

W. E. Daviss Letter

Amite County, Miss. Holly Grove

February 1841

My dear Son,

This is your birthday, and if you have been a good boy you may read what your father has here written. I hope, Augustus, you are in every respect what I hoped you would be, a good obedient and dutiful child. If you have done your duty, you may be sure that God Almighty, his angels and your father in Heaven are pleased. God is your friend, put your trust in him, and you need not fear what bad children and bad men say about you or treat you. If you do right you are sure to do well and be very happy. Since you read my first letter, you have been going to school I hope. Yes, my little boy with his little basket and his little books, has been striving to obey his father. If you are a good boy, good men will notice you and take care of you, and you will make a smart man and everybody will love and respect Augustus Frederick Daviss.

You can read and write and spell very well, and have read several histories, and if you have been managing well you have commenced arithmetic and Grammar and Geography. You look in the dictionary and learn the meaning of every word you don't know, and you must remember what you learn or it will do you no good. If you have no books of your own, you must borrow some from your friends and take care of them, and return them when you are through with them. Nothing, my dear boy, could give me more grief, then to know that on Saturdays and Sundays and other idle days you are running about with idle bad boys, playing and fishing in the creeks. If these boys want you to go with them, say to them that older people say that such a course is not right and that you are determined to obey them. By pursuing this course, you will do right and when you grow to be a man you will be glad you had, and obeyed such good advice. When I was [missing text] years old I could read and write very well, for I had a good mother who took delight in teaching me, and my other brothers and sisters how to read and spell. She used to make us read a chapter in the Holy Bible to her every Sunday morning, and of nights she would make us kneel down by her side and teach us to repeat the Lord's Prayer. All this goodness made us love her more than we should have done if she had taken no pains and trouble to make us good and happy. And this is the reason why I am telling you what you should do in order to make you good and love me and often think of me when I am gone to another world, never more to see you or instruct you, but I hope some good person will tell you when you do wrong and I hope you won't say anything to hurt their feelings and cause them to think you are a bad boy and hate you. Oy, no, my little boy, you must never, never, say you won't do what is right; but if bad boys or bad men should ask you to do wrong, tell them your father told you never to do an improper act, and that you are determined to obey him, and then they will be ashamed of themselves and will trouble you no more. Good people then will love you and tell you that God loves good little boys and will take them home to heaven where their parents are who are dead.

You must rise by times in the morning and make yourself neat and clean, and then study your book, if your Mother or the good person with whom you live ask you do to anything, do it quick and be cheerful and then take your book again. And by pursuing this course, you will soon be a good scholar and a good boy too, which will make people praise you and say that Augustus is one of the best boys in the neighborhood and then your friends will all be proud of you.

My greatest distress is that at this period of your life you will be placed with persons who, not knowing any thing themselves, can't give your mind the proper direction. Ignorant people can't appreciate the advantages and blessings of education, and affect dislike persons who are better informed than themselves. This is a great [missing text], because many boys are ruined for want of good advising and will imitate the example of trifling, lazy, drunken people. My dear little boy, you can never keep the company of bad people without injuring yourself. People will think you are no better than the bad boy who associates and plays with you.

If you learn to read and spell of nights and whenever you have the opportunity you can read my next letter without the assistance of any person, and if you don't want people to know what is in it you need not tell them because you will be old enough to keep your own secrets and write letters to your little friends and relations. I write these letters in a great hurry and in a bad hand, because I am not very well and don't know how long I may live, and I want to leave you something to remember always. Remember, my son, if people in Heaven can look down upon earth and see what is going on, I shall always be looking at my little boy and praying God to direct him right, and if you do wrong, which every little boy is apt to do, you must be sorry for it and do better the next time, and God will forgive you and you will be quite happy. I shall say a great deal in my next and you must [missing text] be too anxious to see it [missing text] if, you have not been a good boy and learned to read and write [missing text] you must not open it until you learn. Now you must be a good boy five years and may God protect you.

Your affectionate father

W.E. Daviss