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# THE FOLLOWING LETTER

Was written by Frederick Briggs to his Wife, while under sentence of Death, for Horse Stealing; and who was executed, together with his comrade, M'Elheney, on the 16th October, 1789, in the county of Prince Edward. It presents an awful warning to those who live dishonestly, and who wickedly transgress the known Laws of God.

"MY DEAR WIFE—The hand of Justice has arrested me in Virginia, at a great distance from you and my other dear friends, whom I never more expect to see; I do, therefore, write this to acquaint you with my lamentable fate, and to convey a wretched father's last request and charge to the children whom my bleeding heart cherishes with a fondness that only death can destroy.—On the 3d of August, I was taken up, together with my companion, M'ELHENY, in Nottoway county, charged with carrying off the horses of a Mr. Spencer, in Charlotte, about fifty miles from the place of our capture. From the jail of Nottoway, we were sent, on the 13th of the same month, for trial, to Charlotte county; where we were detained in prison till the 30th, and then, by the examining court, were sent down to Prince Edward, to be tried before the District Court: on the 1st of September, our trial came on, and the Jury having brought us in *guilty*, on the 9th, we received the awful sentence of DEATH!

"What a melancholy scene does the history of a few days present to your view! Surely I must have been infatuated, to have brought myself into a situation where every day's anguish of mind would more than balance the follies and fancied pleasures of all my past days of dissipation; and, yet, these distressful days are the prelude to the tremendous day of my execution, and the most tremendous day of standing at the bar of the eternal God, in judgment!

"Oh! my dear, what shall I do? My soul shudders at the horrid catastrophe to which I am reduced, and which I am unable now to prevent. O! that I had contented myself at home in industrious labor, with you and my dear, *dear* children—then I might have enjoyed peace, with the most homely fare; whereas, now, I am torn violently from you all, forever! and have brought distressing ignominy and reproach upon myself and family. But this regret is useless now—I have no prospect of any relief, but from the God of mercy and compassion. To him, I have been attempting to turn my distressed thoughts, and to seek his mercy and grace, ever since my confinement in Charlotte. But the thought of you and my poor dear children, so overwhelms and overburdens my distressed mind, that I scarcely can command one calm reflection.

"My dear creature; as I never more expect to see you in this world, I beseech and charge you to take care of our poor children as well as you can—let me entreat you, by the love and affection that always subsisted between us, not to suffer any person to use them ill, if you can help it. I hope the dying words of a husband that loves you, will prevail with you to keep the children out of the way of bad company, lest the untimely wretched fate of their poor father should also be their's. Let me also beseech you, to take more care of their precious immortal souls, than we both have done; and that you may the better succeed in this, be engaged for your own salvation—for death may be as near you as it is me; it may seize you, at home and in security, as well as it has unexpectedly approached me—and I am sure, if you saw the grim messenger, as plain as I now view him, ready to grasp you in his dreadful arms, you would feel your need of a change of heart, and of an interest in Jesus Christ, who, only, can save the lost. O! fly, fly from the wrath to come, and warn our beloved children, also, to escape the terrors of the law. Bring them up in the fear of God, and keep them from the vile practices of a sinful world; so may you look for a blessing from that merciful God, who is the widow's guardian and the orphan's friend. Oh! if I were a faithful servant of that God, how easily I might leave you under his protection and fatherly care; for he hath promised, in Jeremiah, 49: 11 v. "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widow's trust in me." Now, my dear, let me entreat you, to seek the Lord for yourself and for your children; and when I am dead and forgotten, as I soon shall be, let me be considered as yet speaking to you in this mournful letter. Call my dear fatherless children around you, to hear what their miserable father has to say to them:

"Come, my fatherless, unfortunate little ones; come, listen to your dying parent's last request and charge. I have been too negligent of your precious perishing souls, while I was with you—I now confess it, before God and you, and would try to make one feeble attempt, before I die, to say something to you for your good. I beseech, I conjure, I command you all, to seek the Lord in the days of your youth; quit the follies of the idle and thoughtless, and try to give yourselves up to God in time, lest his wrath burn fiercely against you forever. Don't give way to frolicking and company-keeping; these ruin and destroy many a soul. Be resolved to seek God's mercy, let others do what they will; pray much, avoid the wicked, and all of you carefully associate with people of good characters. Be industrious, for idleness leads into bad company, extravagance and wickedness of every kind; it often ends in dishonesty and *ruin*. My dear daughter, my beloved Nancy Goodrich, I think I see you weeping by your mama's side, while she reads; let me address you particularly; you are grown up to be a woman; remember that virtue and religion will be your greatest ornaments. If you behave well and shun bad company, you may be happy and esteemed, though your unfortunate father is not. Assist your dear distressed mother; obey her, and try to comfort her in her afflictions—may the almighty God bless you, my dear child, and make us meet in a better world. How can I support under the grief that wrings my heart, while I bid you a long farewell! My poor Howell and Edward, will you remember your poor father's words; my heart bleeds for you, my poor dear fellows, lest you should live wickedly and die miserably—resolve to be good boys, and obey your poor dear mother in all things; do your best to help her, in an honest way. If you behave well, and be industrious, you will always be encouraged by good people. Never associate with idle, wicked company, lest you come to the unhappy end of your unfortunate father—my poor boys, seek and serve the Lord, and he will bless you. Oh! that he would pity your youth and teach you his ways—farewell, my dear fellows, farewell! Clerimon and Dolly, Little Tommy and Queen Polly; dear babes and children, how I could press you to my bosom, if you were here; but, oh no, my rough irons would hurt your tender limbs. Oh, for one parting kiss from my dear children, but that cannot be; I am to die without seeing you; then, remember what your dear daddy says to you—be good children, pray to God every day, do what your mamma bids you, and as you grow up, help her with all your might to provide for and maintain you all in an industrious way. My sweet little children, I am not fit to bless you, but I hope the God of Mercies will.

"My blessed wife; if you have had another child since I left home, let it also know my fate when it gets old enough, and warn it thus to avoid an end like mine. Tell my poor mother, that her hapless son is just about to be hurried out of this world—I expect she will be shocked and distressed, but I hope God will support her. I hope my brothers and sisters will have compassion on my distressed family, and not grudge to do them every kindness in their power—the Lord will reward their kind hearts, if they act thus, and also serve him. I here bid them all an affectionate farewell. My dear soul; it is but justice that, with my dying hands, I record how much I regard you, and declare, that I never saw a woman on whom I could better depend. May God reward your *faithfulness*.

"Let Howell be bound apprentice, when about nineteen, to some trade; let him have his choice. If you ever marry again, bind out all the boys; but if you live a widow, you cannot do without them—keep what little there is together, for your needy rising family. And now, as it appears probable that we never shall see each other in the face again in this world, let us try to cast ourselves into the arms of God's mercy, and seek his favor, that we may be allowed to meet in a happier world hereafter. And now, my dearest love, how shall I take my last leave of you on earth! Oh, how shall I say, that we must meet no more, till the Heavens and the Earth pass away—there we must meet before the *Judgment Seat*! How can I bear to think that I am dead to you forever. My God, support my wife—and, oh, have mercy upon her wretched, but most affectionate husband.

FREDERICK BRIGGS.

"P. S. The time appointed for our execution, is the 16th October. Keep this letter to shew to the children as they grow up, and take a copy of it, which I wish you, for my sake, to read often to them. Farewell, my dearest wife, farewell!"  
F. BRIGGS."