeed the rainy season answers very well to a winter, though the spring is earlier than in the States. Planting time has already begun. I have had a little spot hoed off where I hope to plant some slips and seeds for flowers. Our gardening succeeded so poorly last year that we have not much heart to try again. We are all having colds and little Nellie, I am sorry to say, has got a burn from a candle by the side of her nose, which is quite bad. We all took a ride over to Richmond a week ago to a mission prayer meeting, i.e., Mr. Penfield, Mrs. Morgan, and myself, leaving the babies at home. The roads are much better than they have been and we enjoyed the trip very much, going and returning the same afternoon.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Wolcott are living in the new house that Mr. and Mrs. Douglass occupied when at Richmond. Miss Julia Treat keeps house at their former residence and attends to part of the boarding pupils while Mr. and Mrs. McDonald occupy still another building at the same place. Mrs. Thompson is poorly. She has talked of going home and trying the water cure treatment. Mr. T. is not well himself. Twenty years of missionary labor has nearly used them up.*

*Bigelow is away from home at Brandon Hill yesterday and Providence today I suppose. He has been very busy drawing and painting a large map of the United States by means of which to explain to the people the state of things at home. The brethren are uniting together to hold meetings at the different stations to stir up the people to do more for the support of the Gospel in view of the demand for labor among the contrabands. The Brainerd people have given less in proportion to their numbers than any other. They are sending their children out to school better than they did last year.*

*What you wrote about the piano made us wish we could pay Smith for his there and have it for ours, but after all I do not suppose it is best. A missionary have a piano! Who ever heard of such a thing? Besides there are a hundred things we need far more.*

*Just now I need a set of dishes very much and a pair of candlesticks. I have never had a regular set and my table shows a strange mixture. Blue, red and clouded were bought at different times as necessity called for them. The rate of exchange is so high (40 pct.) that we do not draw money from New York any more than we can help. It is better to order goods. Bigelow has got out a good deal of medicine to sell the people in this way and a short time since I sent for a piece of bleached shirting. Perhaps I shall get the dishes in the same way. I hope the cloth will come this month.*

*You speak of looking for an opportunity to send us a box of things. If you have it in your heart to send one and can do so without distressing yourself I have no doubt it will come quite as safe by express as by any person who might be coming. A barrel would be the best to send and perhaps some of my good Oberlin friends will help you fill it. Clothing or material for the same, bedding, and dried fruit would all be acceptable. Scarcely any thing would be amiss. I would be very thankful for a good pair of overshoes. Little Nellie needs to come out of long clothes but the material for new ones is lacking. I am glad father has such kind thoughts towards us and our children.*

*What would be our share of the piano? We should be glad to have at interest till the children are old enough to use it in obtaining an education.*

*I asked little Mary what I should tell Grandma for her. She says "tell her howdys for me."*

*Sat. morn. Bigelow has just got home, feels too tired to write. My cold is worse and my "chest hurts me" as the people say. Love to all from all. Shall we ever hear from Professor Penfield again? Sarah C.*

*Sarah has not written me since she was married. If I can find time I will try to write her, however. I see by the papers Lucinda Adams is married. That is the first I have heard of it.*

*We have subscribed for the Lorain County News, which we prize very much for its items of news. Hope Eddie Williams will be very useful in his new field of labor but his enthusiasm will likely cool after a little. Mrs. Gage seems to think the ex slaves all good Christians. I think a few years of labor among them would teach her something different.*

*The warmest love, your daughter Sarah*

*P.S. I'll tell you another thing I would like and that is s decent ingrain carpet for my sitting room. It would be a great comfort.*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Brainerd  
June 30, 1863*

*My Dearest Mother,*

*We can scarcely express our gratitude for your faithfulness in writing us so regularly every month. The past two months we thought we should be disappointed as by misdirection the letters were sent to another bag, but a little later in the month they arrived safe and sound. I think B. in his last requested you to direct to the care of*

*Henderson and Savage, Kingston. I think father has generally done so. You will perceive that I have returned from my Kingston trip. I cannot say that I have been much benefited by it as I hoped to be, but I certainly had a fine rest.*

*Dr. Beckett has a pen (a small farm for keeping cattle) about a mile and a half from the city where the air is much more cool and bracing than in the city. His wife is a very nice Christian woman some younger than myself. She is quite proud and happy in the possession of their first baby, a fine little boy. They have a nice large house and things in the best style. A lady with her two daughters, also from the country, was there at the same time and although they were very rich people they treated me like a lady and we had fine times together.*

*Dr. B. had a large bath into which we went every day, making desperate attempts to swim, which art Mrs. B. had learned from her husband. This did me a great deal of good. I used to get under the spout and take the stream right on the sore spot on my chest, then on my lame shoulders and back. But I could not stay in nearly as long as the rest on account of the cramps which I began to feel in my hands and feet. I had a ride, or drive as the people here call it, in a carriage almost every day.*

*Saturday evening I was invited to a select party at Mrs. Aughton's (she is now living in Kingston) and bought and made up a white dress for the occasion. Mrs. Chivers helped me make it and wished me to wear a rich ribbon scarf of hers, and when I was dressed the Dr. said I looked quite charming. In fact, I suppose I had not been so well dressed since the day I was married. At the party I met Mr. Hitchens, who came from America in the steamer with us, and Mr. Webb, a colored gentleman whose wife read Uncle Tom's Cabin in Oberlin some years ago. She is now dead. He has written one book and is writing another. Mr. and Mrs. Menich and Mrs. Thompson were acquaintances, as also most of the party present. Mrs. Rosanna Menich plays and sings very nicely. We had several American songs in which we all joined in the chorus. I remained at Mrs. Aughton's till Tuesday and then went with my husband, who had come down Monday, out to Dr. Beckett's, from whence we started home on Wednesday noon. We came as far as Oberlin that evening and slept with one of our old neighbors. In the evening we walked past our old house.*

*I could not control my feelings sufficiently to go in. We were happier in that home than we were in any other, though at the time we left we had severe trials. The first year I was there I had excellent health which I have not had since. Then our little Mary was born there and my dear husband was ordained to the Gospel ministry. Some of the people would like to have us come back and on many accounts I should not be sorry to do so.*

*Still we shall probably remain here as long as we remain in the Island. There are influences at work in the church which may make our stay rather unpleasant to be sure. Some parties are doing their best to make a split in the church. But Bigelow says these things are only the more reason why he should hold on and I am sure he will not leave till he is quite sure it is his duty to do so.*

*I suppose you received my picture in the last mail. Hope it did not frighten you. Am sure I did not think I looked half so bad. I think you have heard before that I looked thin and pale, now you will think me haggard. B. urged me to try again with a darker dress which Mrs. Aughton lent me and I did so just before I came up from town. This picture is some improvement on the first but I find no pleasure in looking at it. The \$3.00 spent in pictures had better have been spent in consulting Dr. Bowerbank I imagine. Indeed I felt as if I ought to see him before I came up, but the fear that B. would think I was frightened about myself prevented me from doing so. Since I came up, Mary has been sick with measles and now has the whooping cough. I have had her in my arms a good deal of the time and some of the time Nellie too. This has given me pain in my side and shoulders. My cough is quite troublesome. I am laying plans to spend the next rainy season in Kingston. If I am not better in the spring think I shall try a sea voyage. I have been reading some of Dr. Fitch's works, have a great mind to consult him.<sup>45</sup> If anyone can cure me I am sure he can and he has certainly cured many far worse. The thing that troubles me the most is a languor and weakness which makes me feel as if I could do nothing. Mrs. Chivers, and she is a doctor's wife, said I ought to have an egg beat up with plenty of white sugar and a spoonful of brandy in it every day. I don't know as I can afford it, but if I can get the eggs I think I shall try brown sugar.*

*Our pecuniary circumstances are decidedly close just now. We lose a large percentage of what we draw from home and the people pay in just nothing. The 30 pounds which we lay ourselves liable to the people for is accounted for this quarter and what else we get must come from the people. Yam is scarce and it is hard times for those who do not have it, so we have to look to what comes in driblets for medicine to support us. We still have to pay 10 pounds for the cow we bought of Mr. Douglass. It gives us less than 2 quarts a day though the calf is dead. We often wish we had one that would give something like the quantity old Lil used to.*

*I suppose Mrs. Morgan will soon go to housekeeping in town and we shall be by ourselves again. I cannot say I am sorry. I suppose I shall have Nellie down with measles in a day or two. She has quite a bad cough. Maria is with me still. She took very good care of things while I was gone. Margaret Williams, the other girl, is neither bright nor smart but her grandmother is very anxious to have her learn how to do things and she is kind to Nellie, so I keep her without wages. Maria has 24cts. per week to clothe herself. I put out a dozen clothes every week to be washed at 60cts. per dozen. The rest we do in the family. I assist some in ironing though seldom in washing. Before Maria came I had to do more housework than I felt able to but take things easier now. I shall have plenty of company in July and August I guess, but as the saying is, they must take potluck.*

*I am very glad you have had such a good visit with Sarah in her new home, wish I could have gone with you. Also to Aunt Lucy's though she was in affliction. We are told that it is better to go to the house of mourning than to that of feasting. Aunt feels*

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<sup>45</sup> Dr. Samuel Sheldon Fitch, a prominent New York physician, spoke and wrote extensively on the prevention and cure of pulmonary consumption. It was only in 1882, however, that the true cause of tuberculosis and the means of its transmission were discovered.

*such things deeply, may she be sustained by divine grace. I am sorry my time for writing is so limited or she should hear from me by this steamer.*

*Love to all, your aff. daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*

**From Sarah to Mother**

*Kingston  
August 3, 1863*

*My Dear Mother,*

*So you see I am once more in the city and under the Doctor's care though not confined to my bed. Not long after I last wrote I went down to Richmond to help Mrs. Wolcott out with her sewing. One afternoon, Mrs. W., Julia Treat and myself went out to the river bathing and I took a cold which settled in my lungs. Was scarcely able to ride home the next day and for a week or so was obliged to keep to my bed, most of the time coughing and raising all the time at a great rate. Bigelow was so busy that he did not think how bad I was until he noticed some of the phlegm I was throwing up, then he told me he thought the disease was making progress and I ought to be under medical care.*

*The next Tuesday, i. e. July 27<sup>th</sup>, we came to town. Sent for Dr. Bowerbank but his younger partner came instead. After examining the lungs he said there was a little tenderness on the left side but did not seem inclined to answer questions. Ordered a cough mixture and tonic as well as some tartar emetic ointment to be rubbed on the chest. I said something about going to the States. He could not advise it at this season of the year, but if it were spring it would doubtless be beneficial. I have about made up my mind when it is spring I will try it. Bigelow was obliged to return Thursday afternoon. I brought Nellie with me and am stopping at the rooms. Any plans are not very definite. I am waiting for the leading of Providence. Think I am some better than when I came down. This warm dry air is better for me than the dampness of the mountains.*

*Bigelow is having very hard times at Brainerd. The teacher of whom we thought so much has turned out badly. The girl whom I told you I was obliged to turn away for insolence accused him of seducing her. There is an unhappy state of things in the church. I do think that our Mission have made a mistake in putting more power into the hands of the people than they know how to use. Mr. Starbuck ordained in Brainerd Church a number of Elders who were to assist the Pastor in cases of discipline, etc. Some opposed it at the time and more have since, till recently a vote was passed dissolving the Eldership. Still the church was pretty evenly divided and the question is not yet settled. Some of the people do not like B. and would be glad to drive him off. He says he will not go till he is forced to. I think myself it would be an unfortunate thing for him to leave them just now and pray that he may have wisdom to guide them safely through this crisis.*

*Mrs. Morgan is keeping house in town and I thought of boarding with her but her present location is too cramped. She expects soon to remove to better quarters.*



*Wednesday, August 8<sup>th</sup>. Mrs. M. is spending the day and helping me finish off a muslin dress. It is very tiresome for me to sew from the pain in my shoulder. I have received a line from B. He misses me very much and seems anxious about me. I think I am feeling a little better, shall not remain more than a week or two I guess now, and then come down again when the rains set in. He says Mary has a cough. Am sorry to hear that. I fear both children will be inclined to my complaint.*

*I have not heard a word about letters from America. Think there must be some somewhere. My shoulders are paining me and I must lie down and rest.*

*Your aff. daughter, Sarah C. Penfield*

**From Bigelow to Parents**

*Eliot  
August 4, 1863*

*Dearest Parents,*

*I have scarcely a moment to spare as we are in the midst of our August meetings but must not let the steamer go without a few lines from me and especially as my dear wife is so poorly at present. Before weaning Nellie about two months ago she was greatly reduced in strength by the drain on her system, and since she has gained but little and three weeks ago took a severe cold (after bathing in the river at Richmond) which has settled in her lungs causing severe pain and distress. She is raising what seems diseased matter from her lung and is nearly choked at times by the phlegm.*

*She is now in Kingston under the care of Drs. Bowerbank, Campbell and Anderson. Her spirits are greatly depressed, still she feels resigned. She is thinking of going to Dr. Fitch in New York and it is a possible thing that she may do so by the next steamer though it is not probable. I could not leave Brainerd at present with much more safety to the interest of its cause than the Pres. of the U.S. could leave his country. Hence she would be obliged to go alone if at all now.*

*The barrel has not come though all the other things that were shipped with it have come. I fear we shall never see it. But must wait to see. Yours of July 15 and 16 has come to hand.*

*But I must be on my way to Providence where we have a meeting today.*

*Your loving son, T. B. Penfield*

We do not have a complete or accurate account of what happened after Sarah's letter of August 3 and Bigelow's of August 4, though we can try to piece together the tragic events of the following month. In mid-August, it appears, the decision was made that

Sarah should return to the United States for treatment of her “disease” (certainly consumption, though hardly ever so named) at a sanitarium in Saratoga, New York. The two girls were to remain in Jamaica with Bigelow, but in the immediate care of Mrs. McGregor, one of five sisters living at Lewisburgh, an estate near Brainerd where Sarah and the children had often visited. Though Nellie was suffering a sore throat, it was not thought to be serious, and Sarah and Bigelow left for Kingston. After they left but before the steamer departed, Nellie developed a fever and died very suddenly, on August 27, 1863. Bigelow and Sarah hurried back to Brainerd, but after the funeral they must have decided that Sarah should continue with her plans to return to the U.S. and should take Mary Cowles with her. In early September Sarah departed by steamer, accompanied by a Mrs. Dickinson, her traveling companion. Bigelow remained in Kingston for a few days and then returned to Brainerd.

**From Bigelow to Sarah**

*Brainerd  
September 10, 1863*

*My Dear Wife,*

*You will probably be able to picture my surroundings with much less stretch of imagination for some time to come than I yours. Behold me then, seated at the side table in the dining room, the waiter of glasses, etc., being removed to the standard of the Mt. Patience table. The bracket lamp burns brightly on the side of the wall a little over my head. I have just finished a nice supper of cornstarch pudding made with milk and eaten with milk and sugar. I think that with Maria to keep house I shall get on nicely, at least as nicely as it is possible without you, Dearest, and darling Mary (do give her a kiss for me). Margaret begged so hard to stay through this week that I consented, though I long to get settled down as I am to be. You know when any change is to be made or anything to be done I am uneasy till it is settled.*

*I believe not a little of my comfort as well as usefulness depends upon the steady carrying out of a good system. Hence I am striving to systematize as much as possible. I have begun already and as a part of the plan am taking a daily bath. It is of course idle to give you all the details of my system until I have found whether it will work. And so I will wait and see if I hold out. If so, be assured that you will hear of it in due time. As a part of the plan I am to write you such very – but I am telling too soon. I can more easily imagine your surroundings now than I shall be able to do one or two weeks from this. I suppose you are about over seasickness, at least I hope so. Still, as you probably retire quite early I imagine you in your stateroom and most likely in the lower berth. I hope Mrs. Dickinson who is so famous for acting well acts toward you in her best style, otherwise I should be tempted were it possible to rush on stage and as a brave knight rescue my lady love. But a truce to this strain. Before you can receive this token of remembrance you will no doubt be nicely settled down at Saratoga Springs. The people of note and fashion will probably have left you their room, which I dare say will be more*

*acceptable than their company, for it is too much the way in such circles to look down on the missionary and more especially if poor. I shall direct to Bro. Whipple until I learn of your address and let him forward to you. I am only afraid that he will be jealous when he sees how large – but I am almost telling again. The fact is that I have for a long time been accustomed to consider the evening yours and that I cannot altogether feel otherwise yet. Well I have so near told you that I might as well finish. I mean then to write you such long letters that you will not be able to read them through more than once or twice, so long in fact that you will be ashamed to show them to anybody and all the more so because I shall write so much nonsense which as you know is something terrible and not to be forgiven in a missionary.*

*I believe you were to keep a journal, so perhaps you would like to hear mine. In answer to the moving of my hat which was kept up at intervals till you were nearly out to Port Royal, I saw the flutter of a white handkerchief which I was sure was yours. Was I right? I thought you were weeping, but could not be sure. After the ship had gone so far into the distance as to render it quite impossible to discern objects on board, we turned back to the shore, a sorrowful company. Tears were in the others' eyes. I who had the most cause to weep had not the relief of tears. On returning to 44 Hanover we found Rosanna Merrill, who had come too late to say goodbye. The hours of the evening were beginning to drag heavily away when Miss Jane<sup>46</sup> proposed we should go round to Miss Cathcart's on North Street. On the whole, though weary, I found the walk a relief to my overstrained mind. Rosa and Alick went with us. Sabbath morning we all went to the Kirk to hear the Rev. Milne. His subject was the account of Stephen's martyrdom. I am sure one at least in the congregation profited by the comforting and soul stirring reflections with which he improved the subject.*

*At 3 o'clock p.m. all except Mr. Camp went to church on the Parade. The service in itself is beautiful but still as death and the rapidity with which it was read by the minister and the people suggested the idea of a regular steeple chase, or as I now recall it reminds me of the pauper's funeral rattle, his bones over the stones. In spite of this, to my mind, serious drawback to devotion, the sermon which followed, upon the reasons of unanswered prayer, was instructive and impressive. Both services left the impression that the people of Jamaica have at least gospel preaching.*

*Monday we spent shopping and packing. Tuesday by five o'clock A.M. we were on our way over the mountain and over the moor. We reached Brainerd between one and two o'clock safely and well though quite tired.*

*Yesterday Jane put the house to rights and returned to Lewisburgh in the cool of the evening, while lazy I did little else than rest.*

*Today I have been sermonizing, selling medicine and buying corn by turns. About half past 11 o'clock I felt so poorly that I went to bed for an hour, after which waking up I felt much better. But as I need sleep I must now call the children in to prayers and then*

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<sup>46</sup> Miss Jane was one of the sisters from the Lewisburgh estate, who must have accompanied Bigelow and Sarah to Kingston and then traveled back to Brainerd with him.

*go to my lonely room. I feel that my trials are being blessed to my growth and grace. May the same be true of my darling wife. Good night.*

*September 14<sup>th</sup>. You will see by my date that although I count the evenings as yours, yet you are not getting even a part of each at least in letters, yet I can assure you they are yours and no doubt yours are mine. Various occupations have filled my time evenings but I am glad of another one to give to you and to you alone. You know distance lends enchantment as they say. If so you and I ought to be doubly enchanted with each other, for since my last date our distance from each other has just about doubled. How I miss you morning, noon and night I cannot tell you. Your own heart can bear witness, yet you are in the midst of new scenes and kind friends and our darling Mary is with you, while I am bereft of all my heart holds dear. I have a desolate house and a little grave under the mango tree on the hill. But I am not to write you a blue letter, for if I make you sad who shall gladden your heart.*

*Besides, although tempted to sad thoughts and gloominess at times, yet in the main I am contented and cheerful. The presence of the Lord is mine constantly if my faith is only sufficient to grasp the blessing. On the whole, as I again review the matter, I believe you will have more cause for lonely hours than I, shut up as you will almost of necessity be in narrow quarters most of the time for the six months to come, and only occasionally seeing the face of a friend. I fear you will be so sad at times as to be tempted to leave the water cure establishment and go to your friends even at the risk of your health, while I in active and earnest labor for the souls of my people shall find but little time for loneliness. However, we will not either fear for the other. The Dear Lord ordereth all things well. All our interests are in his hands. I find that most of Mary's clothing is still here at home. What disposal shall I make of them? Are they worth sending to you or shall I lay them away to be outgrown before she returns or give them to those who may need them? I should judge that you would think the last the best. You will rejoice with me in the prospect of continued steam communication between Kingston and New York. I am made to understand that the government have told Mr. Holt to go on for the present according to the old contract. If so we will be able to hear from each other regularly which will be of great comfort. I had feared that we would be deprived of this blessing and of course we still may. If so we must be submissive.*

*My health is quite good now though I have but little strength. I went through my usual duties with the exception of the teachers' class yesterday with as little fatigue as ever. Still I can do no hard work. A very little knocks me up.*

*But to continue my journalizing. Every day one or another of the people is inquiring after you and sending messages and assuring me that they are praying for your safe passage over the ocean, speedy restoration to health and return to Brainerd. Old Mrs. Green while speaking of you had several times to turn away and brush off tears. I didn't know she cared so much for anybody in the world.*

*Thursday night I did not rest well but tossed about from side to side of the bed and seemed to be quite feverish. In the morning I felt so little vitality that I dared not*

*take a bath. I felt miserably enough all the morning and sat in the rocking chair reading the news of the war in snatches and dozing between. After noon however I felt much better so that about five or six o'clock I rode down to Lewisburgh.*

*The ladies were more than a match for me in numbers and determination and so in spite of me my horse was put to pasture and I was presented with a pair of slippers. Stella entertained us most of the evening with music. The conversation was mostly small talk, which I suppose they thought would be of greatest service to me under the circumstances.*

*After family worship I was shown to the room where our Nellie was laid out. I have since been informed that they call it my room and they expect me to spend the greater part of my nights there, in which I have assured them they will be greatly mistaken. I do not think it would be advisable for me often to go there, not oftener than once a week or two. I could not get away again before 12 o'clock the next day. I then called on my way back to Brainerd on Jane Morrison who is sick with a raging fever and on Mrs. Charles Reid who is beginning to get better. But few were out to prayer meeting, yet we had a good and pleasant time. The clapper on the chapel bell came out while ringing for meeting. By appearance its connection with the bell had been broken for some time though it had been held in its place by the weight of the bell. I shall have to procure another piece from the foundry in Kingston.*

*After the usual exercises of the Sabbath I called a meeting of the congregation to choose a teacher, when Martin Harris was chosen without dissenting voice. He seems quite hearty in all his ways and I hope will continue so. He is to begin school in two weeks.*

*I took the opportunity while the congregation was together to explain your sudden departure for America. The people appear satisfied, though some seem to fear that it is only preparatory to my permanent leaving them too. I pray that this may not be. We had a good number of people out and I enjoyed much liberty in preaching from the text "Be ye reconciled to God." Caroline and Jane were up to the service and remained till about 3½ o'clock. Soon after they left Bro. Thompson of Mt. Charles dropped in thinking I might be rather lonely. He is a dear good brother. We had much communion of heart and consultation over the interests of our common Master. He stayed to breakfast this morning, after which he went on toward Mt. Charles.*

*We have had a rainy day and, as I have felt rather Mondayish, I have kept quite close. William Smallie is with me at present in the place of Robert Clark. He is doing well.*

*Maria's little sister Ester is to come and spend a few weeks with her soon. Margaret left this morning having been here five weeks as she said. I thought that the 7 pounds or a little over which you had spent for her in town was pay enough, but as she seemed exceedingly surprised I promised to ask what you thought she ought to have. Now please don't forget to tell me in your answer.*

*The doves are not flying as yet though they are well fledged. Carlo is growing quite fast and promises to make a large dog. We are having all the breadfruits we want at present. Oranges will soon be ripe I think. Wish I could send you some from our trees. The mangoes are coming on nicely. I found on reaching home that you had not taken the pine from our garden. I eat it today.*

*Hope the fruit in your basket is keeping nicely. The neesberries will be spoilt unless eaten before now. I meant to have shared them with you before leaving the ship but had not the time.*

*September 24<sup>th</sup>. Ten days since my last date (I am sorry my ink is so poor. It does not seem like that I used on the last page, yet it is the same. I must get some that is better. If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, that of the ink is in the writing.). And now a little journalizing again. Tuesday of last week was another rainy day and but little could be done out of doors. So I read, sang, and studied my subject for the Sabbath, going to bed early in the evening.*

*Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> finished my sermonizing for the week and in the evening sang for you. Thursday according to appointment went to Richmond in company with Bell and Jane, Stella, Caroline and Ned. The last named three returned the same evening to Lewisburgh while the rest of us remained till morning and then on to Orange River to spend the day. We took an early breakfast at Richmond and a second breakfast at Orange River about 11 or 12 o'clock, and soon thereafter had a ramble through the old works now deserted and crumbling away, along and across the river and all about.*

*After dinner rode up to High Gate to see the great road that is being made and, meeting with the Rev. Mr. Constantine, on his invitation, went into the church to see what it might look like. H expressed deep sympathy with me in my late bereavement and present loneliness.*

*As it was late when we reached Lewisburgh and as I was quite weary I remained overnight and early Saturday morning went up the hill to Brainerd. In consequence of heavy rain but few came to the prayer meeting. On Sabbath I preached from the text "What wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" I did not have as much liberty as the Sabbath previous, whether because I trusted to my careful and full preparation too much or because I yielded more than was right to a worthy spirit during the previous week, I know not. Of this however I am persuaded, that I need to preserve a close walk with God and be much in earnest prayer in order to achieve an effective deliverance of the truth. You will unite with me, Sarah, I am sure in importunities at the throne of grace that I may be increasing constantly in holiness.*

*Kingston, October 2<sup>nd</sup>. I know whose birthday it is today. Don't you, Pet? And I can easily guess who is wafting wishes of happiness, etc., for somebody in the Isle of Springs.*

*Well now really, journalizing after the foregoing fashion is quite too dull work for the day and indeed too tedious an occupation for the writer or the reader, especially if there be any affection seeking expression in the one or sought by the other. So, if you please and as you please, we will change the tune for one somewhat livelier. I mean however not to condemn all of what I have written you but merely the dry jotting down of daily events, prosy in themselves and of little or no account to you a month after they have passed beneath the dark waters of Lethe. Matters of more moment demand my time and pen. Yesterday the glorious old flag, the stars and stripes, was flung to the breeze from the portico of the upstairs house at 44 Hanover St., the occasion being not that the town had been taken by the Yankees, but that East Tennessee, the birthplace of Mr. Camp, was relieved of rebel thralldom. Of course we greatly rejoice with him in this and all the other good news just received by steamer.*

*I need not tell you how eagerly I looked through the great pile of letters till my eyes lit upon the handwriting dearest of all in this wide world to me.*

*A disappointment though possible would have been most trying. I am thankful for all the mercies that are mingled in my cup and not the least is this that steam communication between us is still to be preserved. Since writing the last sentence I have had a conversation with Camp about the matter and had this cup of expected happiness dashed from my lips. He says regular steam communication between here and New York is at an end at least for the remainder of this year. The Plantaganet is ordered to Liverpool at once and the Saladin is to leave here for Hayti and then to run between that island and New York.*

*So this letter will go via Port au Prince and then letters must take their chance so far as yet appears. The Lord's will be done even in this. If Jonah's gourd be withered, let us not Jonah-like complain. You have to write occasionally directing to the care of Mr. Whipple and he will forward as he has opportunity. You will have too to possess your soul in patience until he sends you as he receives my letters from time to time. One sigh for the disappointment. There! Now let hope resume her sway. I know not when or how I shall be able to return my thanks to my good brother Prout for his kindness to you. May the Lord reward him as doubtless he will. The Lord has indeed taken care of the trust I so tearfully but confidently committed to him and I know he will continue the same. Oh how the Lord merits our confidence. Were it not that I know in whose care you are, nothing should keep me from rejoining you at once. As it is I am a prisoner of hope. Perhaps it is not boasting to say as I feel that I am a prisoner of the Lord. I can at least apply to myself those sweet little lines which no doubt you remember well. "I am a little bird shut from the fields of air. Well pleased a prisoner to be because, my God, it pleaseth thee." You will not of course suffer our little one to forget me. But don't make her think that she will see me again soon lest as the weary months roll away, so much longer to a child than to one older, she should grow too sad at hope deferred or begin to doubt your word. Better to tell her perhaps that Papa will come by and by sometime. I hardly think you need to expect to see me short of 8 or 9 months from this on account of my presence being so much required at Brainerd as yet.*

*I think matters are taking a turn for the better. The Elders are elected and now consist of L. Phillips, A. Frazier, W. Bennett, W. Green, C. Morrison, and M. Davis. As the latter is so much occupied in the store at Richmond we may have to fill his place again. I was glad to receive Mrs. Bennett's kind remembrance. Please assure her that they are fully reciprocated. I was sorry to learn the position of the mob toward her husband and yet it has given him honorable distinction which no doubt he had well earned.<sup>47</sup> McDonald tells me that you are only three hours ride by rail from Rochester.*

*My dearest will I know for once excuse a little white paper. I had fully expected to fill the sheet, but numerous cares have occupied my time so that it is about midnight and, as I am to be off by light in the morning, much against my inclination I must hasten to a close. Mrs. Morgan is to go up to Bro. Walcott to spend a few weeks in the country and Rosa goes with me. Mrs. Venning is on the border of insanity, indeed the Dr. says she has religious insanity, but that it will in all probability soon turn to settled melancholy. She is in town and Sallie is with her. Perhaps you will think it advisable to send on this letter to Mother after reading it thoroughly. Love to you and little Mary from*

*Your husband, T.B. Penfield*

**From Bigelow to Parents**

*44 Hanover St., Kingston  
October 2, 1863*

*Ever Dear Parents,*

*Yours of September 15<sup>th</sup> came to hand yesterday. You knew not when writing it that Sarah and our little Mary were even then setting foot on American soil, yet so it was as you have doubtless been informed long ere this. It seemed best on the whole that my wife should go at once and fully as plain that I must stay.*

*The hand of the Lord is no doubt in it, as is the removal from our care and sight of the precious little one you can now never know but in heaven.*

*As for me, I thought that my trials and burdens were great before the separation from my dear ones. Since then I feel they were light afflictions but for a moment. I scarcely dare think or remember how near the verge of insanity I was for 24 hours before and after hearing of my little one's death. Thank God however I have weathered the storm and am now quite myself again and am performing my usual duties, though my stock of bodily strength is much more limited than before.*

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<sup>47</sup> Sarah R. I. Bennett was director of the American Female Guardian Society in New York and editor of the *Advocate and Family Guardian*. Sarah Penfield would have known Sarah Bennett when she worked for the Society the year before she was married. Mr. Bennett may have been involved somehow with the draft riots in New York City in July 1863.



*I am beginning to think that I shall not get my full strength again without a change. Indeed I should have accompanied my wife but for the present distracted and sad condition of the church at Brainerd. I hope however to be able to make a visit to the United States within 8 or 9 months and then remain toward a year. I am glad to learn that you will still be in comfortable health when I return to the States.*

*The barrel of goods you sent has not made its appearance and probably never will. At all events if it ever turns up it will be an agreeable disappointment. Mr. Whipple is sure that it was put on board together with a lot of other goods. All of the rest were landed and the barrel no doubt was there somewhere but overlooked, and before Henderson's agent had noticed that the articles landed came one package short, the vessel had left for the Spanish Main so that nothing could be done. Under such circumstances, as the people say with a shrug of the shoulder and a rolling open of the hand, "What me fe do?"*

*You ask in respect to our leaving Jamaica, would the A.M.A. be likely to furnish the means or any part of it. I reply that they most likely would not furnish any, inasmuch as they have not in the case of others, as for example of Bros. Wolcott and Thompson. However, our salary goes on and would probably continue, provided I did not remain over a year. I borrowed money to pay Mrs. P's passage home and I shall have to sell property to that amount to pay it, as we are not at all beforehand and her expenses at Saratoga will of necessity be great. Many thanks to Father for his present of \$200 which you say he is about investing for me in government stocks. We are all glad to learn that Prof. Allen is thinking of coming out to take temporarily the place of Bro. Thompson. The sooner the better. Eliot is suffering exceedingly for want of a resident pastor. The people do not consider Bro. Wolcott as their minister. (Private – It will not, I should think, be best for Bro. Thompson to return on account of the light in which he is viewed by the people. They say they have had so so chat long enough, they want preaching, etc., etc. They would not probably give him a call again unless we pressed it exceedingly.)*

*The subject of Father's letter concerning the mission to the freedmen is one in which we yield to no one in feelings of warm attachment. That, however, we do not see it our duty individually or collectively to break ranks here on that account need be no matter of surprise to any. Inasmuch as we are the Apostles to these Gentiles we magnify our office by staying to reap that which for many years has been sown here. Bro. Thompson's idea that we ought to wind up operations here I believe to be sadly a mistaken one, but I must close with ardent love.*

*Your son, Bigelow*

**From Sarah to Mother**

Saratoga Springs, N.Y.  
Thursday evening (late 1863)

*My Dear Mother,*

*Many thanks for your very kind motherly letter. Am sure I could not be met more cordially if I were your own daughter. Father asks if I am ready to go to Oberlin. I don't think I am just yet. I believe I derive benefit from my treatment here and wish to give it further trial. Dr. says it would be far better for me to spend the winter here than in Oberlin. That is what B. thought I had better do. Still if it seems better for me to go, I can have either Mr. Thompson<sup>48</sup> or Mr. Bedortha's<sup>49</sup> company sometime next month. You ask what my expenses are per week. Dr. says he can't tell exactly, but he makes them as low as possible for missionaries.*

*Mother wants to know if Bigelow approved of my coming at this season of the year. Yes, I think he did. When we talked over the state of my health, the leaky exposed state of the house and the gloom Nellie's death had cast over it, we both said I could not stay there through the rainy season, so we chose between my coming to the States or going to Kingston and he said he much preferred the former, especially after what Mr. McDonald told us of the treatment here. As to his health, he seemed exhausted mentally and physically before we started for the baths. He has had a very trying time with the people of his charge and been disappointed in the teacher of whom we were thinking so much, and at the children's picnic when I was away from home he overdid. He had two or three weeks of comparative rest and seemed much better when I came away. I fear almost as much for his mind as for his body. His plan about coming home was to await Mr. Venning's return and then get Mr. Douglass to take his place, as it would not do to leave Brainerd without a pastor in its present state. He hoped to get things in better order before he left. I found that I could have good company and was satisfied to come without him. When I said Mr. Boyd attended the funeral I meant he officiated. B. was there too. I formed the acquaintance of three sisters at Lewisburgh a mile or so from our house a year ago. Lately Mrs. McGregor, a widowed sister, has joined them with still another sister who has always assisted in the care of her children. She is an excellent nurse and it was to her care that I committed dear little Nellie. I felt very much inclined to give up going to the Baths when I saw how bad her throat was, but she assured me that as long as there was no fever, there was no danger (the fever set in after I left.). Besides, if I did not go, B's plans for going were all broken in upon, and after much hesitation I decided to go. That I bitterly regretted it afterwards I need not say, but for some reason I was suffered to do so. I know Mrs. McGregor and her sisters did all that I could have*

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<sup>48</sup> Probably Rev. Lorin Thompson from Jamaica, of whom Bigelow wrote in the previous letter. He and his wife had returned to the U.S. earlier that summer. Sarah wrote in her February 27, 1863 letter that Mrs. Thompson was seriously ill and was considering taking the water treatment.

<sup>49</sup> Dr. Norman Bedortha and his wife operated a sanatorium at Saratoga Springs. As early as April 1859, Henry Cowles had written about them in an article in the *Oberlin Evangelist*, recommending the water treatment for consumption and "a great variety of other diseases." "We do not know another place to be preferred to this for an invalid who seeks the quiet repose and refreshing sympathies of a truly Christian household, coupled with the skillful appliances for the restitution of health." Cowles had known the Bedorthas earlier when they lived in Oberlin.

*done. After the fever set in no power on earth could have saved her I suppose. The Lord's will be done.*

*The barrel seems to have been lost. It was on the bill of lading but did not appear among the goods.*

*I am glad to hear you have a bonnet for me as mine is quite out of date. I have a kind friend who lends me a hat when I walk out, which I did yesterday and today. I have missed the fever today and feel better than I have in a long time. If the weather holds pleasant I shall hope to gain rapidly. My throat is very sore. I am so hoarse that I have not had my natural voice for a long time. The cotton compresses I use here have relieved the pain more than the heavy ones.*

*Wish that Smith and Charles would come to see me now that they are so near. Am sorry to have no better account of Josephine and Mr. B. Love to all,*

*Your Sarah*

This is the last letter we have from Sarah. If she wrote more, they have not been saved. Sometime during the fall or early winter, she and Mary moved to Oberlin to stay with Bigelow's parents. Evidently she was failing rapidly, for Bigelow came home from Jamaica to be with her in her last days. We have this letter from Bigelow to George Whipple explaining his decision to return.

**From Bigelow to George Whipple<sup>50</sup>**

*Oberlin  
February 24, 1864*

*Dear Bro Whipple,*

*I was somewhat disappointed in not finding you in New York as I wished much for an interview. Under the circumstances I did the next best thing and had a talk with your wife. I also conferred somewhat with Bro. Starbuck, but a visit with you would have been much more satisfactory.*

*In your last to me, if I remember right, you suggested that I should return to the States for two months. This I would have done gladly could the A.M.A. have borne my expenses and the health of my wife admitted it.*

*I know not what the A.M.A. might do, but I feel as if I could not return to Jamaica while my wife continues so poorly as at present.*

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<sup>50</sup> This letter is from a small collection of Bigelow's correspondence with officers of the AMA. held in the archives of the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans.

*She cannot walk a step without assistance nor sit up many hours at once. At present her disease seems not to be making as rapid progress as of late and she is even gaining somewhat in strength. Still we know the progress of consumption is not uniform but exceedingly deceiving.*

*It is not at all likely that she will be well enough this summer so that I could leave her long enough to be of much service in Jamaica, and I consider it certain that she will not ever be well enough to go there again herself.*

*The probability therefore seems to be in spite of my former plans, hopes and expectations that I shall never see Jamaica again.*

*I suppose Bro. Starbuck has communicated to you the reason of my leaving Jamaica so abruptly but perhaps not so fully as might be best. I had made my plans to remain two months longer so as to come home by the March 5<sup>th</sup> steamer, and most of the two months was to have been devoted to a trip with Prof. Allen through the south portion of the island for the purpose of securing specimens geological, chronological, botanical, etc., as well as seeing specimens ethnological. On Sabbath January 3<sup>rd</sup>, between S. School and service, I received two letters, one from my wife saying that my staying so long was killing her and urging me to come, asking if it had never occurred to me that it was possible to delegate my authority over Brainerd to some other but that no one else could perform for me the duties of husband and father, etc. etc.*

*Father and Mother wrote fully of Sarah's health and rapid decline and gave me in case I should remain longer in Jamaica only a faint hope of ever seeing her alive. When I read these letters I could only throw myself on the bed in an agony of contending emotions and commit my way to the Lord. Upon a hasty but prayerful review of the whole case, it seemed to me that I might and ought to go at once provided I could get the consent of the mission and secure a passage. Bro. Venning had returned so that my place could be filled then as well as two months hence. Besides, I had not purposed being at Brainerd much of the two months at any rate. It did not seem to me that the collection of specimens according to my plan was of enough value to detain me under the circumstances. (The rest of this letter has unfortunately been lost.)*

*The American Missionary, New York, June 1864*

DIED

In Oberlin, of consumption, April 21<sup>st</sup>, Mrs. Sarah C. I., wife of Rev. T. B. Penfield, aged twenty-six years, a missionary of our Association.

Her father, Rev. D. S. Ingraham, became in 1837 the pioneer missionary from this country among the then recently freed people of Jamaica. He died in this country August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1841.

Mrs. Penfield was born in Jamaica, May 1838. She lost both her father and mother by consumption. She became a pupil at Oberlin about the age of fifteen; was converted during her first rear's residence there; graduated from the Ladies' Course in 1857; spent one year in New York City, chiefly teaching and aiding in the Home for the Friendless; was married in August 1858, and went with her husband to Jamaica, under the American Missionary Association, where she spent five years, the last three in frail health. While she had her health her labors in that mission field were earnest, ardent, and successful. She returned in the autumn of 1863 to Oberlin, Ohio, where she died, peacefully in Jesus, leaving one daughter, four years of age.

. . . . .

Besides this obituary, we have no details of the Sarah's final days except for this fragment of a letter which Bigelow sent some time later to his "brother" Julius.<sup>51</sup>

**From Bigelow to Brother Julius**

*. . . . to her bedside, when raising her dying hand she placed it in blessing on her head, seemingly engaged in prayer for her. When struck with death she said, "Pray that it may be short," referring without doubt to the death struggle, and again after a little, "Pray for grace." A few minutes later she raised her eyes and gazed upward intently as if on some distant and soul absorbing object. This was about half past six A.M. A few short and labored breaths at longer and longer intervals and a shudder and her freed spirit had flown to Him whom not having seen she loved.*

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<sup>51</sup> In all likelihood this is Julius Beardslee. Although they had had a falling out over theology and the control of mission property at Oberlin Station, Bigelow always maintained his respect for Beardslee and claimed that their personal relationship was cordial. Certainly Beardslee, as one of the pioneer Oberlin missionaries in Jamaica, would have been close to Sarah's father, David Ingraham, and would have known Sarah as a baby. He may have sent this letter back to his former professor Henry Cowles after Bigelow's death.

*A sweet expression of peace rested upon her pale features as I took the last farewell view in the College Chapel. We laid her remains to rest by a weeping willow in Father's burial lot in the old graveyard on the banks of the creek.*

*Mary remains with Mother and Father Cowles to whom she is ardently attached. She is too young to feel long or deeply the blow that has deprived her of a mother, yet at the time she mingled her tears with ours and sobbed as if her little heart would break, till in pity to her I ceased the expression of my own sorrow to minister comfort to my darling. After a time she ceased weeping and said to her Grandma, "Won't Nellie be glad to see Mama?" (Nellie you know was our youngest who died in Jamaica.) "And won't Mama be glad?" and after a little pause, "And won't God be glad too?" Her Grandma said yes to each and the little girl added, "Then there will be three that will be glad."*

*Hoping that the account will prove both interesting and profitable to you.*

*I am, dear Julius, your affect. brother, Thornton B. Penfield*

Bigelow Penfield remained in the United States for several months, dividing his time between Oberlin and nearby Berlin Heights, Ohio, where he served a church for a short time. In October 1864, he returned to the Mission in Jamaica, leaving Mary in the care of her grandparents. Sometime during these months at home, Thornton Bigelow, who had always been known in the family as Bigelow, decided to use the name Thornton. His remaining letters from Jamaica over the next two years are always signed "Thornton."





West Indies Mission Station



## NEW YORK & JAMAICA 1864

**From Thornton to his Parents**

*61 John St., New York*

*October 8, 1864*

*Ever Dear Parents,*

*I arrived safely in N.Y. this morning by boat from Norwich and take the first leisure to let you know of my welfare.*

*I have had a pleasant trip though with one or two drawbacks owing mainly to my own carelessness. After leaving Buffalo I could find nothing of my ticket. I remembered the conductor's taking it as we were nearing Buffalo and did not remember his giving back any portion. Nothing was to be done but pay over again and so I did with good grace.*

*At Rochester I met Smith, who is well as usual, and with him and Sarah passed a few hours pleasantly. Before going to their boarding house I telegraphed to the aforesaid conductor under the impression that he had my ticket but received no reply.*

*To make a long story short I found it in my pocket just before reaching Worcester. The ticket agent there paid me back what I had paid for the part of the ticket belonging to the Western R.R. and has sent back the other part to Buffalo to be sold, promising to send on the money when it shall be received.*

*The meetings of the Board were interesting, instructive and profitable. All seemed to feel that it was good to be there.*

*Mr. and Mrs. Penniman did all they could think of to make our stay agreeable to ourselves. The Rev. Mr. Clark, Pastor of the Pres.n. Church, Huntington, Lorain County, Ohio, with whom Father is no doubt well acquainted, shared with me the generous hospitality of these friends.*

*After Mr. Clark left yesterday, Mr. P. and myself had a drive over the hills and far away. I enjoyed the scenery, the pleasant bracing atmosphere and the exhilaration of spirits but more than all the kindness of heart that prompted to such little deeds of love. The livery stable had the benefit, Mr. Penniman paid the bill of course.*

*I met Rev. Avery S. Walker (the lame man) and had a nice visit with him. He wished to be remembered very kindly to Father. And how is my little Mary getting along? Nicely, I trust. Tell her that her father has only cried a little, once when Mr. Jessup was telling about leaving his little children who have no mother now and going back to tell the poor people in Syria about the Blessed Jesus who loves them.*

*Bro. Strieby<sup>52</sup> just now asked what my engagements were for tomorrow and learning that I had made none said laughingly that he would have to send me up to preach for Dr. Cheener. Of course it is only a joke.*

*I will try to find time to write you again next week. I am feeling rather dull today from my loss of sleep last night and the excitement of the past few days.*

*Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to his Parents**

*61 John Street, New York  
October 24, 1864*

*Ever Dear Parents,*

*As I did not have time to write you before leaving for Jamaica, I requested Bro. Whiting to do so for me stating the fact of my welfare and my safe embarkation on Saturday of last week on board the Montezuma. I presume you will have received his letter before this from me. I have now the pleasure of assuring you of my continued welfare and of my safe arrival after an exceedingly short voyage.*

*Like one traversing a circle however I have arrived again at the very point of departure.*

*So now of course for a brief explanation. The Montezuma has a propeller and in leaving the pier she slipped her screw from its place so that when she wished to reverse her engine (having now gained the middle of the North River) so that she might go forward on her passage she was unable to do so nor after this attempt was she able to proceed backwards either. Her attempted back down resulted in a breakdown.*

*Yesterday she was towed again to her pier. All through the day of rest, a gang of stevedores was engaged in unloading. Another gang worked throughout the night and yet another is hard at work today. She is to be put in or on the dry dock tomorrow and hopes to reload and be off by Thursday or Friday. I shall know by Wednesday morning probably how long she is to be delayed, and if long enough shall hope to attend the annual meeting of the American Missionary Association at New Haven.*

*Please tell my dear little girl that her father hasn't gone to Jamaica yet but expects to in a few days. I had one cry a few days ago and don't expect to have another so long as I hear that she is a good girl. Tell her that I cried very softly so that nobody*

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<sup>52</sup> Michael E. Strieby, an Oberlin graduate, was the Associate Secretary of the American Missionary Association.

*heard me though perhaps a few may have seen me wiping away the tears. Please give her my love and a warm kiss right out of my heart.*

*Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Father**

*New York  
October 26, 1864*

*My Dear Father,*

*You have probably received my letter written the 24<sup>th</sup> accounting for my being still this side of the water. Our vessel will not probably sail before Friday. I expect to go to New Haven today to attend the meeting till summoned by letter or telegraph to return.*

*Last Sabbath evening I listened to a very interesting account of the working of Missions in India given by Dr. Henry Scudder, the son of the old Dr. who first put it into my mind "to become a missionary and go to India and help him." Monday evening I had a personal interview with him.*

*Yesterday I had a long interview with Bro. Wood, Gen. Sec. of the Board<sup>53</sup> and gave him a full and frank statement of my views and feelings touching service in India or some other foreign field under the auspices of the Board after returning from a year or two of further labor in Jamaica. He advised me to make an application at once and to secure testimonials from those who know me best and have them forwarded direct from their writers to the Secretaries at the Missionary rooms in Boston.*

*At the same time he urged the importance of cutting down the two years in Jamaica as much as practicable. After listening to his advice I had a consultation with Bros. Whipple and Strieby and they said they saw no objection to the course suggested by Bro. Wood, but the length of my stay in Jamaica would have to be determined somewhat by circumstances not yet wholly foreseen. They do not however expect me to remain more than two years.*

*I would be glad to have you secure testimonials for me from the following persons and see that they are forwarded to Boston with all due expedition – Pres. Finney, Prof. Morgan, Bro. Fairchild, Prof. Fairchild and Prof. Allen or any others you may deem advisable.*

*According to the manual, testimonials obtained by the candidate should relate to 1. His character and good standing as a church member. 2. Natural talents and temper and probability of his working pleasantly with them. 3. Judgment, discretion, common sense. 4. Literary and theological attainments. 5. Diligence in improvement of time and*

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<sup>53</sup> The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, headquartered in Boston.

*opportunities of usefulness and habits of economy. 6. Capacity for acquiring influence over others and fidelity and skill in using it for their good. 7. Power of acquiring languages. 8. Personal appearance, manners, address. 9. Any peculiarities of character, habits, constitution indicating special fitness or unfitness for any particular field of labor. 10. General character and standing. And 11. Probable success as a preacher.*

*I am not sure whether it would be advisable for you to write one yourself, considering my relation to you. Yet you could speak more understandingly of several points than others could, especially of the latter clause of Nos. 3 and 5. I go to New Haven today and hope to be able to remain through the meeting, unless summoned sooner by telegraph.*

*Tell my little daughter that I think of her everyday and a great many times a day too and pray for her that she may be a good girl and love Jesus.*

*Yours with filial regard, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Father**

*New York City  
October 29, 1864*

*Dear Father,*

*I might have increased my list of persons from whom to request testimonials almost indefinitely but am inclined to think that a few strong ones are equal to a good many weak.*

*However it may be well to have one as to my success in teaching from either Mrs. Dascomb or Principal Fairchild.*

*Passengers for Jamaica by the Montezuma are warned to be on board by 3 o'clock this P.M.*

*The agent just told me we would not weigh anchor before 10 o'clock tomorrow morning. I have been at New Haven attending the Annual Meeting of the A.M.A. Had my expenses borne by the Society. I did not take part in the public exercises simply because I was not asked to do so. Mr. Claflin from Africa did make a speech uninvited. The fact of it seems to be that the class of laborers employed by the Association is such generally that they do not care to put them forward on such occasions. Perhaps I am wrong in judging but it makes little difference any way as far as I am concerned. From their urging me to attend and offering to bear my expenses I had supposed that they would want a word from me and was prepared to give such an one as might have helped the Association somewhat, in my opinion, but probably I needed a lesson in humility. I*

*was tempted to feel a little sore about the matter but concluded it would be of no earthly use to feel so.*

*I have made out my application for service under the American Board and sent it on today. Hope your gathered testimonials together or singly will soon be on their way to the same destination. Since leaving Ohio I have had the best of health and have been widening almost constantly my circle of friends for which I cannot be too thankful.*

*New proofs of the goodness of God are multiplying about me constantly and my heart is filled with gratitude every time I reflect on the matter.*

*I cannot enough thank God for having inclined your heart to my little jewel so strongly and though I miss her now and shall more yet at Brainerd, she is safe from the evil influences from which I should be in a measure powerless to shield her in Jamaica.*

*May the Lord reward you for all your love to and care for my motherless one. Please tell her I shall kiss Fannie and Carrie for her.*

*Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Mother**

*Kingston, Jamaica  
November 8, 1864*

*My Dear Mother,*

*The Montezuma behaved herself admirably after her overhauling on dry dock in New York and as a consequence I landed safe and sound yesterday about 5 o'clock P.M. We left Sandy Hook Sabbath afternoon so that our passage was one of but little over eight days. We had headwinds for some three days but kept steadily on and made tolerable time. The last of the way the wind helped us nicely. Everything was pleasant except the cooking, which was anything but tidily or well done, and the Dr. who (an Irish Dublin Londoner) kept up an untiring and nauseating fusillade (pardon the incongruous figure) against the Yankees. We had some 25 passengers. I judged from the appearance that the Captain was making preparation for service the day previous to our arrival (Sabbath) but it turned out to be a false alarm. The great majority of the passengers were Jews and it is very likely that they prevailed on the Captain to give up the idea if he had entertained it.*

*None of my friends knew me at sight though they soon came round. They all say that I have improved 50 per. c. Owing to the short time the steamer remains in and the plenty I find to do, my letter must be written with greater dispatch than usual. Hence this miserable scrawl I am sending you and the number of mistakes.*

*Small Pox is raging in the city and country as well, though in mild form. There have been comparatively few deaths, at least among temperate people and not so many new cases this and last week as in the previous. They say that one newly coming among it is more likely to attack than those who have been wonted to an atmosphere replete with infection. It is not at all improbable that I may have it, yet I have not the slightest fear or concern about the matter and trust that you will not give yourself any undue anxiety about it. I would keep it from you if I thought I could not trust you to exercise the same implicit confidence in God about the issue that you have ever sought to teach your son.*

*As to whether I have it or not or, having it, live or die, is God's care and not my anxiety, only so that I take all reasonable precautions about it. I am advised not to be vaccinated since the vaccine matter has become so impure. Our Mission carpenter McDonald and his brother have had it, one lightly and the other seriously. Both are nearly well. They were past giving it a week since. My horse has come down. I shall probably go up to Brainerd Thurs. eve or Fri. morn. McDonald talks of buying my carriage and harness at cost. I hear that there is some talk of having Douglass keep Chesterfield, Venning take and reside at Brainerd, and myself take charge of Eliot (near Richmond) and live and teach at the latter place. This would suit me to a T.*

*Sadness strives to gain ascendancy, but "He giveth more grace." I lay awake some hours thinking of Sarah and Nellie last night, but my sadness turned at length to the height of joy. I believe I never experienced more of the love of God shed abroad in my soul than then. Fell asleep again and was wakened by my own voice praising God aloud; though startled felt it so good to be so employed then and there that I continued for some minutes in the same exalted state of soul.*

*I do earnestly long to know nothing but Jesus X among this people.*

*Love to my darling Mary and you all. Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Mother**

*Richmond  
December 1, 1864*

*My Dear Mother,*

*I hope you received in due time the needle threader I sent you by Mr. Townsend. I thought you would find it quite serviceable and trust it has proved so by this time. I forgot to mention it in either of the letters since written. I have been rather sorry that I alluded to the subject of Small Pox in my last as it has caused me no trouble as yet and it may not at all.*

*So far as I can learn it is doing but little harm at present. In some localities it is still raging though seldom does it lead to death. None of the Mission proper have had it*

*or even fear it. I find things among the missionaries about as I left them. They are all plodding on in the usual way, cheered with but few tokens for good. Simple, earnest, laborious, self denying and cheerful, they are a band of Christians such as it is a pleasure to join. Still there is not such a high toned spirituality as I should love to see and share with them.*

*I am striving to preserve a close and constant walk with God and meet with much in my own experience to hearten me in the strife. The greatest luxury of all is the fact that so little strife is necessary. My mind seems to turn so naturally and steadily toward my Savior that what I have too often in previous years performed as duties are now my truest and chiefest pleasures. I seem to myself like one in a pleasant dream and at times almost dread the waking. And then I ask myself if any such waking is necessary. If all this be a dream, I desire thus to sleep till the morning of a brighter day in Heaven.*

*I have no ecstatic joys but a deep wellspring of pleasure in the felt presence of my God. In both teaching and preaching I find unusual but quiet satisfaction. I am determined to know nothing among this people but a crucified Christ.*

*Brainerd might be lonely indeed to me and would be were I to yield to my feelings, but so far the Lord has preserved me from gloom and despondency. The people were quite cordial in the welcome extended me, mingling congratulations for my safe return with condolence for my loss. I am for the greater portion of the time in Richmond. Have taught a little more than a week already.*

*The sickness of Bro. Wolcott led me to assume the responsibilities of the situation rather sooner than I had intended, but I am not at all sorry, since my time is so fully and so well employed.*

*Come to get up in the mountains among the Mission, I find that there has been no serious talk of having me take Eliot and Bro. Venning take Brainerd. On the whole matters stand at present very well. My people at B. would be glad to have "minister" among them a little more but seem satisfied under existing circumstances with my course. Bro. and Sister Wolcott are cordial and do their best to make a pleasant home for me at Richmond. I have scarcely got settled yet. Most of my books and other goods are still at Brainerd. I expect to have some of them there but the greater part I shall probably bring to R. I come here on the evening (or afternoon) of the Sabbath and expect usually to return to B. on Friday. Tomorrow however I am called with Bro. Venning to investigate a difference between the church at Providence and their Pastor Bro. Fisher.*

*Richmond, December 5<sup>th</sup> – I hope you will pardon me for sending you a letter so soiled. I had it with me at Providence and Brainerd hoping to find some time to add a few words and it got soiled against my rubbers which were in the same side (rest of letter missing)*



*Thornton Bigelow Penfield, 1866*



## JAMAICA 1865

**From Thornton to Mother**

*School Room, Richmond  
January 31, 1865, 7 ½ P.M.*

*Dearest Mother,*

*I am not at all sorry to have the time of the month roll round which summons me to the pleasant task of correspondence with you. Most of my spare time both yesterday and again today has been occupied in writing, revising and copying a lengthy communication to Bro. Whipple on Mission business. Consequently I have been driven into a corner with my other letter writing.*

*I am with the school from 7 to 9 P.M. as well as the 8 ½ to 12 in the morning but the evening session is mainly for study so that I have the time pretty much to myself. I generally read some interesting work, though a part of the time is taken up with setting copies for the next day and with hearing recitations in Latin and Algebra for which we have no time in the morning session and occasionally some scholar wishes help in a difficult sum.*

*As I have to keep a general oversight of the scholars during the evening, I find reading more pleasant than writing as it is easier to follow and keep the train of thought prepared ready to your eye by another person than to manufacture one for yourself in the midst of interruptions. Since beginning to write I have turned aside to hear the classes as above and explained a difficult sum and at length thought it was best to take a seat at the table where some of the oldest scholars were sitting as a little too much mischief seemed to be afoot in that quarter.*

*We have two brilliant lights in different parts of the schoolroom and the scholars gather in two groups around the tables nearest under the lamps. I think I shall be obliged to have all the boys use one lamp and the girls the other although as there are about twice as many boys as girls it will not be so convenient as the present arrangement. I am enjoying the school about as much as I have ever enjoyed any duty. And I am sure you will admit that I have sometimes had quite a keen relish for teaching classes in geometry in Oberlin. My silver call bell comes in continual play in school hours. The various classes come forward in order at the second tap of the bell. By means of Monitors the two classes are reciting at the same time. I mark each scholar in each study every day.*

*I am getting up more enthusiasm than I ever have seen manifested before by black children, but then you know I have not labored among the freed men or perhaps I might tell a different tale. I have somewhat over 30 scholars. About three fourths or a few more are boarding scholars. The rest live near Richmond and merely attend in the morning session of the school.*

*I am in excellent health. Do not remember ever to have been better than at present. However I have still to guard carefully against irregularity of meals, especially as combined with riding in the sun in the middle of the day. I had a severe turn of the sick headache growing out of this very cause only last Saturday.*

*You will no doubt remember that I was suffering with inflammation of one eye when I wrote you last. Very fortunately I got quite over the trouble before the opening of school Jan 16<sup>th</sup>.*

*I am enjoying the presence of the Savior every day and on this account can say, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places. I have a goodly heritage." I have a pleasant home here at Richmond though it would be a very easy task to make it quite unpleasant. Mr. Wolcott and I take each our own ways and don't interfere with each other much. Most people find him very difficult to get on with.*

*9½ P.M. I have just rung a large bell for the scholars to retire. My melodeon is in the schoolroom, and at 9 books are put aside and we close the evening exercises with singing a hymn and joining in prayer. I have not much ground to hope that more than two or three of the scholars are Christians but am pleased with the attention generally paid by them to things divine and shall hope to be the means of doing them some little good.*

*You will please excuse the nature of this sheet. I did not notice that it was so poor a one when I commenced writing on it. I was exceedingly interested in what you wrote in respect to little Mary. Nothing could interest me more than her little heart experiences. I was very glad you wrote me so fully in respect to her and shall always look with eagerness for any account of her ways and words. I do hope she is already one of the lambs of X's flock.*

*She was consecrated to the service of God at her birth. As I first took her in my arms I prayed that she might become a Christian as early in life as she could know of X and his salvation and that she might be inclined to a Missionary life if it were his will. Never since have I given over my prayers and labors to secure this end. Nothing could give me greater joy than indications that she has a new heart.*

*I hope you will not have often to acquaint me of her naughty ways but the more full and unvarnished accounts I can have, the better shall I know how to pray for her. My darling little daughter. Her absence is one of my greatest trials at present. I am well satisfied however with her being with you and Father.*

*I do not think she could have better or more judicious hands to lead her little feet. The Lord has wonderfully provided for her. I hope she will have grace ever to feel it and to live answerably to mercies received.*

*I have received word from the Mission house in Boston that my application is accepted, though as I can not go just yet to India or elsewhere no publicity is at present to be given my appointment.*

*Since I have taken charge of Brainerd again there has been less confusion in church meetings than in Bro. Venning's time. But things are bad enough still. We have had to expel quite a number and shall probably be obliged to many more before long. The Lord gives me more freedom and unction in preaching than formerly. I mean to know among them at B. nothing but Jesus X and him crucified. Please kiss my little girl for me and tell her I am very glad to learn that she is praying for a new heart and trying to do the right and love Jesus. I pray for her every day.*

*Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Mother**

*Brainerd  
April 4, 1865*

*My Dear Mother,*

*My affairs all remain in status quo at present. We learn from the Rooms of the A.M.A. that important movements are on the tapis. Most likely the Ex. Com. is about to make an effort at a transfer though I am not sure. Bro. Wilson and family are about going home for from six months to a year. He hopes to return to Jamaica after that time but his wife would far prefer never to live in Jamaica again. My wife and Mrs. Richardson had like feelings. The climate and the confinement, occasioned by bad roads, hot sun, and liability to rain falls harder on the women of our Mission than on the men. They have generally had poorer health than we, as we have often remarked.*

*Last week I gave the children of Richmond school a vacation and in company with three of our Mission and three others as well as two guides and two carriers made the ascent of Blue Mt. Peak. I hardly expect ever again to be so far above the earth while in it, speaking of course in literal sense. 7360 feet. We had a most glorious sunset as well as sunrise, a fine extended view over the island and after the clouds settled down for the night we were still far above them and had a fine view of the tops of cloud land.*

*I enjoyed everything exceedingly except a cold I took while sleeping on the ground at night or rather courting sleep, for sleep was the scarcest commodity that night among us. I had a decaying tooth and as I took cold it began to jump and ache so that I became excessively nervous and could not rest at all or even sit still. I was on my feet nearly all the night.*

*We left our horses some six miles back from the peak at the nearest dwelling that they might be cared for and so had to walk about 12 miles. On our way up the thermometer stood at 94. At sunrise on Blue Mt. it was 44. We kept a roaring fire all*

*night, or at least attempted to. The sunrise was by far the most glorious I ever beheld. My imagination even had not ever painted anything so glorious.*

*But we could not remain on this mountain of vision and even if had we could not have retained our visions for they faded or rather brightened in to common day. The glory became so diffused that we could not see it. My cold has settled in the right side of my face in general and my ear in particular and refuses yet to be dislodged. I am obliged to keep my ear stuffed with cotton.*

*Assure Father of my sympathy for him under his threatened affliction and my prayers that the thorn may be removed or grace sufficient be received. I hope Mary will be able to make out my letter to her.*

*Your loving son Thornton*

**From Thornton to Mother**

*Richmond  
May 3, 1865*

*My Dear Mother,*

*Yours of March 15 and April 15 came together yesterday. I had no letter last month. The March letter was delayed in some manner I suppose. I am very glad to learn that Father's threatened trouble with blindness seems to be receding. I shall look anxiously for further news of it next month, also of my little Mary's cough. I am more than ordinarily busy just now and so for once must write you a very short letter. I trust you will allow yourself no concern about my health or happiness. They are both in the hands of one who will do the very best for me. I believe I never enjoyed better health in my life than now, nor even as good health so uninterruptedly as since my return to Jamaica. I am really fleshy for me, my ribs having gone out of sight beneath the well stuffed cushion that covers them. Not one pair of my pants will quite come together round my waist. The little finger on which I wore Sarah's ring with ease when I left America in common with my other fingers has grown so plump that the ring sank into the level of the surrounding skin and at length burst. I have no data as yet from which to decide the probable time of leaving Jamaica. My plans will I presume become less inchoate within three or four months. I borrow no trouble. The Lord will I am sure order all for the best. Thank Chas. for his letter. So Pres. Lincoln is dead. Our mourning is joined to that of the whole nation. It seems as if he could not be spared but God can make his place good. His record is on high. Love to my darling little Mary and to you all from*

*Your affect. son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Mother**

*Brainerd  
May 20, 1865*

*My Dear Mother,*

*Inasmuch as I have several times of late sent you quite short letters I have determined to begin earlier than usual this month in order to make amends. I should be conducting our usual Sat. P.M. prayer meeting now (a little after 3) but the rains have prevented the people from coming out. We are in the midst of the May season and are having plenty of rain. It has already lasted one week and will probably continue one or two weeks more.*

*Everything was dry and parched enough before these rains, much more so than usual, for we had scarcely enjoyed one good shower for two or three months and that in the time of the first planting. There must be a short crop of yam this year and some suffering among the poor, though as mangoes are bearing much more heavily than usual and are free to all who choose to pick them, there can scarcely be any starvation before the autumn yams are ready to be dug. I should judge from appearances that the trees on Brainerd alone will bear a hundred bushels of mangoes, not a tithe of which will I or my household be able to eat.*

*Most will rot on the ground as everybody has plenty, the trees growing wild everywhere and in such numbers that there are probably more of them than of all other trees put together. I suppose however that you will wish rather to learn of those matters which more nearly concern my personal comfort. And first let me speak of my household arrangements. I am much more comfortable, with the single exception of society, here than at Richmond, for there everybody is too busy to care for comfort, at least so it seems to me and I have now given it a pretty thorough trial and might be presumed to know. Accordingly I am there only from 9 o'clock A.M. Mondays to 1 or 2 P.M. Thursdays.*

*And now a little more particularly as to my household arrangements. William, a lad of about 15 who was with me before I went home, is with me again. At Richmond when I am there and at Brainerd when I return here. There a scholar and here a steward, servant or whatever you please to call him. At either place in the main he is faithful and looks well after my interests. My mare whose name is "Brunette" is his special charge. She is a recent purchase, the handsomest and best beast I have ever owned. She cost me between \$60 and \$70 in gold. I would not take \$80 cash for her unless I leave the island with no intention of returning.*

*Mrs. Nelson (Maggie, as I call her) is my housekeeper. She generally comes as I return from Richmond, locking up the house and going to her own home as I leave again Monday. She brings her two little girls with her, as she comes, leaving only her husband in charge of the house at home.*

*When a girl she had her training in one of the Mission families, Bro. Venning's I think. She surely had good training. I verily believe she cares more for my comfort than her own. She is modest, quiet, unassuming, faithful in guarding my interests and, I am happy to add, a growing Christian. For her present position I do not know her equal in Jamaica.*

*Thus you see, my dear Mother, that the gracious Lord has abundantly provided for my bodily wants. Besides these persons, Thomas, a little cousin of William, is with me while I am at Brainerd, and one Lane Arties, now a widow, who was for a time before her marriage one of our household.*

*For a few days each week I am only a boarder in another family and then for a few days I am pater familias here. But these changes are so uniform that it is much the same as if there were no change. In fact I believe with the care I take of myself, my health is all the better for these changes.*

*Friday, May 26 8 P.M. A half hour or more with my dearest Mother tonight. The rains, though falling heavily nearly every day, have limited themselves to but one or two showers today. I have been hard at work nearly all day, as in fact every Friday for some weeks, overseeing and aiding the carpenters in putting an iron roof on the dwelling house. We have to be very careful to rip off no more shingles than we are able to replace with roofing before a heavy shower at the close of the day.*

*With the exception of what one carpenter will be able to finish tomorrow morning we have covered the two broad sides of the roof and one of the hip ends. We pause now a little for want of cash. The people are trying to put it on themselves. They are doing nobly in this matter. No doubt with some hope of keeping me, though I tell all who speak of it that I can not remain more than 8 or 12 months longer before returning to America and that I shall be very careful to make no more promises to come to Jamaica again. I have even told some of them that I long to go to the heathen and should do so at once if I could only see my place here well supplied. For some reason the people make me no trouble at all and have made none since Bro. Venning handed over again to me the reins of government. In these latitudes after a long calm we expect whirlwinds, tornadoes, or earthquakes. Accordingly I am on the lookout for disturbances from above or beneath. I certainly should hail with pleasure one from above, for though less positive in their evil the people are still nearly as negative as ever toward good. There are almost no signs of spiritual life among them and little response to my earnest appeals in this direction.*

*Still I enjoy preaching to them, better I think than ever before. With but rare exceptions I have been greatly enlarged in soul while reasoning with them, from the scriptures. Often on Sabbath I seem as it were to stand on the very confines of the two worlds and in the act of speaking catch surprising glimpses of the truth. As I open my mouth the Lord fills it. May I never be left to go back from such experiences. At such times it seems so easy to preach. The thought that in all probability my labors here will soon be forever closed adds earnestness and fervor to my efforts. As to the rest I am*

*exceedingly happy and hopeful. I am happy in my family and in my school, happy in my closet and in my pulpit. It seems as if my God delighted to show me how he could superabundantly make up to me all the denials of my present condition. I live without carefulness though my future is no more decided that it has been for some months. Daily I commit this to my "Counselor" and feel sure that he is even now preparing me for my future and my future for me, and that in due time from the present dimness shall break the sweet dawn of God's purpose for me. Yet the present dimness is sweet. Oh how sweet since chosen by my God. Inexpressibly sweet by reason of the lesson of quiet trust I am learning.*

*Is it not for better, dearest Mother, to walk by faith than by sight? Even as I write tears of deep joy are springing to my eyes and I know you will join me in thanks to the Parent of all good for his tender mercies to my soul.*

*But I must now summon my household for evening worship and then retire myself.*

*July 5. I am still well and hearty as ever. Closed my school week before last. Shall spend most of the month in traveling with Bro. Wolcott along the south side of the island, collecting specimens for Prof. Allen and visiting other missionaries, etc., etc. Bro. Douglass preaches twice for my people during my absence and Mr. Harris comes once or twice as need be. Yours of June 17<sup>th</sup> has come to hand. Unless I should relinquish all ideas of India I could hardly have gone to the Sandwich Islands even were I at home. The only objection that weighs much against India is that the Board seems to consider a wife indispensable and about this I am totally at sea. I am most happy to hear of my little daughter's improvement and that she is making herself useful. I am more anxious just now for her physical development than mental. Both however are necessary. Each in its time and way. Sana mens in sana corpore.*

*Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Mother**

*Brainerd  
August 4, 1865*

*Ever Dear Mother,*

*Since writing you last I have spent most of the time in traveling in the Parishes of Clarendon, Manchester and St. Elizabeth. The exertions required on my part to prepare the Richmond School for examination and exhibition had worn me down somewhat and I was glad to get quite away from duties and cares. I was absent from Brainerd four weeks lacking only two days and have returned as healthy and vigorous I believe as ever in my life. I have enjoyed the trip keenly from the beginning to the end, as has Bro. Wolcott, who accompanied me. If I only had time and space I should love to give you a full*

*description of things seen, heard and felt, especially among the Moravians (or United Brethren) with whose principles and measures I have fallen deeply in love.*

*Could you only have accompanied me, I am sure you would have been as pleased as I. Their congregations are much larger than ours as are also their simple but substantial edifices.*

*Their chapels and dwellings houses are almost (if not quite) without exception built of stone. The least expensive of their stations has probably cost more than all of ours put together. This however is merely an indication of their generous policy which seems to ramify in every direction.*

*I have long felt that this is the true policy in missionary operations, in which opinion I am not joined as it appears by the A.M.A. This however my pen speaks only in a whisper lest I harm a Society composed largely of God's most earnest children. Still I feel deeply that their policy is a mistaken one and that far less valuable or permanent are and must be the results. We found the Moravians much more simple in appearance and manners than the generality of gospel ministers in Jamaica.*

*There was a total absence of stiffness and formality and what is commonly called Ministerial Dignity. They reminded me strikingly of Christian in Pilgrim's Progress who turns his back on the world. They have the air of one who has "bid the world farewell" as a revival melody of Jamaica expresses it. This may perhaps be accounted for partially from the fact that they have no salary, nor are allowed to amass wealth or even engage in any occupation of the head or hands that is lucrative.*

*Their legitimate expenses are borne and that most generously. Thus their bread with their water are sure and they have no cause for anxious care. All of them are pleased with the system and would prefer it, as one of them said, to a salary of 1500 dollars a year.*

*In sickness they are expected to have the best medical assistance within reach. In case of death the widow is provided for. When laid aside from active duties by ill health or infirmity they are made comfortable. Their children are liberally educated, etc., etc.*

*Thus should the church provide for all those soldiers who in her name have gone to the forefront of the battle.*

*My plans I think are assuming a more definite shape. Bro. Douglass has asked to leave to return to America for a period of from 6 to 8 months, at the end of which if he returns I shall probably be at liberty to leave. He goes by the next steamer. I hope accordingly to reach home by the end of May coming and possibly sooner.*

*Yours of July 15 with Charles and Mary's came to hand last evening. This leaves before daylight tomorrow as the steamer sails at 2 P.M. I am glad to learn of your good health, also that my little daughter is doing nicely. Please give her a good long kiss for*



*me. If you think best I would like ½ dozen copies of her as at present. Several friends wish to have her picture. You could send them one at a time without increasing the postage. Please tell Mrs. Allan that Miss Woodcock is in good health. She is teaching the day school at Eliot and is very useful indeed. She has a warm love for her work. I do not expect to teach at the school at Richmond any longer, as I will have the charge of Elliot during Bro. Douglass' absence.*

*I cannot tell you how thankful I am to you and Father for your loving care of my darling one. I long to have her with me but she is better with you.*

*Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Mother**

*Eliot*

*September 4, 1865*

*Ever Dear Mother,*

*You will please excuse pencil marks and poor paper as I am not at home. I have borrowed Miss Woodcock's ink once already this morning for letter writing and had packed my holsters for traveling when heavy rain set in and obliged me to wait. I see she has taken her ink again and I must improve the time. I shall soon have a few conveniences of my own here as well as at Brainerd. Instead of doubling myself upon Richmond, to use up the spare lengths of my energies, I am for the coming 7 months to be pastor of Eliot as well as Brainerd and have already entered upon my duties here. Yesterday I met the Sabbath School, then conducted the usual mid-day service, preaching from the words "And that knowing the time, now it is high time to awake out of sleep."*

*For the second service we had the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. And lastly I had a meeting with the deacons to converse about church matters, etc., etc.*

*I expect to spend alternate weeks here and at Brainerd. While here I shall be nicely looked after, as Miss Woodcock is a capital housekeeper. She proposes to attend to my washing, ironing and mending, which last especially has had little or no attention the last 8 or 9 months. I am not so shabby as you might suppose as I can take a few stitches myself when absolutely required.*

*Br. Douglass sails in the steamer day after tomorrow on a leave of absence of 8 months. I have asked permission to return to America in Jan. and the Mission are asking the A.M.A. to fill my place at once. It is just possible they may and if so I shall thereupon take my departure. More likely they will fail to do so. In that case I cannot be spared before Bro. Douglass returns. I do not feel at all impatient. The Lord's way cannot be a bad one.*

*I have been thinking some of coming home via New Orleans in order to see a little more of my own country but it will probably be out of the question as the A.B.C.F.M. will no doubt expect me to report personally as soon as possible at 33 Pemberton Square, Boston. Thereupon I suppose I shall be under the necessity of entering on what looks to me anything but inviting – “wife hunting.”*

*However, at present I borrow no trouble about the matter, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” The Lord I am sure will direct.*

*Kingston, September 6<sup>th</sup>. I have received what I understand to be leave to return by 1<sup>st</sup> January. However I cannot avail myself of it until Bro. Douglass returns to Jamaica in May coming unless someone is found to take my place. Perhaps Father can help out in this matter. I send enclosed a letter to Rev. Charles G. Bisher. I think he may be induced to come. He was one year ago in Alpena, Michigan. Mrs. Butler of Oberlin will probably know if he has changed his residence lately. Bro. Charles will perhaps ascertain and forward.*

*I am not sure if I have said anything about my health. At least there is at present no occasion, for it takes care of itself, or rather our Kind Father takes good care of it. I am not quite so fleshy as some time since but in first rate working order. I hope Bro. Douglass will be able to bring to you a picture scrap book for my darling Mary to whom I send a kiss by Bro. D. and plenty of “howdys” as well.*

*Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Parents**

*Brainerd  
September 29, 1865*

*My Dear Parents,*

*It is so long since you have had a good sized letter from me that I think I will send you a sheet full, of larger size than I generally use. For one who is such a poor letter writer, as I for years have proved myself, I think it doing pretty well to send even a small letter every month. While my dear Sarah was alive she had most of the correspondence to attend to as she was much the readier writer and could fill a sheet generally before I reached the bottom of the second page. On this account I indulged myself too much as I have since found. It seems to me that I miss her more and more every day.*

*Every little while some new reminder turns up of happy days in which she was the chief element of my happiness, or least next to God. Letters, pictures, clothes and - - but why try to enumerate? The house is full of reminders in every direction, and in my dreams I often meet her. Such sweet and happy dreams, and yet while dreaming I have a half consciousness that the scenes are not real.*

*Were I at all superstitious I should believe that her spirit paid me visits, and more than this that she was calling me to join her in the spirit world, for in my dreams I have several times of late met her at funerals and had her mysteriously pass away before my earnest gaze, and once she counseled me to prepare for my own death.*

*I trust that you know me too well to think for one moment that I attach any importance to these dreams. I suppose they are quite natural under the circumstances. A picture we had taken about a year before marriage and which you never saw is the most natural and speaking likeness I have of her. It looks so healthy and cheerful, too. I love to look at it and almost forget sometimes for the moment that it is only a shadow.*

*For a time I avoided my sorrow and it was almost as if I had not loved and lost. I think in all my previous letters there has been scarcely an allusion to the Dear Departed. You can then pardon me once for speaking what is so constantly in my heart. I am learning to look my sorrow steadfastly in the face and I trust to put it where it belongs. The Lord has I am sure taught me by means of it many exceedingly precious and valuable lessons. May I not prove a forgetful scholar.*

*The way I am treading has seemed at times long – oh so long – and still often for the time looks so weary and dusty ahead that I faint. But these are my moments of weakness and lo, strength comes of them. “My Grace shall be sufficient for thee,” etc. Thus, though weeping may endure for a night (and my cheeks are not strangers to tears), joy comes in the morning. Had I foreseen all the trials and griefs that awaited me here, I should scarcely have had courage to face them, I fear. And yet why not? Had I foreseen the help with which a gracious God would meet my every trial and grief, I had been bold as a lion. Our want and His assistance. Thank God that the two are never far removed apart. He is “a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear.”*

*One year ago next Mon. morning I bid you my last goodbye. It has seemed the fleetest footed year in all my life. It seems like a dream, and so in many things it has been. I have had for the most part but little intercourse with the world or perhaps I should say little sympathetic intercourse. I have occasionally met others but could not speak much of my inner life and so have grown somewhat I fear of a spiritual recluse. I have exceedingly enjoyed however what has been like a safety valve, the preaching of X and his word. Some of the time I have been inclined to turn the eye inward too much and sometimes outward in the wrong direction. Seldom have I looked upwards as much as I should, yet I am not forsaken of God and wish never to forsake him.*

*I am thinking much of the change of Missionary relations that so soon awaits me. It is a daily subject of my petitions that the Lord would guide me in my final decision about going to India or elsewhere. I am full of assurance that He will. I only wish to follow where he leads.*

*Bro. Douglass went home by the last steamer for a visit of eight months. I have given to the Mission to understand that I will remain during the eight months (7 more) unless a man comes out sooner to relieve me, but now I remember that I told you this in*

*my last and requested Father to do what he can consistently toward securing someone to fill my place at Brainerd.*

*I ought surely to give the people credit for their good behavior since my return. You know how they tried me previous to my return home and what accounts Bro. Venning used to send me of their disorderly business meetings, etc. They have hardly appeared like the same people this year and in fact they are not altogether the same, for several of the most contentious spirits have been cut off as dead branches and others have been laid aside by sickness. I could wish that their different kinds of discipline might prove salutary in each case but fear not more than for a time.*

*I enclose a little letter to Mary. Mother will please read it to her. I hope she will soon learn to read writing, though she is rather young yet. I shall look for copies of her carte de visite every month now till they come. I presume you will send her to school this autumn. I doubt some whether it will be wise to send her in the winter, though as there are good sidewalks if she has a pair of rubbers she may get along without injury.*

*To establish and strengthen her constitution is just now I think of more value than to push her on in acquaintance with books. Dr. Lewis seems to think that the seeds of hereditary consumption even may be eradicated by a course of judicious treatment. I hope it may be so with my darling Mary. I cannot tell you how much I miss her. Life would wear quite another aspect if she were here to share it. It is best however as it is. Love to all inquiring friends, from*

*Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Parents**

*Richmond  
November 1, 1865*

*Dear Parents,*

*I expected to fill up a sheet for you last evening but was occupied till quite late with company. And when I might have been excused, a quarrel among the young men of the schools was referred to me for settlement. The one who had given the first offense came with a bloody mouth to complain. He was a brown boy and had been beaten by two of the black boys. In hearing the case from the different boys (for I can scarcely call them young men in spite of their age), the brown boy became so exasperated again that he seized a club and was approaching the blacks when I snatched it out of his hand and put it aside. Soon however he seized it a second time, and taking it from him I threw it away.*

*He threatened to kill one of the boys, upon which I told him I would hand him over to the constable if he used any more threatening language. When I had at length*

*shown each boy his part in the wrong and got them quiet with lights out, it was nearly 11 o'clock.*

*Bro. Wolcott starts by daylight this morning so I am up to finish this letter. He will have to push on quite briskly in order to get through to Kingston or even Spanish Town by daylight, it not being considered safe at present to travel at night. From Bro. Starbuck's letter and the paper I have ordered mailed to him you will gather the particulars of the fearful rising of the blacks in the eastern part of the island.<sup>54</sup>*

*It is due to the overruling hand of God that the diabolical plot of massacring all white and fair brown men in Jamaica miscarried. The Government seems to be so fully apprised of the plans of the Rebels that they will be able to do little more mischief at present. The chief instigators and actors have been executed and the Island is beginning to breathe a little more freely.*

*Those who know the negro best seem to have been the most alarmed. And not a few are thinking of leaving the island. For two or three years the number of white inhabitants has been gradually decreasing, I understand, by returns to England or immigration to America. The greater number however can not well leave their business and property. What is in store for this poor island I can scarcely imagine. Things look very sad, but in God is our trust. In spite of appearances I have strong hope yet of the ultimate success of the Redeemer's kingdom here. We walk by faith, not by sight. The Ark of God is safe.*

*My duties at Brainerd and Eliot are quite engrossing but the frequent change seems to agree with my health. I have not quite so much flesh as in the spring but have plenty I think. In six months or more I hope to turn my face homeward. I shall probably go to Boston first and how long I may linger in the East will depend on their advice and the development of circumstances. But I must close with much love,*

*Your son, Thornton*

*Kingston, November 6, 1865. Unforeseen circumstances have taken me here and finding my letter was not yet posted I add a few more words. Later developments show that the plot was more fully matured and had the countenance of more white and brown men than I could have supposed possible.*

*On my way to town I learned that one of my people at Brainerd (a constable) (he told me himself) had just apprehended a man who threatened the lives of Mr. Langbridge, my nearest white neighbor, and Mr. Rennals Castor of St. Thos. Ye Vale, living a little farther from me. I met also Mrs. Ellis, the wife of a Maroon and one of our Elders at Providence, who said the Maroons<sup>55</sup> had been ordered to Port Maria, 11 miles on the*

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<sup>54</sup> This is a reference to the Morant Bay uprising of October 1865, which Thornton covers in more detail in his next two letters and which is described further in Appendix B, pages 217-218.

<sup>55</sup> The Maroons were a self governing community of free blacks, descendants of escaped slaves, recognized by the British government but obligated by treaty to provide assistance in the suppression of rebellions.

*other side of Richmond from the residences mentioned. News has reached Kingston of an outbreak at the same place. I cannot learn how serious it is. Do not fear for me, Dearest Mother, I am in the Lord's hands and trust him. I trust I may say with the Apostle Paul, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself so that etc."*

*This is a sad blow to the friends of the negro.*

*Love to my Darling Mary and you all, from Thornton*

**From Thornton to Parents**

*Brainerd  
December 29, 1865*

*My Dear Parents,*

*Christmas is past and nothing further has been heard of the rebellion which was to annihilate the whites about this time. I have no doubt the intention of those who inaugurated it was to make it spread all over the Island. I am equally sure that if it had not been met with the utmost rigor and determination as well as success by the Government, the intention would have been realized. As it is, those who would welcome and aid such a movement dare not do anything in this direction at present. They have been taught a lesson that will no doubt be remembered two or three years at least.*

*Still, elements of mischief are afloat on every hand and I shall not be at all surprised to learn within a few years that a far wider conspiracy and better laid plot has ripened into fruits of blood and death throughout the island. The rebellion was causeless. There were no laws bearing oppressively on the black people, for no law in the land makes any distinction between whites and blacks. By those who administer the law there has been no doubt in isolated cases partiality shown to the whites. But this was often apparent rather than real and grew out of the fact (quite notorious) that the blacks are as a general rule ready to swear to any lie that will best serve their purpose.*

*These and plenty more that I could mention are sad facts for the friend of the colored man to acknowledge, but they are true and nothing is ever gained by denying the truth. The sins of the whites toward the colored people of late have been those of omission rather than commission. They have not been oppressive as a rule but neither have they shown much concern for their moral or even physical well-being.*

*The great end of the planter is to realize the estimated amount, if not more, of sugar and rum. Beyond this he has little concern. So far as the negro is a means to that end, he is cared for, but not much farther.*

*This is a sad state of things and does not tend to elevate and ennoble either white or black. Still it is no more than is true in woolen, cotton, paper and other factories generally in England and America. Provided that reasonable tasks are required and fair*

*remuneration given, there is in this no oppression. And in these two particulars the Jamaica negro has the advantage of common factory hands.*

*To prove that this oppression of the planter, if it is still so called, was not the cause of the outbreak, we have merely to cite the fact that nearly all who inaugurated it were not laborers on plantations but inhabitants of mountainous districts, men and women who lived upon their own little freehold. They were aided by those who without regular employment and stated means of livelihood lived from hand to mouth. Hope of plunder and gratification of brutal passions and lusts had their share in leading on the people.*

*Their leader (nearly white) had his own personal spite and revenge to gratify against those who fell as the first victims. He was a large proprietor and professedly a great friend of the people and yet one who descended to the lowest and meanest trick to benefit his own pocket at their expense and all under the cloak of a pretended religion.*

*All this was substantiated by facts which I could relate but which would prove tedious. It is said by those who ought to know that the government had proof that he was aiming at the office of Governor over a new state when the rebellion should have been complete.*

*That which made such a rebellion possible will I believe make another actual whenever the people believe they may be successful in it.*

*It is most likely that for some time or perhaps ten years to come the government will be on the alert and with a large force of regulars and volunteers. But the lessening of such forces will probably be the signal for a renewal of plots and rebellion, unless some most remarkable interposition of Providence stays the wave of returning Barbarism rolling over the people of this land.*

*Ministers of all denominations, comprising many earnest and true men, have by means of Chapels, Churches and schools, the written, spoken and acted Word and all the appliances within their power, attempted to stay the wave of whose power they could not deny, but for the most part have labored confessedly in vain.*

*A call has been made for a Convention of Ministers of the different Evangelical Denominations early in February to consider the present crisis in the morals of the land and consult as to the best means of meeting and overcoming the obstacles to the progress of the Gospel. I intend to be present, though if I take any part in the deliberations it will be a very humble one, especially as I am an Alien and about to leave the Colony.*

*I pass to matters more immediate and personal. I am slowly perfecting my arrangements for departure. Have already informed the people of the time and reasons for my leaving without expectation of return. Some seem to feel it deeply, but I do not think that most of them care much about it. I have been informed that some are saying they will not have any more Yankees. I do not however apprehend any great disturbance.*

*They will probably take Bro. Douglass pretty quietly as pastor pro tem, which relation he will very likely sustain as long as he remains in the island, retaining still the pastorate of Eliot.*

*They have made me absolutely no trouble in church discipline since my return, which considering their former character has been a cause of wonder and thanksgiving. If it were only borne out by other indications I would consider this a sign of spiritual progress. On the contrary it is due I believe to my increased power to hold them to the gospel standard and to the absence of some roots of bitterness which in times past have greatly troubled us. For both these the Lord's name be praised.*

*Since writing the last letter to you I have lost several pounds of flesh and am now quite hollow cheeked. I have been threatened with a run of fever and indeed have had more or less fever for a couple of weeks, though I have performed most of my usual duties. I think I have gained the upper hand now. My appetite has returned and nearly my usual strength and vigor. The season has been unusually unhealthy.*

*Your monthly letters are a source of great comfort. I have received them all regularly (even one mailed on the 18<sup>th</sup>), together with cartes, 6 in all, of Mary. The steamer leaves N.Y. on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. A letter mailed the 19<sup>th</sup> even would probably come in time if Sabbath did not intervene. Perhaps it is not best to risk it. McDonald is about to leave the island. You will please direct my letters no more to his care but to me, Richmond P.O., Jamaica, West Indies. Kiss my precious daughter for me and tell her I wish her a very happy New Year. Please purchase for her a suitable birthday present from*

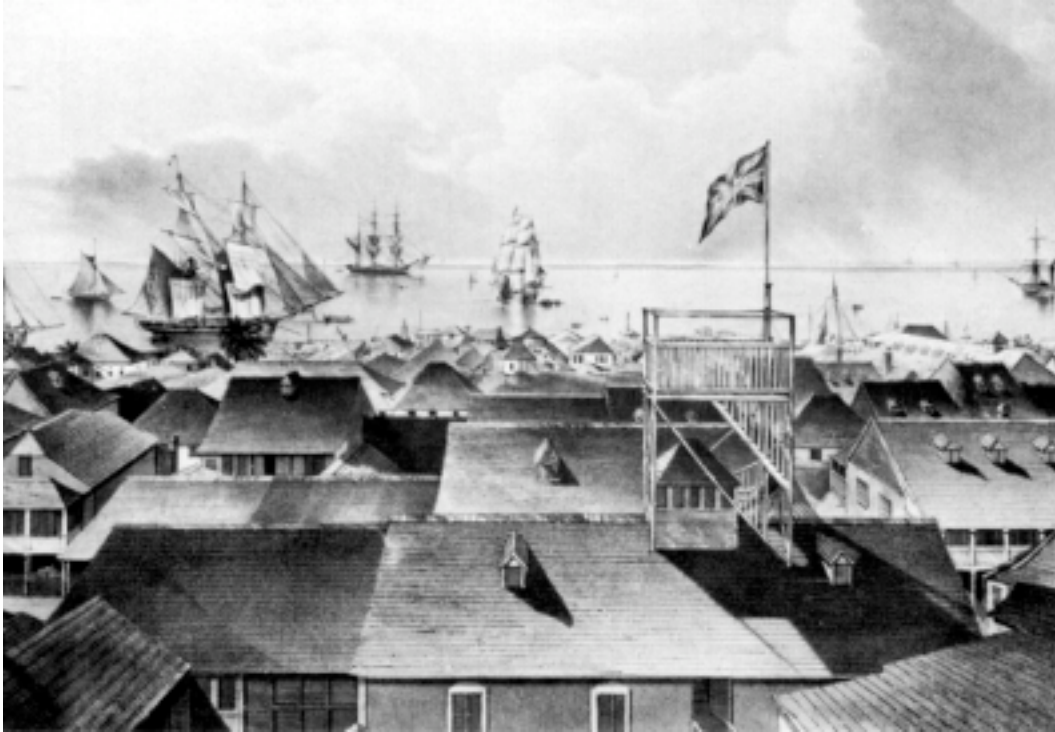
*Your affect. son, Thornton*

*(Written crosswise on the same letter) Though I do not allude to it as often as I should I am always glad to learn of the progress Father is making with his Commentary. Perhaps he will have been to England and returned before I shall see him again. If he goes the latter part of the winter as you thought possible, when will he hope to return? On returning to the United States I must repair at once to Boston to report myself to the Board. I shall probably spend a week or two visiting friends at the East, etc., etc., so that I will probably not reach Oberlin before the first week of June. You know I cannot bear to be idle, so even though I should find occasion to be in Oberlin often or near it for a few months, I should like some regular occupation in the Lord's service.*

*Henry Hitchcock had for a time, I believe, some such position as Junior Pastor with the Rev. S. Wolcott of Cleveland. Such a place would suit me well if I could have it. I should greatly prize the opportunity to profit by the ripe wisdom of such an one. May he not be glad to use the chance thus afforded for a short vacation a part of the time? Perhaps no harm would come of Father's setting an inquiry on foot. Next to this I would like some temporary position of City Missionary in Cleveland. I could command such testimonials in this direction as might be required. Please excuse my crossing this leaf. I hope you can read it.*







*Kingston Harbour 1870*

## JAMAICA 1866

**From Thornton to Mother**

Kingston  
February 2, 1866

*My Dear Mother,*

*I have only time for a few words. I am in usual health and spirits. I have been down to meet the steamer which came in this evening, quite behind hand. She brings no letter from home this time which is somewhat of a disappointment.*

*It is now a half hour past midnight and I cannot close my correspondence for a month without a few words with you. Then for a two hour nap and Bro. Wolcott and I must hitch my mare into the buggy and be on the way back to the mountains, as I have an important business meeting to attend at Brainerd soon after noon tomorrow.*

*Three months more and a half (for there is now a middle of the month steamer beside the regular one) and as Douglass is to reach here by the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, I must wait half a month longer and then I hope to set sail for home. But I must close.*

*Your loving son, Thornton*

**From Thornton to Parents**

Kingston  
April 4, 1866

*My Dear Parents,*

*I am sure you must consider me the busiest of mortals that I cannot find time for more than a few lines once a month. Yet so it is. One thing after another occupies (and necessarily as it seems) my time.*

*My arrangements are pretty well completed to return to the United States by the May steamer. But it may be a month or two possibly before I come on west. I shall spend a week or so in New York, I suppose about the same in Boston, and I can't say how many in the vicinity of Mt. Holyoke.<sup>56</sup>*

*I had the same thing in mind some time since but was thrown off the track by the suggestions about certain parties in Oberlin. The last month's letter and this just*

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<sup>56</sup> Among Thornton's cryptic references to his long distance search for a wife, this is the most specific. Charlotte Elizabeth Hubbard was a student at Mt. Holyoke. We do not know for certainty how he identified her as a suitable candidate, but we suspect that his sister Josephine knew her parents and recommended her.

*received seem to point out the course concerning which I had already entertained such high hope.*

*I have just formed the acquaintance of two Boston gentlemen one of whom is returning before I do and urges me to make his home in Cambridge mine while I am in the city or near it. He is acquainted with the principle officers of the Board and returned missionaries and wishes to give me certain introductions which may amount to something.*

*The Lord's hand is evidently in the thing and I shall strive to scrutinize his leadings carefully and with faith as well as earnest purpose to follow as he leads. The whole matter has long been altogether committed to his hands and I feel no wish to withdraw it.*

*Tomorrow morning early I start on a tour through the late disturbed districts, St. Thomas Ye Vale, etc., etc. Expect to be gone about ten days, then pass around the stations of our Mission saying goodbye. My time is so filled up that the month will soon be gone and then - - -*

*I have not forgotten, Dear Mother, though I have not said anything about it yet, that this is the anniversary of yours and Brother Smith's birthdays. Permit me to wish you both many happy returns of the day. You have lived twice the average human life and I very nearly one. Whether we shall either live so near the close of the century as to fill out another term of man's existence is quite problematical. Your age and encroaching infirmities make it quite unlikely on your part and the climate and wear and tear of missionary labors in India render mine nearly as doubtful. Most likely we shall both, ere that, have done with Earth, and have seen the King in his Glory, as well as have been restored to each other and many dear ones gone before, and still to go. Oh Mother, what a joy to look into each other's faces and know we are safe in the Kingdom of our Father, safe from sin and its attendant evils – safe forever. And it will soon be, I feel well assured, through the rich grace of Jesus. "I believe in perseverance of the Saints and the life everlasting."*

*But I must close with the warmest love to you as well as my precious little daughter whom I long to see again.*

*Your own son, Thornton*

NEW YORK 1866

**From Thornton to Mother**

*New York  
May 23, 1866*

*My Dear Mother,*

*I have not quite got through with my hurry in the City yet and so must give you but a few words. I have sent on a trunk by express this afternoon and enclose the key. There are two parcels for Bro. Richardson. I presume he will send for them soon. I enclose the key of Mary's little box. The arrow root in it is to be made up after the style of corn starch.*

*The bananas I fear will be overripe but hope not. Wish Josephine could enjoy them with you as a sort of reminder of her brief missionary life in the W.I. They are to be eaten raw after stripping off the outer husk. Are very good alone but better still cut up in sugar and cream. They go very well as a vegetable if sliced lengthwise and fried.*

*The yam is cooked and eaten as potato with the exception that a heavy paring must precede the cooking and the latter be done in salt water till soft. You can send Josephine a piece if she cannot come to Oberlin to enjoy them with you.*

*Please inform Prof. Allen that I have also forwarded to him by express a barrel of conch shells and a small cask of fruits preserved in rum which Bro. Wolcott has put up for him. I have not met the charges either on them or the trunk.*

*I have something else to send. A lot of curiosities for friends and for Mary a -----, well, she must guess, but as I cannot trust it by express I will bring it along when I come.*

*I must run down town now and make a few purchases before night.*

*As ever, your affect. son, T. B. Penfield*

Thornton Bigelow must have had a busy but productive summer. His letters or other records which might provide the details have not been preserved. However, we know that he was offered an appointment by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to serve as an evangelist in the Madura Mission in South India and that he made plans to leave in the fall. He was also successful in that another endeavor which he had described earlier without much eagerness as "wife hunting." He seems to have become much more enthusiastic about that task after he met Charlotte Elizabeth Hubbard, a student at Mt. Holyoke College, whose parents were friends of his sister Josephine. Joel and Mary Irena Hubbard, were active abolitionists and supporters of the American

Female Guardian Society and the Home for the Friendless in New York, where Sarah had worked for a year, so there are a number of ways in which Bigelow might have come to know of Lottie, as she was known.<sup>57</sup> His intentions must have been obvious to her from the time they met. Perhaps the better for her to get to know him and his family, he invited her to spend the summer in Oberlin with his mother, and attend classes at the College, while he again served the church in nearby Berlin Heights. Written records are sparse, but family tradition holds that he eventually persuaded her that it was “her duty” to accompany him as a missionary to the heathen in India. He and Lottie were married at her home in Montclair, New Jersey on October 22, 1866 and sailed from Boston on November 7.

The following letter, the last in this collection, written by Thornton to Lottie’s parents, provides an insight to his changed frame of mind and a bridge to the next series of letters, presented elsewhere as “The Missionary Call,” which describes their experience in India from 1867 until his death there in 1871.

## AT SEA 1867

**From Thornton to Mrs. Hubbard**

*Ship Isabella*  
*March 25, 1867*

*My Dear Mother,*

*I cannot allow the anniversary of your birth to pass by without writing you a few lines at least. I never before had any adequate idea of the wide world of waters. For days, weeks and months we have been sailing and sailing without sight of land. We have passed through the Tropics from mid-winter on one side to early winter on the other; have seen the ocean in all its different moods, now sleeping quietly as the bosom of a placid pool, and now lifting up its hands on high and rushing with irresistible force. We have seen the early dawn full of promise, the noon darkened by the scowl of the passing hurricane, and the evening glorious in its sunset, in gorgeous colored clouds, and the night with her myriad eyes looking down upon us from peaceful depths in a cloudless sky.*

*Both storm and calm have hindered us on our way and baffling headwinds have driven us from our course, yet no disaster has been permitted to disable the vessel. We have just about run down our longitude and hope after sighting the island of Amsterdam tomorrow to set our face northward and run for Madras. One day seems so similar to another that I incline to give you a “specimen brick.” I rise at or soon after 6 A.M., take a few turns on the poop deck and note the direction of the wind and the progress of the vessel and learn what we have been doing during the night. After a few breaths of fresh*

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<sup>57</sup> In 1872, after Thornton Bigelow’s death in India, Lottie returned to her parents’ home in Montclair, NJ. For several years, she supported herself and her two children by working in New York at the Home for the Friendless.

*air I sit down to study my advance lesson in Tamil. At 7½ I call Lottie and at 8:20 we have our family worship. Most of the time we two compose the family and read by the light which comes through the thin curtain before our door and then between the venetians in the door. But on days (a few of which we have just had) when the waves are not high and the vessel rocks but little, our dead lights are open and we have the use of the port window and Miss Smith joins our number. After she leaves we read our verse for the day and kneel again in silent prayer. After breakfast we together study the review lesson until 10 when with Miss Smith we recite it to Brother Herrick. This occupies an hour or an hour and a half. The remainder of the A.M. is devoted to exercise which Lottie and I take together on the deck, either with grace hoops or in a promenade. In the latter, our tongues run faster than our feet, as we talk of the past and the future. Dinner is at 1 P.M. and the previous hour is filled with miscellaneous duties.*

*After dinner we read by turns something solid or entertaining till 3 P.M. when I finish the preparation of my advance lesson in Tamil while Lottie sits by engaged in tatting. At 4 P.M. I recite my lesson, Lottie sometimes sitting by, at other times conversing with Mrs. Herrick on household matters, etc. As soon as my recitation is over we repair to the poop deck and spend the time till supper which comes at 6 in pitching quoits, Lottie and Miss Smith, the Capt., Bro. Herrick and I. After supper we generally have an hour or so on deck in moonlight or pleasant weather in some sort of game, as my eyes forbid my reading or studying, and before retiring I generally take one last promenade on deck. So the days, quite filled up, pass rapidly by. More anon.*

*From your affect son, Thornton*

*Much love to Father and sister as well as to my Mother.*





## Appendix A: The Jamaica Mission

The Jamaica Mission was from its inception an Oberlin enterprise, combining the cause of abolition with concern for the nurture and education of emancipated slaves. David Ingraham, Sarah's father, is generally considered to be the founder of the mission, though he was never technically a part of it. He was, as mentioned earlier, one of the Lane Rebels who came to Oberlin in 1835, and he continued his theological studies there for the next two years. On the advice of his physician, he spent a winter in Cuba, seeking relief from his severe asthma, and while there he determined to go to Jamaica to work with the newly freed slaves of that island. He returned to Oberlin, where he was ordained and married, and then went to Jamaica in the fall of 1837 with his new wife Elizabeth Hartson. The London Missionary Society in Jamaica was happy to accept his services and he was assigned to the Congregational Church in Shortwood, just outside of Kingston, where Sarah was born in 1839. Ingraham remained with the London Missionary Society even as he was laying the foundations for the Jamaica Mission.

Slaves in Jamaica were officially freed in 1834 but were held in apprenticeship until 1838 when they were granted "full freedom." While most remained as paid workers on the sugar plantations, many were able to move to new colonies in less populated parts of the island. During the next few years Ingraham had an opportunity to visit and minister to these freedmen in the area north of Kingston and received several requests to establish churches in their communities. Perhaps he had already talked with friends and laid the groundwork for this cause before he left Oberlin, because when he sent out a call for missionaries to respond to these invitations, four men immediately volunteered and arrived with their wives in 1839.

All four were from Oberlin. Like Ingraham, Amos Dresser and C. Stewart Renshaw had been Lane Rebels and were 1837 graduates of the theological seminary. Julius Beardslee and Ralph Tyler were still students in the seminary. They would likely have known Henry Cowles and perhaps even studied under him. While ill health forced Ingraham and all of these pioneers except Beardslee to return to the United States within just a few years, others arrived from Oberlin to take their places. By 1861, thirty-six former Oberlin students had gone to Jamaica to serve as missionaries (Strieby, 10). Of course they were joined by others who were not from Oberlin, including Charles Venning and his wife. He was an Englishman who went to Jamaica originally to work on a sugar estate but had a change of heart, trained as a schoolmaster, and applied to join the Mission. She was a native Jamaican.

Renshaw established the first mission station, called Oberlin, in 1839. It was located in a fairly heavily populated area just sixteen miles from Kingston but at an elevation of about two thousand feet. That same year, Beardslee opened the station at Brainerd, in a more remote area seven miles further to the northwest, and Dresser and Tyler started work at Union and Devon Pen ten miles north of Oberlin on the road from Kingston to Annoto Bay. In the next

few years, as more missionaries arrived and opportunities availed, five more stations were started, all in an area of about ten by twenty miles, west of the 7400 foot Blue Mountain Peak, along the rock strewn Wag Water River. No station was more than eight to ten miles from its closest neighbor, but the terrain of rising mountains and deep, narrow valleys made travel by carriage impossible and arduous even on horseback.

The hills were, and still are, covered with thick vegetation and useful plants such as ackee, breadfruit, mangoes, bananas, and many other fruit trees. The soil was rich but there was hardly any level land for cultivation and farmers were forced to grow their yams, cassava, coffee and other crops on almost vertical fields. Sarah was not exaggerating when she reported that the lower end of their pasture in Brainerd was 350 feet below their house. The church there was situated on a high ridge, with the land falling off hundreds of feet on either side and a view of the sea off in the distance, at least on a clear day. As Bigelow once wrote, this was a long way from home in northern Ohio.

The climate was also a challenge. Torrential rains at times cut off all communication between stations, and lingering dampness affected people's health and good humor. Extreme heat at other seasons debilitated North Americans used to a more temperate climate. The missionaries seem to have been susceptible to the tropical diseases and suffered the irritation of boils, chiggers, and ticks. Several missionaries died in Jamaica and more were forced to return to the U.S. because of failing health.

The Mission saw initial success. Early reports document 120 members in the Brainerd church with 70 children in the school; 25 members in the Oberlin church with 175 others connected with the congregation and 75 in the school; 80 members in the Eliot church with 35 children in the school; and there were similar figures for the other stations (*The American Missionary*, March 1847). In Richmond, the Mission purchased a thousand acre estate, with a great house, saw mill, sugar works, and rum distillery. Following the example of English missionaries, it divided and sold most of the land to small farmers, retaining enough to establish a model farm and industrial school. It made good use of the saw mill and sugar works but used the still as a schoolhouse. In 1843, the Mission established the Jamaica Congregational Association, with the expectation that the churches would eventually become independent and self-sustaining, after the pattern of North American Congregational churches. But with the rapid turnover of missionaries, it was hard to keep all the stations and schools staffed, and often one or another had to be left vacant or permanently closed, much to the disappointment, and disgruntlement, of the people who had come to depend on them.

As a result, it was almost inevitable that there should be some "sheep stealing," as missionaries or ministers from other denominations moved in to fill the vacuum. Surprisingly, the Jamaica Mission faced its most serious threat from Julius Beardslee, one of the founders of the mission. Sometime in the early 1840s, Beardslee returned to Oberlin to complete his theological education. While in the United States, he was converted to the theology of Thomas Campbell, one of the founders of the Christian Church (Disciples of

Christ), and when he returned to Jamaica in 1848, it was under the auspices of the American Christian Missionary Society. He established the first Disciples church in Kingston that year and later started another church in nearby Dallas. But he also visited churches of the Jamaica Mission where he had served earlier and seems to have encouraged disaffected members to come over to his denomination. While the church at Oberlin, as Bigelow reported from very personal experience, did vote in 1861 to join the Disciples of Christ, no other churches accepted the invitation, though simmering dissatisfaction remained in some places.

It was originally hoped that the churches in Jamaica would be able to pay for the support of the missionaries, but that proved to be unrealistic. In 1844 the Committee for West India Missions was set up in the United States to try to raise funds for the Jamaica Mission. In 1846 the Committee merged with two other missionary organizations to form the American Missionary Association, and for some years after that the Jamaica missionaries enjoyed some financial security.

The two groups that joined with the West India Missions in the new coalition were the Union Missionary Society and the Western Evangelical Missionary Society. The former was organized in the aftermath of the 1839 *Amistad* affair, the case of the African slaves who were tried in an American court for piracy and murder after they had seized control of the vessel they were being transported on. A group of abolitionists headed by Lewis Tappan of New York formed a committee to defend the prisoners in court and, with the help of former President John Quincy Adams, secured their release in 1841. Later that year they were sent back home to Mendi, on the west coast of Africa, accompanied by three missionaries of the newly formed Union Missionary Society. The Western Evangelical Missionary Society, another Oberlin endeavor, was established in 1843 to support work among the Ojibwa Indians in northwestern Minnesota. A number of missionaries went out to that area, built churches and established schools, but they received little financial help until they were brought under the umbrella of the American Missionary Association (AMA).

The new organization not only assumed responsibility for the Mendi Mission in Africa, the Indian Mission in Minnesota, and the Jamaica Mission, but also started work among fugitive slaves in Canada and white settlers in the mid-west and it quickly offered its support to two missionaries in Siam who had been asked to resign their appointments with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In fact, the American Missionary Association was intentionally established as an alternative to the American Board. The American Board had refused to accept volunteers from Oberlin for its own mission to the Indians because of their espousal of the theology of perfectionism and had sought the resignation of the two missionaries in Siam for the same reason. On the other hand, many abolitionists contended that the American Board was tainted because it refused to take a strong stand on abolition and had allowed its missionaries among Indians tribes in the South to own slaves. The American Missionary Association was unequivocal in its

opposition to slavery and seemed to make that cause almost as important as preaching the Gospel and saving lost souls.

Again, Oberlin played a leading part in the new organization. The executive secretary and editor of its publication, *The American Missionary*, was George Whipple, another Lane Rebel and former faculty member from Oberlin. His assistant (and successor as secretary) was Michael Strieby, a former Oberlin student. Lewis Tappan, who had been a strong supporter of Charles G. Finney when he was still a revival preacher in New York and had contributed generously to the support of Oberlin College and to the work of the Jamaica Mission, as well as heading the Amistad Committee, was appointed treasurer. Up until 1860, nine-tenths of all its workers, at home and abroad, had come from Oberlin (Strieby, 5).

*The American Missionary*, published monthly beginning in 1846, gives a clear picture of the work of the Association. Along with the minutes of annual meetings and reports of the executive secretary and treasurer, there are letters from the missionaries in Africa, Jamaica, Siam, Minnesota and other places where the AMA supported workers and articles on the struggle against slavery in the United States. Up until 1861, the paper gave most of its attention to foreign missions and somewhat less to anti-slavery activities in the mid-west and on the frontier. A change in coverage at that time signaled a shift in the focus of the organization itself.

While backers of the American Missionary Association were sincere in their support for work among the people of Africa, the newly freed slaves of Jamaica and fugitives in Canada, they must always have hoped that someday they would be able to work with emancipated slaves in their own country. With the start of the Civil War, they felt that time had come. For them, the war was not a struggle to preserve the Union but an opportunity to end slavery in the South.

At the annual meeting of the American Missionary Association, held in Oberlin in October 1862 a few weeks after President Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation, the delegates passed a resolution expressing their gratitude and the hope "that under God the freedom of large masses of the enslaved is near at hand." Almost immediately a number of students left to begin work among the already freed slaves in South Carolina. More volunteers followed until by 1866, the American Missionary Association had over 350 people working among the freedmen in the southern states, most being women teachers (Fletcher, 911).

And this became the primary focus of the Association's effort in the following years. *The American Missionary* reflected this change. Now most of its attention was given to the work among the freedmen, the establishment of schools and colleges, and the news from ministers and teachers in the South. Reports and letters from missionaries abroad, which had been an essential part of earlier issues, were now often relegated to the back pages if they were to be found at all. Indeed, although there continued to be reports from the Mendi Mission, it is difficult to find anything about Jamaica after 1864. Although the

Indian Mission in Minnesota had closed in 1859, the Association continued to support work among other Indian tribes in the West and later took up the cause of Chinese immigrants in California, and these activities find good coverage in *The American Missionary* in the 1870s and 1880s. Today, however, the American Missionary Association is remembered primarily for its work in the South after the Civil War, especially for the schools and colleges it founded, such as Hampton, Fisk, Talladega, and the other historic Black colleges. The earlier work in Africa, Jamaica and other areas overseas and even the work with Native Americans and Chinese has been largely forgotten.

The missionaries in Jamaica would have applauded this new thrust of the Association's work, but they may not have anticipated how it would affect their own lives, even though delegates at the Oberlin meeting in 1862 had actually discussed the possibility of turning over the work in Jamaica to some English missionary society. At the beginning of the Civil War, contributions to the American Missionary Association had fallen off. With husbands and sons away in the army, people could not afford to give as they had previously and the Association could not support the work it was committed to. Missionary salaries had never been adequate, and did not include horses, medical care, and other major expenses. Now salaries were often late or not forthcoming at all, and the missionaries were forced to find other sources of income. We can read Bigelow's frustration in his letters when he reports on how well the Moravian missionaries are looked after or asks his stepfather to send monetary contributions by some other method than through the mission office in New York, lest Brother Whipple conclude that he would not need his regular salary.

It would appear that morale among the missionaries was low, even when salaries were restored, because several decided it was time to go home and no new missionaries arrived to take their place. Bigelow took the initiative in seeking a solution to their problem. He and a colleague consulted with a representative of the London Missionary Society in Kingston, Rev. W. S. Gardner, about taking over the work of the Jamaica Mission and found him receptive. Gardner suggested that the LMS might support any American missionary who chose to stay in place and would attempt to find English missionaries to take over the stations that would be left vacant. Bigelow communicated this offer to George Whipple, but we do not know his response.

In 1864, when he was back in Oberlin at the time of Sarah's death, Bigelow had a long conversation with Michael Strieby and followed it up with a letter to Whipple and Strieby (Amistad Research Center collection) laying out the arguments for why the AMA, if it could not support the Jamaica Mission fully, should turn over its responsibilities to the LMS, which had the resources to do the work properly. He argued further that, given the negative attitude of many Jamaicans toward the "Yankees," the English missionaries might really prove more effective. He said that he had told Gardner that he was prepared to stay on and help with the transition if it came to that. Again, we do not know Whipple's answer.

What does seem clear is that the Jamaica Mission was no longer of very high priority to the American Missionary Association. George Whipple appears

to have raised no objection when Bigelow announced his intention to resign, but he found no one to take his place. In a letter home in April 1865, Bigelow hinted that the AMA Executive Board was about to make some decision regarding a transfer, but evidently nothing came of it, for a year later Bigelow was still trying to recruit missionaries for Jamaica. In September 1866, after he had left the mission, Bigelow wrote to Whipple from Oberlin (Amistad Research Center collection) to say that he had found a candidate willing to go to Jamaica, but there is no indication that Whipple followed up on the lead. When Bigelow left Jamaica in May of 1866, ten to twelve of his colleagues still remained, and while several departed soon after that, others continued on for some years. Lucy Woodcock, who had arrived from Oberlin in 1853, stayed in Jamaica until her death in 1876. For some time the Mission appeared as a line in the AMA's annual financial report, with ever decreasing contributions toward its support. In the March 1880 issue of *The American Missionary* we find a warm and appreciative eulogy for the life of Rev. Charles Venning. As mentioned earlier, he was English and would have been less inclined to leave Jamaica than his American colleagues. In spite of periods of ill health, he continued his work as a preacher and teacher in Jamaica until the end. The last references to Jamaica are in the treasurer's reports for 1880 and 1881 under Jamaica Mission: "\$250 for aged missionary," presumably Mrs. Venning. And then nothing.

Today many of the churches still exist. Oberlin, as Bigelow reported, had already been taken over by the Campbellites, who we know as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Brainerd became a Presbyterian church. Others remained Congregational, most likely under the care of the London Missionary Society. Today all are back together as member churches in the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. Among those churches, there seems to be no institutional memory of the Jamaica Mission of the American Missionary Association. Oberlin's contribution is remembered, but through the person of Bigelow's friend and nemesis, Julius Beardslee, the founder of the Disciples of Christ Church in Jamaica.

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We have no record of how or why Bigelow and Sarah made their decision to go to Jamaica in 1858, but we can probably understand their thinking. Bigelow had a long-standing commitment to go to India "to help Dr. Scudder" but to do that he would have had to apply to the American Board, and he was probably unwilling to do that. Sarah, of course, had a close attachment to the Jamaica Mission, and may have wanted to go back to continue in the work her father had started. They arrived at a time when the Mission was still healthy, and in their early letters they speak optimistically of the work and their intention to spend the rest of their lives in Jamaica. However, after Sarah's illness and death, Bigelow must have remembered his first "call" to go to India and listened to his heart. He seems to have overcome his reservations about the American Board, and the Board in turn had softened its position on Oberlin trained ministers. They offered him an appointment to the Madura Mission in South India and he agreed to go as soon as he could be relieved of his obligations in Jamaica.

## Appendix B: Jamaica in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

Jamaica in the middle of the nineteenth century, when Bigelow and Sarah arrived, was experiencing a period of profound economic and social change. Two dates highlight this change. The last slave rebellion in 1832 was followed the next year by the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. The Morant Bay uprising of 1865, to which Bigelow was a witness, brought an end to Jamaica's limited self government and ushered in the direct rule of the Crown and the amelioration of some of the conditions which had caused the rebellion.

For one hundred and fifty years before that time, Jamaica had been one of the richest of Britain's West Indies colonies. Jamaica's prosperity was based almost entirely on the production of sugar. Sugar was enormously profitable in the West Indies and provided a large portion of the capital that had underwritten the industrial revolution at home in England. Sugar, the plantation system that produced it, and the slaves who provided labor shaped the economy and social organization of the islands.

In Jamaica, the population was made up of a small group of wealthy planters who controlled most of the land, a mostly urban class of artisans and merchants, and the large majority of slaves. In 1834, before emancipation was implemented, the population of the island was 376,000, of which 20,000 were white and 310,000 were slaves (Rogozinski, 114). Mortality rates were high and planters depended on the continued importation of slaves from Africa until 1807 when Parliament ended the slave trade. Treatment of slaves on the plantations varied with the owners but was harsh enough to spark twelve serious slave revolts during the previous century. This probably explains the feelings of insecurity which whites felt, as a tiny few in the midst of a disaffected many, and the brutality with which they put down any hint of defiance or rebellion. As historians have said of the similar situation in North America, slavery degraded both the owner and the owned.

A substantial portion of the population, 46,200 in 1834, were free non-whites, black or brown in the terminology of the day. While free, their rights as citizens were limited, though many owned property, even slaves. Inhibited by their status as free people from engaging in agricultural labor, considered slaves' work, most lived in towns where they performed various kinds of skilled and unskilled labor. Some were well-educated and found success in journalism, law, and business, and a few even achieved wealth and some political status as members of the legislative assembly. Formal marriage between the races was uncommon, but Sarah and Bigelow mention some examples, and one of their colleagues, Charles Venning, was married to a light skinned Jamaican mulatto. Discrimination, based on race and degree of color, was the rule, of course, but Bigelow and Sarah were dismayed to find it even among the their colleagues.

Moravian missionaries arrived in Jamaica in 1774 and began work among the slaves. Neither they nor the Wesleyans and Baptists who followed them challenged the practice of slavery at first, accepting that condition as God's will for the Africans, but they did attempt to convert slaves, establish churches and provide education, and later, through their influence and that of abolitionists in England, they brought about some improvement in the treatment of slaves.

The government of Jamaica was largely in the control of the planter class. The Crown appointed a royal governor, who was responsible for administration and military affairs, but legislation and taxation were the prerogative of the Assembly, a body elected by a limited, property based franchise. In 1860, the Assembly consisted of 47 members, returned by only 1,903 registered electors (Hamshere, 162). This body was dominated by planters and wealthy merchants, who governed the island according to their own views and interests. When in the mid-nineteenth century they were faced with a decline of the sugar based economy and the emancipation of their slaves, they proved unable to adjust to the new situation, offering only small modifications to the old system, which was no longer an option. It should be noted that though they had little power or influence, there were two black and several colored members of the Assembly in 1860.

The campaign for the abolition of slavery, fought in Britain under the leadership of William Wilberforce and others, put pressure on the British government to end the slave trade and then to free slaves in the West Indies, and in 1823, the government did announce its resolve to work for that end. The planters, of course, opposed this reform, predicting that emancipation would ruin them. Perhaps in anticipation of freedom, there were slave revolts in several of the British colonies, and planters accused Christian missionaries of the London Missionary Society and Baptist Church of inciting the slaves. There was a major insurrection in Jamaica in December 1831 and into 1832, sometimes called the Baptist War, involving over fifty thousand slaves led by a lay preacher, Sam Sharpe, and several other black deacons. Over 200 sugar estates were burned and pillaged as whites fled to coastal towns. Eventually colonial troops suppressed the rebellion, in which fourteen soldiers and over 400 slaves were killed. In the aftermath, one thousand slaves were hanged and a further thousand severely flogged. Blaming the insurrection on the missionaries, angry whites burned fourteen Baptist and six Wesleyan chapels. Some also blamed the British government and spoke openly of declaring independence and joining the United States (Hamshere, 147, Rogozinski, 184).

In spite of this setback, or perhaps because of the outrage in Britain caused by the news of the revolt and its suppression, Parliament passed the Abolition of Slavery Act in August 1833. It set August 1, 1834 as the date for implementation but established an apprenticeship system, varying from four years for artisans to six years for field laborers, during which time freed slaves would continue to work without pay but would be housed, clothed and fed by their former masters. Slave owners were compensated for their loss. The apprentice system was a failure. To slaves and their sympathizers it seemed to be only a legal extension of slavery, and for the most part, planters did not



believe the system would work and did not invest much effort in making it work. Parliament ended the apprentice system on August 1, 1838, the date celebrated in the West Indies ever since as Emancipation Day. That was one year after David Ingraham arrived in Kingston and began his work with the freed slaves of Jamaica.

Unfortunately, freedom for the African slaves came at a time when the sugar economy was already in decline. While planters usually blamed emancipation for their problems, prices had been falling on the London market ever since 1815, due to competition from Cuba, Brazil and Java, and a final blow fell in 1846 when Parliament repealed the protective duties that had shielded West Indies sugar from foreign competition. While some colonies, Trinidad and Barbados for example, were able to adjust to the new situation, even increasing their production of sugar, in Jamaica many of the planters simply gave up. By 1850 over 240 plantations had been abandoned. Sugar production fell from over 68,000 tons per year in 1830 to 27,000 tons in 1855 (Hamshire, 157). Planters who tried to stay in business often found that their former slaves would not work for the wages they felt they could offer.

The situation in Jamaica, unlike some of the other islands, was that the freedmen had options; if they felt that wages were too low, they could leave and look for work elsewhere. While planters were reluctant to sell land to former slaves, Christian missionaries were able to purchase abandoned estates and by 1842 had established 150-200 Free Villages where freedmen could obtain small holdings and cultivate crops for food and for sale. Planters complained that free blacks were too lazy to do a proper day's work, or as the visiting Anthony Trollope wrote, "The negro's idea of emancipation was, and is, emancipation not from slavery but from work." While they were certainly more sympathetic with the freedmen than Trollope, Bigelow and Sarah also raised questions about their work ethic. But John Candler, a visiting Quaker wrote, "Some planters still insist that they are an idle people because they do not . . . perform as much work as in slavery; but who that has seen them at work in the cane fields or hoeing coffee on the steep hills . . . can call them an idle people? I have seen them, men, women and children, loaded with provisions and fruits which they carry on their heads, weights no European would ever encounter, and sweating under the heavy toil, yet all laboring cheerfully because they are free." (Hamshire, 161)

But not all freedmen could obtain land and many were still dependent on the labor they could find on the remaining estates, even as the sugar industry continued to decline. Sugar was the basis of Jamaica's economy, and when that industry failed, everyone felt the results. Three years of drought in the 1860s hit the peasant cultivators as well as the estate workers, who saw their wages reduced even further, if at all they could find work. And prices for food and other products, as the Penfields noted, had risen sharply as a result of the American Civil War. There was also growing dissatisfaction with the political and legal systems that seemed to favor whites over blacks.

It is against this background that the Morant Bay rebellion occurred in 1865. Economic and social distress and an increase in crime led to demands

for political action. George William Gordon, a freed slave, wealthy through property speculation, a leader in the Baptist church, and a member of the Assembly, led the call for change, demanding constitutional reform and a widening of the franchise and authoring a petition to the Queen asking that peasants be allowed to cultivate unoccupied Crown land in return for rent. Neither the Queen nor the Governor, Edward John Eyre, was at all sympathetic or willing to address the very real crisis that was developing. Eyre, who hated the Baptists, accused Gordon of sedition.

Eventually violence did break out when a demonstration of 400 small landholders led by Paul Bogle, a Baptist deacon, clashed with the Vestry, the local governing authority in Morant Bay. When constables attempted to arrest Bogle, the people resisted and stones were thrown; the militia fired on the crowd, killing seven men. In the riot that followed, fifteen Vestrymen, including one black member, were killed. Though it appears in retrospect that there was no organized or planned rebellion, Governor Eyre responded with force. He declared martial law and sent a large body of soldiers to put down the disturbance. In the suppression that followed, 439 blacks were killed, 600 men and women were publicly flogged, and over one thousand houses were burned (Curtin, 196). Paul Bogle was captured and hanged as a pirate. Worst of all, George Gordon was arrested in Kingston, where he had had no contact with the rioters, was quickly tried at Morant Bay and immediately hanged, still protesting his innocence.

A royal commission of inquiry commended Eyre for his prompt action in putting down the rebellion but criticized the extreme repressive actions taken after the fighting was over. The British Parliament took the position that the majority of the people, all descendants of slaves, could not be left in the hands of a minority of planters and merchants who were only interested in preserving their own economic and social position. The Assembly was dissolved and Jamaica became a Crown Colony in 1866. It should be noted that in 1965 the Government of Jamaica dedicated a monument to the national heroes George Gordon and Paul Bogle.

Surprisingly, Bigelow showed little sympathy for the rebels or understanding of the conditions that caused the rebellion. Though he personally experienced the economic difficulties and mentioned the increased crime and danger of travel on the roadways, he believed that work was there for those who were willing to do it and that there was no good reason for unrest or rebellion. While he did not mention George Gordon or Paul Bogle by name, he was quite critical of the motives of the leaders of the protest. In that he seemed to reflect the prevailing views of the white population, and with them he also feared a general, violent uprising directed at whites and even browns.

From the perspective of history and modern historians, it would be easy to fault him for his narrow view, but he was there and he experienced the turmoil, and for a short time at least, it must have been very frightening. Still, something had happened to him during his seven-year stay in Jamaica. He was no longer as sympathetic with the Jamaican people as he had been when he arrived. He had found difficulty working with the free people of that land.

More than once he had faced rebellion among his own independent minded parishioners. And while he could claim some success in his ministry, he often felt let down by the people he had come to serve. He was probably more inclined now to blame them for the recent unrest than to look for other causes.

By that time, however, Bigelow was already counting the days until he would return to the United States. He still had time to travel to the scene of the recent rebellion and attend an interdenominational convention of ministers to discuss the "crisis of morals in the country," but his heart was not in it. He was preoccupied with his own plans and was ready to leave Jamaica and begin his next assignment.

## Appendix C: The Jamaica Mission Field

The Great Revival in Jamaica, which Bigelow and Sarah describe in their letters and articles in the spring and summer of 1861, was part of a larger movement that began in the United States in 1858 and moved on to Ireland and Britain before making its way to the West Indies. Bigelow and his colleagues in the Jamaica Mission, as well as missionaries of other denominations, welcomed the revival with great hope and expectation when it swept through the island in 1860 and 1861. For a time it appeared to them to be a true work of God, an answer to their prayers for the people of Jamaica. But disillusion set in very quickly. While initially many people were caught up in the excitement and were led to confess their sins and pledge their faith in Christ, the enthusiasm did not last, and where it continued, it seemed to take on the extreme practices and appearance of a more traditional, African inspired cult.

Most of the missionaries quickly distanced themselves from the movement. Bigelow held out longer than others, feeling that with proper guidance the people could be led to a true understanding of the Christian faith, but even he had to admit that there were evil forces at work, “extravagancies,” which he could not control. After his last report on the revival in late 1861, he does not mention it again, but the experience of high hope followed by quick disappointment must have had a profound effect on his work and in his attitude toward the people he had come to serve.

I am grateful to my friend and neighbor Philip Curtin for helping to put Bigelow and Sarah’s personal experience into a broader historical context. In his book, *Two Jamaicas, The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Country, 1830-1865*, published in 1955, Curtin describes the separate economic, social and religious cultures which whites and blacks had developed on the island. It has been fascinating to see how well the Penfields’ observations in the 1850s illustrate Curtin’s theses written almost a century later. And his analysis sheds a good deal of light on some of the difficulties the Penfields experienced as missionaries.

Even before emancipation, blacks in Jamaica had achieved a certain independence of mind and were arguably quite well prepared for freedom. Typically on a sugar estate, the slaves had small plots of land, or provision grounds, where they were expected to raise most of their own food. Through this system they became skilled in farming and learned how to manage their own affairs, at least in this limited sphere. And since they were able to sell any surplus they produced, the more successful farmers attained a higher economic status in their own communities.

Within these communities there was also a clearly defined social and political structure, based usually on the status of the particular tasks which slaves were assigned to do but also on their roles in other slave institutions, especially those associated with religion. While whites generally feared African religion and tried to suppress it, African magic and religious practices persisted,

sometimes in secret, since magic or “obeah” was illegal, sometimes more openly in the form of “myal” cults, and sometimes assimilated or imbedded within what seemed ostensibly to be Christian churches.

Up until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian Church in Jamaica was almost exclusively a white institution to which blacks were not welcome. Moravian missionaries who arrived in 1774 may have been the first to try to bring Christianity to the slave population but their impact at first was limited. More immediately effective as missionaries were slaves from the United States who had been brought to Jamaica by their Loyalist masters after the American Revolution. Some of these, already converted to Christianity, began to share their faith, and over the next forty years, their message spread throughout the island, absorbing as it went many features of African religious practice and belief. This was the origin of the Native Baptist church. Since most of the leaders of this movement were illiterate, they tended to emphasize the spiritual and ceremonial aspects of the Christianity, such as baptism by immersion, over the written word. One typical element, which made its way even into congregations of the Jamaica Mission, was the “leader system,” whereby elders of a particular church were responsible for recruiting, guiding and teaching their own classes of new members, often exerting control over them in ways that went beyond strictly religious matters. As Bigelow observed, while this system developed leadership in the church, it tended to undermine the authority of the minister and worked against unity and good discipline.

British missionaries from the dissenting churches – the Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists – arrived in the 1790s and early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to begin their work of conversion and education among the black population. The white planters and their allies did not welcome the missionaries. They complained that they were upsetting the system and preaching sedition, and they blamed them for any sign of rebellion or unrest among their slaves. In fact, the missionaries were not supporters of emancipation at first, though they saw themselves as allies of the slaves and used their influence to have laws passed ameliorating the treatment of slaves on the estates. After 1820, with the growth of anti-slavery sentiment in England, most missionaries began to work more actively for the abolition of slavery, and they were able to claim some of the credit when the slaves were freed in 1833.

Still, the attitude of blacks toward the white missionaries was always somewhat ambivalent. While blacks welcomed the support that missionaries extended to them and took advantage of the schools and churches they established, they were wary of missionary leadership and authority. They had, after all, established their own religious institutions and churches and they resented the tendency of missionaries to want to take charge and impose on them their white beliefs and ways of doing things.

In the period immediately after emancipation, the missionaries experienced phenomenal success. At a time when the government of Jamaica made no attempts to assist the blacks in their transition to freedom, the missionaries found they could be very helpful. As trained ministers they had special status in the black community and they had the financial support of

their churches at home. They were able to purchase land on behalf of the blacks where they established free communities, they built schools and churches to serve the new settlers, and they offered advice on legal and other matters with which the former slaves had had no previous experience. As a result, membership in mission churches grew rapidly, at least until 1845, and missionaries could rejoice that Jamaica was undergoing a moral revolution.

But there were underlying problems. These had to do primarily with what we today would identify as cultural conflicts, though the missionaries saw them more as issues of right and wrong. The missionaries were not only preaching a more orthodox version of Christianity; they were also trying to acculturate former slaves to an ideal more in tune with Europe or North America than the realities of Jamaica. They were asking much more of the Jamaicans than they were willing or able to give.

The Jamaica Mission was established in 1839, after emancipation, but its missionaries experienced the same conflicts the British missionaries faced. The position of the American missionaries was clear. They had always opposed slavery, they rejoiced in the emancipation of Jamaica's blacks, and they wanted only to serve and teach and prepare Jamaicans to be good Christians and good citizens in their new free freedom. But their understanding of freedom was not the same as that of the people. They found that many of the cultural patterns and customs commonly practiced by Jamaicans were incompatible with their understanding of Christianity.

In one of her first letters home, Sarah wrote, "My heart bleeds for Jamaica, so wicked and downtrodden." In another letter she complained, "...people who do not attend church are the most wicked and degraded imaginable... Those who attend the native Baptist chapels are not much better. Even their ministers drink, believe in witchcraft and that sort of thing." In her article for the *Advocate and Family Guardian* of April 1860, she gave a list of commonly found evils, among them theft, drinking, a lack of respect for the law, and especially a "light regard for the marriage relation." She explained: "It is the universal practice for a girl to go and live with a man upon his simple promise to marry her.... And so they live on year after year as unblushingly as if there were no wrong in it." She acknowledged that this behavior was part of the legacy of slavery but implied that now, after some twenty years of freedom, Jamaicans should be able to change their wicked ways.

As Curtin points out, black Jamaicans saw these things in quite a different light. They did not see petty theft, especially from their former masters, as such a serious matter. Drinking rum was one of the few pleasures available to them and was well established in the culture. The law, they felt, was simply another means whites used to maintain their advantage over blacks. And as for marriage, it was not merely that men never got around to doing the right thing; rather it was women who rejected formal marriage, seeing it as another form of slavery, and indeed they were unblushing and found no wrong in it.

Bigelow was dismayed to find these attitudes prevalent even within his own congregations. Theologically he would have defined sin, at its essence, as a separation from God, but the manifestation of that estrangement was to be seen in the evils of larceny, license, intemperance, and adultery. He expected church members to repent their errors and strive to live better lives. One of his complaints about Julius Beardslee was that he baptized the ungodly merely on profession of their faith, even though they gave no evidence of a change of heart. Bigelow felt that unrepentant sinners should be called to account, even expelled from the church in extreme cases, but when he disciplined the sinner he was also undermining the authority of the sinner's "leader" or elder. It is no wonder he found resentment, even rebellion, in his congregations.

Bigelow's experience was not unique. All over the island, missionaries were facing the growing distrust and animosity of their parishioners, and mission churches were losing members even as the Native Baptist churches and African cults flourished. It is in this context then that the Great Revival of 1860-1861, according to Curtin, "brought the final surge of missionary hope and the final depths of missionary despair." (p. 170) For a time the population seems to have been transformed. In April 1861 Sarah reported that people were flocking to the churches, they were confessing all sorts of long forgotten sins, couples were getting married, and rum shop owners were complaining of a lack of business. When this enthusiasm turned out to be only a temporary surge, or worse an opening for paganism, the missionaries were more than disappointed. As Curtin put it, "Especially because they were dedicated men – sincere, hard-working, and badly paid – many missionaries developed a sense of frustration and resentment toward the blacks who had failed them." (p. 172)

Bigelow and Sarah had only been in Jamaica for two years then, and though they shared the disappointment of other missionaries, they were not ready to give up on the Jamaican people. On several occasions Bigelow wrote to his parents and George Whipple of his hope to spend the rest of his life in Jamaica, if God spared him. But we begin to see indications of his frustration. He refers to Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed and acknowledges that too often the seed, or the word of God, falls among the tares. At another time he mentions the great number of churches and ministers in Jamaica, and comments that at least the people have Gospel preaching, implying that the truth was available if they would only listen. And in an early letter, Sarah anticipated the future when she wrote that if it were possible both of them would prefer "to labor among the real heathen, those who have never heard the Gospel."

It was only after Sarah's death that Bigelow began to reconsider his commitment to Jamaica. While still in Oberlin he wrote to George Whipple of his desire to leave the mission but said that he had promised the congregation in Brainerd that he would return and could see no honorable way of breaking his pledge. Then on his way back to Jamaica, he met Henry Scudder in New York and was reminded again of his boyhood pledge to Henry's father Dr. John Scudder to become a missionary in India. Before he sailed, he had made contact with the American Board and sent in his application. They offered him an appointment to the Madura Mission in South India and urged him to take

up the assignment as soon as possible. He served in Brainerd, Richmond and Elliot for a year and a half, and when satisfactory arrangements had been made for the care of the Brainerd church, he returned home to make plans for the next chapter in his life.

During his last years in Jamaica he seems to have achieved a more harmonious relationship with his congregation at Brainerd. When he informed the members of the church that he was leaving, he explained that he longed “to go to the heathen.” Perhaps he was telling them, in effect, that he had done all he could for them, that they were Christians, and their souls were in the hands of God.



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