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Letter to Mary Sibley from William Russell, May 22, 1836

William Russell
Crystal Springs

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Crystal Springs 22nd may 1836

Dear Friend,

Mary Lewis's brother in law, Mr. David Phillips (who lately married Maria Lewis) Is now the Guardian of Col. Lewis's youngest daughter (Lucy Ann) and has sent her up to me for the purpose of having her educated, which he asks me to provide for etc. She came up with Mrs. Joseph Wherry (Late Mrs. Harriet Hoover, who with Dr. Wherry, was at your house about a year ago) Mrs. Phillips desires me to send Lucy Ann to school instantly, without loss of time.

Can you receive Lucy Ann Lewis into your school now, as soon as she can be sent up? Please inform me this by first possible chance. For if you can now receive her Mrs. Wherry would take her up some time about the last of this week as cannot afterwards, and I know of no other chance for Lucy Ann to get there.- If you have not a place now for Lucy Ann Lewis, I will agree to bring Ann Russell home (or to St. Louis) and let Lucy Ann take her place.- Indeed since I find myself such [part missing] I can go to see Ann so very seldom, and having now no room for her at home, to which I can bring her as formally, to spend a few weeks in the year. I strongly incline to bring her nearer to me at any rate, before long, if even by saying so, she should not improve quite so fast. Please inform me soon as possible, whether you can take Lucy Ann Lewis now, or not.

On my applying now, for admittance of a third scholar into your school, and most probably for several years, and most probably for several years. It may be as proper a time as any for me to state, my palatine and unconditional objection to any girl under my charge, while at school, going to night meetings of sort. And while it is the highest ambition I have; that they should be instructed to maintain the most strict morality; and with a sense of the most strict morality; and with a sense of their most strict and close propriety in all their actions & conduct to speak the truth, do justice, act honestly, and honorably in all things etc. While these are my highest wishes on the one side. On the other hand; I object out & out to their appropriating any art of their time, thoughts, or mind, cogitating about matters of religion.- They are sent to school and their expenses paid, not to study religion, but to study their letters & branches of education. On the most mature and deliberate reflections I am convinced, that religion is a totally unfit subject to take up the time, thoughts, or mind, of students at school. Others may think differently, and have right to act accordingly as to those under their charge. Bit I most firmly believing that religion is one of the most difficult studies, & most difficult of clear demonstrations, while it is the most important, of any on earth; And requires more strength, and maturity of mind than any other, I am convinced that it is an unfit subject of study until the mind is matured.

Sympathy, a contagious disease communicating from on to another, by being brought in contact with those on whom it acts; having stronger powers over young and good hearts, than over the of mature years & reflections. At some of the meetings I have attended, and more particularly at protracted or night meetings I have attended, and heard revival makers. Urging this disease (sympathy) to be the workings of God on the heart, and hurrying those infected with the disease to commitments & pledges, which they never could & never would redeem. Wickedly taking the advantage of the best feelings of a good heart, when operated upon by a contagion. And under that wicked advantage, obtaining pledges which went for in some cases, to Alienate the best feelings of husband & wife. And of parent & child. And of the dearest of friends. I don't that there has ever been such meetings in St. Charles, f there never has, there may yet be such. And to any such I object entirely, to any youth under

my charge going either day or night. And to any such, I object entirely, to any youth under my charge going either day or night. And to no soft, whatever, at night.

It has been perhaps my lot to have suffered more than many others, (from the wickedness of bigot makers) in my attempts to educate a few of my young relatives: and having so severely suffered, I may feel a more acute sensibility on these subjects than most other persons. I do not object to the childrens (I speak only of these under my charge) going to church on Sundays when the weather is good. Not to their reading the bible at home as a school book or otherwise. Not do I materially object, to their applying a part of their time or mind in committing each day, a verse of the bible to memory. Though a sentence in grammar or a rule in arithmetic, would seem to me as appropriate for school. And their orderly attendance to hear family worship is clearly their duty. But what I would object to is to their attending night meetings at all, not only on account of their health, but also for other reasons. I object to their attending any meetings whatever, day or night, where there is much of high excitement. I consider any sort of high excitement destructively injurious to their proper studies. I object to their using or being instructed in any sort of religious catechisms whatever. Or instructed what any part of the Bible means. Leaving their minds free & open, to construe it for themselves, when at mature years & sound discretion. And I object most positively to their being either catechized or lectured by any one, no matter how eminent, worthy, or virtuous; upon religious subjects of any sort, nor in any way advised or ___ in that matter; after than as regards their moral conduct; without special or particular reference to religion. Parents & Guardians & entertaining views in these matters so widely different. And often time felt that I ought to apprise you distinctly of what mine were; and to know. If any of them so materially differed from yours, as to conflict with any of your established rules. I did allude to a part of the same subjects in a former letter in relation to Sunday school etc. And also in several verbal conversations. But the probabilities still increasing, that your place may be more frequently visited by religious leaders; some or other of whom might take the liberty, or pretend to feel it a duty, to catechize or to lecture; about matters of religion, and or all with whom they could be brought in contact. Has induced me to repeat again distinctly in writing, what my views, as to these matters, are.- and I am in this case the more inclined, not to be mis-understood. because years of time has proven to me, that I possess a disposition (however unchristian like it may be) that in such case as that at Belleville etc. where the disease of sympathy was contrived to be brought to operate on two of my nephews then at school there, as they very nearly seduced to joining church; and their minds & time permitted to be wasted on subjects beyond their comprehension & totally different from what they were expressly sent there to learn. Has created a bitterness in my mind against their ___ that neither time or circumstances can ever alloy. That also when then, matter comes to mind, its bitterness fails to force the mind on (though years have since gone by) to seek revenge, For so wicked a prostitution and straight forwards service of the devil, as to seduce youth from the studies they were sent there to pursue. And encourage others, only ___ to alienate & embitter against them, the only friend they had. With this terrible experience which it has been in misfortune, to be inflicted with, as well as with some others of a like character. You cannot fail to appreciate ___ sensibilities I have on these subjects. And to excuse what you may suppose to be error of opinion on my part.

Your respectful friend

Wm. Russel

PS. Your letter of the 19th. This month, was recd. On the 18th I will write you in reply, at the first hour I can appropriate to that purpose. W:R

Mrs. Mary E. Sibley