

Americus May 6th 1878

My dear afflicted friend,

I know my silence must seem (under the circumstances) most inexcusable – and so indeed it would be had anything than sickness of myself and baby caused it. O! my heart in deed bleeds for you and with yours: for do I not know from my own sad and bitter experience what it means to be widowed? How much of desolation, and of sorrow, and woe are summed up in that one word. Life seems now so joyless: nothing seems as it once did. “Every heart knoweth its own bitterness” – and surely we know the bitterness that shall dwell henceforth in ours.

O! my dear friend I am so grieved to hear of your changed circumstances in another respect. It must indeed have been an agonizing thought to beloved, and loving husband to feel that he was leaving his family homeless but I trust that “He who heareth the young ravens cry” and who has promised to be the “God of the widow, and the father of the fatherless,” will always provide for you and your precious little ones. Many, many times I would have sunk under the weight of sorrow and grief laid upon me but for this sweet promise. I too am in changed circumstances, but my dear husband has left me enough to support and educate my little children if it is carefully, and well managed. I have 6 children and the eldest has a few months since entered her 14th year – and O! what a fearful responsibility. I am so glad for you that your oldest is a boy. He can be a great comfort for you, and I doubt not, is. Dear little fatherless lambs, may the Good Shepherd tenderly and gently lead and care for them. It will ever be a comforting though to you, I know my dear friend, that you were able to talk with your precious husband to the last – a comfort which was denied me. I did not expect the dangerous illness of my darling husband until he was dying. He tried to talk to me all morning but was so much under the influence of Morphine that he could only call my name. Once about a half an hour before he breathed his last, I asked him if he could not talk to me. He roused up for a moment and said, “Have not I been talking to you all morning?” I told him “no” but the morphine overpowered him and he sank back into a stupor and only continued calling my name every moment until he could no longer articulate. Sometimes I almost wish I had no children so that I might lie down beside him in the grave. All is so uninviting in life to me. And I feel as if no ray of pleasure or happiness can ever illuminate the dark and leaden clouds that lie above my pathway.

Your letter reached me about three hours after you had passed here (if you went thro’ the day you expected to.) It would have been a great comfort to me to have had you stop a while with me. I intended to have answered your letter the night I received, but I wept so much over it that it brought on one of my severe attacks of neurologic headache and I did not entirely recover for some days; and since then my baby has had two sick turns, the first a very severe one, and I have been ill myself. I trust my letter is not too late to find you in Fla.

So my dear friend, tell me something of your plans for the future: where you are going when you leave Monticello, etc. I do not ask from impartment or idle curiosity, but from a deep and affectionate interest in you and your little children.

You have my sincere sympathy in your grief for the loss of your sister, O! what a loss to those little motherless girls. Are they with you?

Do give my most sincere love to each of your dear children. Willie, "The," Pat, and little Libby [Elizabeth] – how well do I remember each dear little one. And to little Maggie too; tho' I have never seen her, it is enough for me to know that she is one of your little buds – and like my own fatherless.

Mollie would send love, if she knew I was writing, and so would Ellie, but they are all asleep.

I hope you will write me very soon.

With truest love and sympathy
I am sincerely yours'
Hettie E. Oliver

Transcribed by Christopher A. Baker, University of Florida, 2008.