

____ 1st May Armagh
[1866]
My dear Sister Amanda

I received your very welcome letter accompanied by one from dear kindhearted Tilla both of which gave me much pleasure to hear that you were still in the land of the living. I must say it grieves me very much to know that my dear brother's health, as well as your own, is not so good as usual. I know well, from sad experience, how hard it is for old people to regain health and strength when once disease has made an inroad on it.

I don't wonder, my dear Sister, that you should think it very strange that I did not write to you; but I feel thankful to you for doing me the justice of believing that my silence was not the result of any diminution of love or affection towards friends and relatives that were so very, very dear to me. Oh! no, no, neither time, distance, nor the deep blue sea that rolls between us, has in the smallest degree damped my love for you all. I will now try to account for my silence. I arrived at home in the latter end of June 1865 and my health continued tolerably good till the beginning of winter, when I took ill, was confined to my bed for the most part during the winter, and unable to write, or do any thing else. I knew that the postage communication with the South was not open for a considerable time after the war was over and therefore thought it useless to write until I could ascertain the time when letters could pass through to Spartanburg. My illness was something similar to what I had in Dr. Moore's and from it I have never regained my usual strength, tho I recovered so far as to be able to move about the house and garden.

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... up again during the winter and am just now getting around again. You can judge of the state of my health when I tell you that I have not been in my daughter's house for the last six months altho it is only ten minutes walk to it. So you see, I have had a good deal of bodily affliction since I saw you, but Glory be to my good Master, he has been with thru it all and never left me comfortless, he laid upon me no more than I could bear and enabled me even at the worst to rejoice in him, as my reconciled Saviour and to look forward with unwavering confidence to that sweet rest that remains for the people of God. Oh! glorious rest where there will be no more sorrow, or sickness or war, or parting from beloved friends, or fears, or anxieties about worldly things. There all will be peace, sweet, sweet peace, yea, eternal peace.

I am very often with you in thought, in your little family circle. I am anxious to know every thing about the great change that has taken place in your family arrangements in consequence of the war. Do you employ any of your old servants? I suppose John and his family are quite above service, but I should think that Old Aunt Gracy would continue with you. Do you think, is the condition of the black people improved by the change? I rather think not. It would indeed rejoice my heart to hear that the South was prospering and becoming happy again, for my sympathies are as strong and sincere towards the South as they ever were. I suppose you miss dear Alice very much from your family circle. it is a great blessing that her superior education enables her, now in altered circumstances, to fill a useful and honorable situation. I know she is qualified to take a high stand as a Teacher and thereafter(?), with God's help, secure and independence.

I was no little astonished to hear of D'Arcy's Marriage as well as of the mode of life he has selected, however I do believe that there is no proffession [sic] or employment more congenial to man than Agriculture, and therefore I do hope that D'Arcy will be happy at it. I congratulate him on being united to a Lady so amiable and entirely worthy of his love and esteem.

I am sorry to hear that dear Sister Tolly's health is so bad. I often think of her especially when I attempt to sing my little Sunday School hymn. I suppose, like myself, she has not been to church for a long time. What a mercy that God is not confined to Temples made with hands. Jesus our loving Saviour is every where present and ready to hear, to answer, and to bless his own believing children. It is a great comfort to you that David and his dear little family are so near you. I would indeed like to see dear Lizzie and black-eyed Pattie. I think of Pattie ____; she might truly say as she once said, that I was no account, because I could not sing _____.

My dear wife and I are comparatively solitary, her health like my own is not good, and my illness necessarily entails on her a great deal of additional fatigue which is a source of grief to me. Emmy's(?) children are often with us; she has now six, three girls and three boys; they are very fine rosy children, all at school, except the 2 youngest. I've had a letter from daughter Eliza a short time ago, she has also 6 children, two girls and four boys. Mr. Avil is still in the same employment and they are getting on pretty well. William was in Richmond when we last heard from [him], he writes at regular intervals but not very often; he is about as good a son as ever was born to Parents. Our God has made him the staff of our old age, and a faithful one he is. We have heard nothing from our Son John, his silence is a mystery to us. I am glad that Wallace is once more at his work and that dear Dora and her family are well. I do sincerely hope that they may be as happy as I wish them. I do not forget Dora's kind attention to me. it gave me great pleasure to hear that Tommy Moore was at College doing well and a good boy, please give my love to him and tell him I am so glad to hear a good account of him. Please give my most sincere love to Dr. and Mrs. Moore and family and tell them I think of them and speak of them very often. I would write to them; but it's very laborious for me to write. I also desire my affectionate love to Mr. and Mrs. Smith and especially to Mrs. Dickson if still alive and Miss Rebecca Smith to whom I owe much gratitude for her kind attentions to me at the Old School house. She frequently assisted me when the School was large, I never forget kindness. Please tell me what you know of them when you write, you could hear of them thru Mrs. Stone, to whom please present my best regards and also to Mrs. [or Mr.] Dean.

Our home is a sweet little cottage situated on a hill, which commands a view of the entire City and is within fifteen minutes walk of the center of the Town; our garden supplies us with all necessary vegetables, especially potatoes, all the year round. we have an abundance of gooseberries, raspberries, Damsons, plums, apples, etc., etc., also a great profu. Now with such a home and such surroundings we might be very comfortable, had we health to enjoy them; but alas! there's the drawback. I can only creep around and look at the various things as they are growing but even that affords pleasure and is a cause of gratitude to my Heavenly Father. Please give my sincere love to every one of your family, Children and Grandchildren. o Dr. Shipp. Dr. Smith and families. To Profrs Carlile and Dupre and families. I hope in your next I shall hear of your and dear brother's health being restored. I remain as ever, My dear Sister, your affectionate brother, James Duncan.

Wellington Cottage Armagh

1st May 68

My very dear niece,

You were perfectly right in believing that I had not forgotten my very dear and kind friends in Spartanburg and especially one or two whose loving warmhearted childlike greeting warmed and cheered my old heart, every time I returned from Dr. Moore's to Brother's. it reminded me so much of my own children at home and made such an impression as no time can possibly erase.

All your and Alice's little pranks and plays around the yard are as fresh in my memory as yesterday, also our evening ramble after blackberries when Alice was sure to ask me if I had got the Yanky stick to keep off the snakes, very often those thoughts with a thousand more come crowding into my mind; but alas! those, or similar scenes shall never more return to me, and why should the thought produce even a momentary sadness? Is it not because that there is something painful in the very idea I shall never, never see my dear friends again in this world? I have had many meetings and many sorrowful partings this life. The words, farewell for ever, are too hard to pronounce, the faithful tongue refuses to perform its office under such circumstances, whilst the heaving breast and flowing eyes speak a language far louder than words. I speak from sad, sad experience.

But, my dear Tilla, what a sweet and glorious hope believers in Christ have. They know assuredly that there is a happy home prepared for them above, where they shall meet all their beloved friends that have departed in possession of like precious faith.

My dear Tilla, let nothing satisfy you short of an assurance of God's pardoning love thru faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. it is the one thing needful. It has been my comfort and solace this a long life, and therefore I can confidently recommend it to those I love. I am glad to know you are getting on so well with your studies, and it is very pleasant to have such a companion as Miss L. Shipp. Tell her I have the pen wiper she gave me at parting and shall prize it for her sake; please give my love to her and also to all the family. Is the female college in existence still? Tell me in your next letter how you get on with the servants. I am certain they are both lazy and impudent. What of Ann? She was a hopeless case, I fear the change has not improved her. We have very little news from the South, but I can see by the newspapers occasionally that things are not carried on satisfactorily. I hope and trust the country will improve for I love the South and would rejoice at its prosperity. Tell Grand Pa I never went to Ennishaven since my return; my health was not sufficient to undertake the journey tho I wished very much to see them all, especially Sister Margaret before her death. Eliza and her husband had a long illness, but are now better. Rebecca and her family are well, her son Robert Mitchell is Doctor of the Londonderry Infirmary, he was educated at Trinity College Dublin. Father's old homestead is now occupied by strangers. William's wife is living with her own relations. I must now close, I have been several days writing those letters, my health won't permit me to write much at one time. I sent a paper to you about a week ago. Your Aunt Marry(?) sends her love to you and to all. Ever your very affectionate uncle, James Duncan

Spartanburg, 25th July, 1863

My Dear Little Niece,

It gave me much pleasure to see by your kind little letter that you had not forgotten me. It forms no inconsiderable part of our happiness to feel assured that we are affectionately remembered by those we love, and now my dear Tilla, whilst I am an exile far, far from my beloved family and my native land, it adds much to my happiness to know and feel too that I have very dear, kind and loving friends in Spartanburg and among them, not the least, Tilla Lomax.

I have not forgotten about the blackberry season and I remember well the pleasant evenings that Alice and you and I spent in gathering and eating blackberries together. They are among the green spots of my sojourn in South Carolina, and believe me, Tilla, it would afford me no small degree of pleasure to pay you a visit at this time, but having lost so much time by my sickness, I cannot in justice to my school ask the indulgence even of a few days, how pleasing soever it might be to myself. My school has got up to 23 which is about as many as I wish for. I have them so well classified that my labor is not too much for me. The worst part of it is, the long hot walks to and from the school, especially in the afternoon at 4 o'clock, which is the hottest part of the day; but, thank God, I stand it very well and my health is still improving and the weather will soon get cooler. You are correct in saying that I am sorry I don't get the news every day, for I do feel indeed very anxious about the country. Tell Sister that I am as hopeful as ever for the final success of the South and that my hopes rest upon my Heavenly Father from whom I believe I have got an assurance that He will show mercy to His country. I hope, my dear Tilla, that you still retain the good impressions made upon your heart by the Holy Spirit. Oh! do not let them go but cultivate them by frequent and fervent prayer, and do not rest until you feel the witness of God's Holy Spirit bearing witness with yours that you are his adopted child. I thank Sister for filling up your letter and I ought to reply to her but I hope she will excuse me at present; I unite with her in thanksgiving to God for David's preservation on the bloody field of Gettysburg. I suppose it was the bloodiest battle of the war. I thank her for the hat, I find it a great comfort to me. Mrs. Moore will have the wool washed next week and Sister can get it any time after that. I must say it was very noble of D'Arcy to fly to the protection of Charleston, altho at the same time it is very hard to part with the last son, and he a mere boy. Oh: may the Good Being preserve him and return him again in safety to his anxious family. I shall join them in spirit, at the prayer meetings in the church and I trust our Heavenly Father will hear and answer our united prayers. Much love to all, to Brother, Sister, Sister Taliaferro, and Alice. I remain as ever your affectionate uncle, James Duncan.

Tell Lilly Ship I was truly sorry to hear of her ... illness and I am glad she is recovering.

Please give my best respects to all my campus friends. Yours, JD.