

From Sarah Fitch to My Dear Father and Mother

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Lawrence "The City of Sorrow["]: Sept. 2 [18]63

Wednesday Eve.

My dear Father and Mother[.]

I have been trying to summon strength to write to you all the particulars of the sad, sad day which has brought such gloom to this once happy place -- which has wrecked all my happiness -- which has bro't desolation to your hearts. Oh! My dear mother how I longed to help you bear this burden! Never before did I feel the meaning of that word -- crushed -- oh the utter desolation -- the heart breaking despair I have endured. My brain reels! -- my reason totters -- had it not been for our children -- Edward's darlings -- that I had to live for, I do not think I could have endured -- How have those poor hearts endured that could not feel "thou didst it." -- where shall I commence? What shall I say -- there is so much I want to tell you -- and my mind is so confused -- I have yet hardly strength to perform the task --

Two short weeks ago -- on Thursday eve -- this place was so happy -- so prosperous -- on that evening I went up town and was at the store some time. E. & I walked home together -- going down the whole length of our principal business street speaking of all the new building & all the projected improvements -- How bright -- how glowing with happiness & prosperity seemed the future -- How little we dreamed of the horror which even then was hovering over us -- Oh! that evening -- can it be -- oh can it truly be, it was the last! I cannot -- cannot endure it -- oh how little I tho't as Lulie & Charlie kissed "Dear Papa" -- and bade him "goodnight" -- that it was the last -- Oh Mother -- Mother -- those sad words the last time. I know now what they mean -- such a quiet, happy evening as we spent -- together -- in our sweet, happy home -- oh as I look back to that evening -- it seems as tho' my heart would break -- why cannot it break -- how can I bear this burden on thro' dreary month & years -- I will try to tell as well as I can the events of that next terrible morning that fatal Friday morning -- when horror & despair fell upon us -- at sunrise I was up -- it had been a warm, still night & was a lovely morning -- as calm and quiet as any of these mornings to you -- but few were out nearly all were just rising -- I went to call Miranda the girl who lived with us -- (she had been out to meeting late & was very tired) I then went to the baby who was nestling as tho' about to wake -- Edward was in Lulie's room -- as it was cooler than in ours -- In about five minutes I heard the report of a pistole -- then another & another -- twenty or thirty shots -- "Edward" said I -- what's all that about. There was a camp of recruits -- just back of our house & the shots were in that direction. "Oh" answered E -- "it's the boys having some fun" but the shots came thicker & faster -- Edward sprang to the window -- "It's more than fun" -- said he -- "the rebels are upon us" -- you must know that two weeks before there had been a great fright here about Quantrell's coming - & troops were sent here, guards were out constantly & all was excitement -- but it had passed away -- the soldiers removed the guards discharged, the Independent Company of which E. was a member disbanded -- the arms

taken from them & every one was entirely defenceless -- they had plenty of spies in town to inform them of the condition of things - & they had chosen that time of all others when we should be off our

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guard -- oh why was it permitted -- a half hours notice would have saved all! but altho they avowed their intention to burn L. all the way up no one was friend enough to try to put us on our guard -- oh such a strange fatality that such a body of 250 or 300 mounted men were sweeping on & we, not to dream of danger! -- But they were here -- stealthy -- silently they came on till they reached the heart of town -- then they commenced firing -- quicker than I can write it -- they broke their ranks & scattered in every direction -- firing constantly -- shooting down every unfortunate one who was out & as they were every where -- no one who did not live on the outskirts of the town could escape. In five or ten minutes fires were springing up in every direction -- first the "Republican" office was in flames -- then barns & houses all around -- What are they intending to do -- was our anxious question -- They very soon came to the house opposite us -- where G.W.E. Griffith, a public man in the State lived, took his watch, what money he had -- the key to his safe - & then ordered him to go up town with them. His wife with her little child, came immediately over to us almost crazy with fright & apprehension -- Edward was perfectly calm -- He said we had better get all the clothing we could take, tied up - & if they came to our house try to save it & ourselves -- of course we could not venture out before they came, for they were firing all about us constantly & I forgot to add they were screaming & yelling like so many demons from the infernal pit -- oh how can I go on -- so as I try to think it over & place in order those terrible details my brain reels -- I can scarcely think -- we had got the most of necessary clothing tied up - & carried down stairs to take out -- when all at once twenty or thirty of them swept up to the house, surrounded it, and in an instant, a ruffian, a demon burst open the door -- oh that face! it haunts me day & night, a coarse, brutal, blood thirsty face -- inflamed with hellish passions & strong drink for he was evidently intoxicated -- with horrid oaths he said not one of us should leave (he had not seen E. then) another one was behind with perhaps one spark more of humanity in his bosom & he said "let the women & children go" -- I was almost beside myself with terror for Edward -- I knew his doom was sealed -- that demon -- who was there swearing -- shouting -- screaming -- in our dear little parlor, with his revolver cocked in one hand -- the matches lighted to fire our home in the other -- I felt there was no mercy there -- oh my friends -- do you wonder in that instant -- (for all passed much more quickly than I can write it) -- that my heart almost stopped its beating -- and in utter despair, I almost doubted if there was a God who loved us -- He -- that wretch -- turned & saw my Edward -- oh Mother -- so calm so self possessed -- and without a word the deadly aim was taken -- shot after shot in rapid succession -- emptying his own revolver, then taking the weapon from the hand of his companion, and using all its load to make sure work of death -- oh can you picture that moment -- I begged, I implored -- I looked around on that circle of hard cruel faces -- and I know there was not help -- no help -- oh had God forgotten us -- the match was applied to our

home -- I pleaded, I begged thrice to take him out -- not to burn that precious body -- But with an oath, a terrible oath -- he pointed his pistol to my breast & said he would shoot me too if I didn't leave - & I took my screaming children - & went across the road & three ourselves on the grass -- how did I live -- I know not -- In the meantime Mr. Griffiths house (opposite ours) had been fired & soon the flames made it too hot for us to remain there & we went further away & threw ourselves upon the ground - & watched the work of death & desolation go on -- no one who did not see it can form any conception of it -- no words can convey an idea -- By this time houses in every direction were burning -- the crash of falling walls -- the constant firing -- the unearthly yells of the mounted invaders, rushing in every direction -- the shrieks of the bereaved, the groans of the wounded -- could anything more be added to the horrid picture -- Before ten o'clock all were gone -- and in that

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short space of four or five hours -- what a change -- 150 killed & most of them our best men -- 25 wounded (their aim was sure & in most cases they shot again & again, as in E's case) and of these last, several have since died -- 86 widows over 200 children fatherless -- was not their work complete? "The city of sorrow" we are justly called -- scarcely a house but was in mourning -- scarcely a family but had lost husband -- father or friends -- Many were burned in the building -- others were lying here & there, scattered all over town -- People say they knew at once who belong to this police & who not by the saddened look -- all are in mourning & great many houses were burned & the people barely escape with the clothing they had on, some even had not time to dress -- we only had the clothing we had on, every thing was burned -- house -- store -- all, all gone -- Father was at Topeka -- or he too would have fallen -- I thank God he was spared -- there were many different bands -- all seemed to have their work laid out in order -- they knew just who they were after & where they lived. They had marked their victims & especially the members of the "Independent Company" of which E. was one of the first members -- they had a list of that company I could tell you of heart-harrowing incidents without end. Such cold blooded butchery was never before seen -- such deliberate, hellish cruelty -- not one of the newspaper reports that I have seen exaggerated -- the half is not told -- after they had left we got up & went to a friend's whose house was not burned tho' they took from her everything of value - - even to the rings from her fingers -- It was Mrs. Martin F. Conway - & fortunately he was East. Here I staid a week -- Father came down as soon as he heard the news -- He at once found another small building & opened business again & the next week -- a friend of ours, Mrs. Lowe, whose husband was killed went East to Fitchburg, Mass., with her husband's body -- Father's hired the house she was living in, took enough of her furniture for two rooms -- the rest of the house our minister, Rev. Mr. Cordley, (whose house & all they had was burnt) has taken & we are comfortable -- I have had plenty of clothing for present use sent me by friends from Leavenworth & Topeka & I am trying to sew & get once more enough for the children to be comfortable -- but -- oh it is so hard to put my mind on things that pertain to living to live without the one who was all I lived for -- for I believe he was my idol. And now I must tell you

of today -- and did you but know how my heart has today been racked you would not wonder at my unsatisfactory, desultory letter. E. having been burnt in the house, it was many days before it was possible to work there, on account of the heat -- We intended to have had the funeral exercises on last Sabbath but there were so many other services that our pastor Mr Cordley was completely exhausted -- and it was deferred until today -- and here this afternoon we consigned his precious remains to their last resting place -- I had him buried in our garden, where I can have it close to me & keep constant watch of the dearest spot. I had our dear baby baptized over his coffin by the name of Edward Payson. You will love the dear baby, won't you! for his name? -- Oh it seems as tho' my heart would break -- two short weeks ago -- such a happy home -- such a happy family -- such bright prospects now all that is left is a heap of blackened ruins & my husband's grave. On, my God, why layest thou thine hand so heavily upon me? But I know he is happy -- I know he was prepared -- that it is well with him -- and I believe -- my torn & tortured heart still clings to this one faith -- God rules -- For some good end this was permitted -- "What I do now, ye know not -- but ye shall know hereafter" -- for some wise purpose my darling was made a martyr to freedom -- and mother, with all my grief is one proud thought -- Edward never faltered -- nor hid nor showed any fear -- he knew the danger but with calm trust in God's will -- he was as calm & self possessed -- as ever you saw him in the world & I look now almost with reverence, upon that last memory of him -- If it was God's will he should go -- how

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much more noble, facing death with manly firmness than to be found & murdered when in some hiding place as many were -- and mother so many friends as he had -- all loved him -- they have come & mingled their tears with mine & said so many times "how we all loved him." He will be so much missed -- in the church -- in the S. school particularly; his place cannot be filled -- and my rebellious heart will murmur, why was it so -- when life was so bright -- every prospect so flattering -- I feel as tho' God could not have meant him to be taken -- Perhaps you will think it so strange for me to talk so -- but it seems as tho' I have drunk the cup of misery to the full -- as I told one of my friends today -- "I am completely crushed in the dust." I wish I could see you. I have written so much & so wandering - & still I could fill sheets more with what I wish to tell -- I thank you for all the sympathy you expressed for me -- for this evening your letters were handed me -- Oh I have tho't so many times "what will his mother say? how can she bear it" -- and I wished I could fly to you & tell you myself & help you bear it -- but God who has taken him will be with you -- May his strength uphold you! Perhaps I have been selfish in torturing your hearts with all my moans -- but it seems as tho' I could not restrain myself -- I try to control myself before father for his grief is very deep -- he loved Edward as his own son -- he had placed all his hopes upon him -- all his business was soon to be left entirely in E.'s hands - & he is old - & it is so hard for him to see all his plans so crushed -- and for the children's sake I try to keep a cheerful face -- for Lulie says -- "Mamma why do you cry! Isn't dear papa in Heaven with God? and don't he love us now just the same as he used to? - and dear little Charlie says "Don't cry

Mamma -- papa's with God." Dear little comforters! They little know what they have lost -- I wish you could see Charlie. He is Edward's image in looks & disposition -- so loving -- so affectionate to all -- I see Edward's eyes every time he looks up -- I must not write more tonight -- Probably you have received father's letter before this time -- May God sustain you -- as I believe He has sustained me -- For had He not I should have sunk under it. I must tell you of one thing more -- As we were watching those invaders & with intense anxiety trying to determine their intentions, I put my arms around his neck & said -- "God will take care of us -- He will protect us" -- and it gave E. & myself such strength -- Edward's trust was there - & he is safe -- God took him -- and he did not suffer. He must have been almost instantly killed. The one who murdered him was close beside him & aimed at the heart & Edward made no sound. He did not have to suffer as many have such agony & then die. One good noble man died yesterday after so many days of terrible suffering -- was it not a mercy that he did not suffer! But oh! he is gone -- there is such desolation -- I miss him so every moment & it was so sudden -- oh was there ever such wickedness done! - Is there not a righteous Judge who will bring them into judgement! Will not the wails of anguish which rise from this city of mourning reach the ear of a pitying Father & call down terrible retribution. I feel that God has mingled mercies even with this bitter cup -- for I have one of the kindest fathers in the world & a great many friends & everything that love & kindness could do, has been done to sustain me under this burden -- but there are many who have none to look to -- many poor women whose only friend was taken & they left to struggle alone -- a great amount of provisions & clothing is being sent here from Leavenworth & Kansas City & other places -- but -- as is usually the case those who need it most are the last to apply.

By mistake this half-sheet was left and I cannot let blank paper go. A letter came from John last night to Edward. He is near Fort Blunt Cherokee Nation & expects soon to be ordered to Texas. I am going to write him immediately. I will tell you of a few who fell that day. You remember Mrs. Collamore whom you went to see in Boston with Edward? Her husband Gen.

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Collamore was our Mayor. He was killed, his oldest son severely wounded, his house burned, everything of value taken -- his second son made sick with brain fever in consequence of excitement, and last week she returned to Boston with her dead husband & two sick sons -- without a dollar & scarcely a change of clothing -- tho she has abundant means in Boston. Have we not mentioned in our letters a young man by the name of Tritch who was clerk in the store & boarded with us. For nearly a year he was an inmate of our family & loved by us all as a brother. Edward loved him so much. He was found dead in the street -- pierced by six bullets - & on us devolved the sad task of sending the news to his friends, among them a sweet young girl he was soon to be married to. God help all the desolate hearts. I must tell you of one sad house. Dr. Griswold, a warm friend of E's had on Thursday returned from a visit East with his wife & two children. When I was up at the store on Thursday Eve. he came in & he was so happy to be home. At his house boarded Trask, editor of State Journal, son of Rev. Mr. Trask of Mass. -- L.M. Thorp a splendid man, member of the Legislature - & Mr. Baker one of our first merchants.

A detachment of the ruffians went to the house, called out these four men by shouting as they rode up. "The rebels are in town. Rally & help us drive them out" & the four victims rushed to the door to learn more & were deliberately shot down with their wives shrieking & pleading by their sides. Dr. G. and Mr. Trask were instantly killed. Mr. Thorp died next day. Mr. Baker is still lingering on suffering & may possibly recover -- all young -- noble men -- Trask & Baker married last winter, the other two but a few years. From the windows of my room, I see in one direction -- the blackened ruins of two homes -- from the back window -- six ruined houses & in full view a large brick house lately built by one of our most promising young lawyers Judge Carpenter -- married last winter to Miss Barbour from Sherburne, Mass. He was fired upon, he ran thro the house, thro the cellar his life blood gushing at every step. The ruffians followed; still firing till C. fell to the ground -- his wife threw herself upon him & tried to protect him but the wretch coolly lifted her arm placed his pistol under it & fired again to finish the deed -- But its too harrowing to both of us to relate such details. I will send this to you - & I judge Appleton and his wife are still with you -- as he does not mention his return to Peoria. If he is not there would you not send this letter to him -- as I would like him to know all - & it seems almost more than I can do to go over all again now; I love you all. I feel for you all -- All that Edward loved, and all who loved him will ever be sacred to me - & I wish we were nearer you that E's children might learn to know & love their father's friends. Pray for me. I need strength more than human hands can give. Sometimes I can rise above & seem to see beyond the cloud - & can say -- "Do all Thy will -- for it is good." but tis only for a short time & poor nature sinks & the clouds seem impenetrable & God seems afar off -- must I live so for years, perhaps without my Edward -- my stay -- my support -- my almost idol -- I am thankful that I have his children to live for -- to do for -- to train them to fill his place -- may God help me to do my duty to them for his dear sake. Will you not write to me as you used to him for I need your letters & I will try to write for him for I cannot bear that his children should grow up without a knowledge & love for his friends. Your in love & sympathy, Sarah

Thursday Morn[.]

Perhaps I have already written too much for once -- but I thought you would like to know of the funeral. Mr. Cordley first baptized dear baby -- after a very few appropriate remarks -- Dear little Edward! sweet unconscious baby! smiling while tears fell like rain from all eyes -- little does he know what loss is his -- God bless my baby -- "papa's dear baby" -- as Edward so often called

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him -- then after the prayer a few friends with whom E[.]'s voice had often mingled in songs of praise -- sang these words --

"Forever with the Lord!

Amen! So let it be!

Life from the dead is in that word!

Tis immortality!

My Father's house on high
Home of my soul! how near
At times, to faith's fore seeing eye
Thy golden gates appear!
"Forever with the Lord!"
Father if 'tis thy will,
The promise of thy gracious word
Ever here to me fulfill!
Be thou at my right hand!
So shall I never fail --
Uphold Thou me and I shall stand
Help, and I shall prevail

Mr. C. spoke so feelingly of E. for he loved him much -- and feels his love deeply. Our friends again sung --

When we hear the music ringing
Thro' the bright celestial dome
When sweet angel voices ringing
Gladly bid us welcome home
To the land of ancient story
Where the spirit knows no care --
In the Land of light and glory,
Shall we know each other there?

When the holy angels meet us
As we go to join their band,
Shall we know the friends that greet us --
In the glorious spirit -- land?
Shall we see the same eyes shining
On us, as in days of yore?
Shall we feel their dear arms twining
Fondly round us, as before?

Yes! My earth worn soul rejoice,
And my weary heart grows light --

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For the thrilling angel voices,

And the angel faces bright --
That shall welcome us in heaven
Are the loved of long ago,
And to theirs tis kindly given
Thus their mortal friends to know.

O! Ye weary, -- sad & tossed ones
Drop not, faint not by the way,
Ye shall join the loved & just ones
In the land of perfect day!
Harp strings touched by angel fingers
Murmured in my raptured ear,
Evermore their sweet song lingers,
"We shall know each other there!"

Then we laid his dear remains away to rest till the last summons shall call him to rise, & we went back to what we now call "home" -- I try to feel that -- God does all things well & to feel that I am willing He should do as seemeth to Him good with his own. But tho' the spirit be willing, the flesh is very weak, and the moan will come -- when I miss him every moment. I am copying to send to you Mr. Cordley's sermon of last Sabbath. It was thought excellent by all who heard it and I thought you might be interested in it, as you so often heard E. speak of Mr. C. I will send it soon.

I will write no more now -- God be with you all and sustain you by unwavering faith in his His love, "He will not return to us, but we may go to him" Let us do the duty which God sets before us & patiently wait till called to go & meet our loved ones there -- yours ever in love --
Sarah

[P.S.] There was one significant fact connected with the atrocities committed at our home, which if a full account is prepared, as I hope it will be, I should like to have mentioned -- as it full shows the spirit which moved these fiends. In some respects they did worse with us than many others -- murdering E. at first sight -- not allowing his body to be removed -- not permitting a single article to be taken from the house -- it seemed as tho' they could not do worse. And two or three days ago I found out the reason, which I had often thought must be something mysterious. A colored woman who lived back of our house (whose son was killed,) came to see me -- and, said she "Did you know there was a Union flag on your house?" On our woodshed she explained and it all came over me where it was & when put there. Our children had a flag about 2 x 3 feet, which they played "soldier" with -- a day or two before a little boy playing with them had climbed up on the shed & firmly placed the flag staff there. Altho' we knew it was there before this morning it was out of sight from the house & we never tho't of it -- but in full view from the street-back, as there was a vacant lot back of ours -- So, as a large body

of them swept down the street, a breeze blew out those "stars & stripes" in full view, and they seemed perfectly infuriated, cursing & swearing horrid vengeance on that house -- yes, our dear flag -- the glorious "stripes & stars" -- for

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Edward fell, murdered in cold blood, that beautiful emblem exasperated them to the utmost & they mean to glut their vengeance -- to show their deadly hatred & they did it -- may God bless that flag & soon may it wave over our whole country.