Camp of 1st. Division  
Opposite Vicksburg Miss  
June 16. 1863  

My dear Jane,  

While waiting the arrival of the Steamer that is to take us away from here, I shall have time to write you a few lines from which you may learn what has happened since the 13th on which day I closed my last. That Saturday night we stopped at Milliken's Bend which you can see on the map. It is about 25 miles above Vicksburg. Early on Sabbath morning we started again, but were not sent up the Yazoo as was intended. A despatch boat spoke us on the way and ordered us down to the lower landing at Young's point. Here we landed, but before we came near we heard such a thunder of artillery as we have not heard since the bombardment of Fredericksburg. On landing we had a view of the city and saw the shells bursting over it, the batteries on the hills and all the large objects, but could not see the men. We saw the court house with a hole knocked through the steeple. In the afternoon we could hear musketry by volleys, and the scattered sputtering of the skirmishers. This lasted till night, and the bombardment all night. Our mortars never cease, day or night. The reports are tremendous, the shells weighing over 200 [lbs.]. At night it is grand to see them flying and bursting in the air.

This is on the Louisiana shore, and is the point of land where Williams [Thomas Williams] and Gen. Grant tried to cut the canal through that was to change the current of the river. The remains of their work is here at our side. This is one of the most wretched and unhealthy places you could imagine. It is a vast swamp, abounding in negroes, vermin, reptiles and filth. There are thousands of escaped contrabands of all sexes, sizes and colors gathered here. It is very questionable if they have made much by running away. They appear to be less able to stand the camping out than the soldiers. Most of them have coughs or colds and nearly all the dysentery. There is a party of them engaged all the time in digging graves, and if they don't take better care and be more cleanly the place will soon be nothing but a graveyard. They are far better looking negroes than the ones we have in the north and if they were fixed up and dressed as well, would be a very respectable looking people. There are three regiments of soldiers now in the service of the government near here recruited from amongst these darkeys and on Sabbath week they had a pretty hard fight near Milliken's bend. A couple of brigades of rebels attacked them outnumbering them two to one, but the darkeys fought hard. They stood their ground till their ammunition was done, and then charged with the bayonet, driving the rebels off with great loss. The rebel Colonel in command was killed, beaten to death by the bolts of the muskets, and by his...
own old slaves too. Thy took no prisoners on either side. So let them fight. The army begins to like the idea, and our soldiers now are satisfied to fight alongside of them.

Yesterday, (Monday) we were ordered across the point, for the purpose of crossing the river and strengthening Grant's left wing. We started at four o'clock in the morning. We have no horses or wagons any more. All was left in Kentucky and there are none here. Every man owns just what he can carry. We could not of course take our stores of provisions that we had for our brigade, and we would have to stay with them to take care of them. The object of going across is to get below Vicksburg without passing its batteries. Our boats dare not venture. We go back through the country till we get below and then cross. Lt. Justice wanted to go with the regiment. I got permission to go too. The rest were left. Willie had to stay. The Lieut. got his sword on - the first time he had it on since I came with him, and I got his little Sharp's rifle. I wanted to be with my company and could also see after Johnny - perhaps. We got round in a couple of hours. There were not enough boats to take us all over at once. The other brigade started over first. The heavy firing of cannon and musketry was going on even fiercer than the previous day. The boats returned and the 8th. Mich. & 79th N.Y. were next ordered on with the Artillery. The old Benjamin battery was to go now. This was the one that our men protected so well at Bull Run. Our regiment has to wait till the next return of the boats from Warrenton. I went on board with the Colonel and his staff. We had taken a part of Benjamin's battery on when an aid arrived ordering us to disembark and get into the woods again. We returned and the men who had gone across to Warrenton were also sent back. The word was that Grant did not need us. These Western troops are very jealous of any interference, and expect to do all the work and get all the credit of taking the place themselves. Towards evening we were ordered back to the landing where we disembarked at first. We were this morning ordered on board once more, and we embarked on board the Steamer Sam Young. From present appearances this will likely be her last trip. I was interrupted with my letter in the preparation for loading, and had to commence with pencil when I got on board. The Captain of the boat objected to loading so much baggage, horses and men on his boat, but they had to go. She is an old wreck - is leaking badly and the steam pump has to be kept constantly going to keep her from sinking. Some of our men have stepped off and got distributed on other boats. Willie made his escape and is on board the Silver Moon. I have picked a good place and will take my chance with the regiment. One man fell overboard alongside of me just before we started. I threw him an empty bucket when he came up, but he sunk again before he could get hold of it. It was
the only loose thing at hand. Newton Moore stripped and jumped in, caught him and kept him up till a boat got out and picked them up. We are now on our way for the Yazoo, where we originally intended going. We expect to get there sometimes to night.

The bombardment still goes on, and the City still holds out. Our men took the Lone Tree battery yesterday. This was on the highest ground outside of the city. Grant has turned their own guns on them. They deserve a great deal of credit for their bravery and endurance. It is said they are on short allowance, but of that we cannot be sure. One thing is certain, they can't get any more from outside and they will have to make what they now have, do them, or else break through our lines for more.

Chambers Weakley arrived here about two hours ago. This is his first appearance since we crossed the Potomac. He had been at Alexandria ever since. Numbers of men always keep back on some pretext when there is an appearance of a fight. Of the 79th, N.Y. 111 men deserted since we left Kentucky. I am told that never more than half of a regiment goes into a fight. Mr. Brown tells me it is true. He has not got back to us yet. I heard that he has had his leave of absence extended.

We are making very good speed considering our mean old boat. I can see a conflagration in the city. We will soon turn the bend in the river and will be out of sight of it for a while. I have a good seat in the guard of the boat and my office stool and an empty canteen. These together will float me in case we sink and with what I can swim I have no fear of reaching the shore should an accident occur. You need not have any fear of such a thing for I will not mail this till we land, and then of course you will know that we arrived safe. We have had no mail, no papers nor no news since we came here and don't expect any for a long time. I had to give up fishing. My new hooks and line were stolen the day I got them. If we were going home I would bring you two or three contrabands along. There must be several thousand around the place we left. We are turning up the Yazoo, and there is no mistake about it this time.

I may write you when we land and will continue to do so as I have opportunity.

I have no opportunity now to say any more as we are crowded close together & I don't know but my neighbors are reading every word, besides, the men are splashing me as they draw water.

With much love

Yours affectionately

William