

In the Woods near Jackson  
Hinds Co., Miss  
July 11. 1863

My dear Jane

I can hardly account for my long silence. It is now ten days since I have written to you. I can scarcely realize it. Difficulties were in the way - any amount of them, but none so great in itself as to have prevented me, but taking them all together it has done so. Even to day it is something unusual to me to take the time. I can scarcely summon energy to commence, much less to look back over the last week and recount its occurrences. Even if I am not interrupted before I get this finished it is very doubtful if you receive it anyhow. Yet I have evidence that the mail is still passed along somehow, for I have received two of your letters No. 22 & 23. No. 22 is the second one of that number that you have sent. These bring me intelligence up to the 17th June from home. I have also received one from Jos. D.Kirk of 22 June. Please excuse me to him for not answering it at present - and I can't tell when, as I may be interrupted at any moment - The Cannonade that commenced this morning is growing louder and fiercer and I know not which way the tide of battle may turn, so that I will undertake no more writing till under more favorable circumstances.

In the first place dear I must notice anything in your letters that require an answer. I will take your advice in regard to taking care of myself. I am doing so now - sitting under a tree in the shade and our men out in the sun fighting - thermometer about 150 degrees. In regard to the sheep, it is all right, and in regard to Abbott you have done right too, but at this distance off I cannot give you any good advice on such subjects, and you must of necessity rely on your own judgment. There are a number of other matters that I might answer if I had a little to do as I sometimes have had, but just once you will excuse me for passing over them.

So to go back to where I left off the last time I wrote you from Flower Hill, I will try to give you a brief sketch of what has happened since that time. We were then at the church and quartered in the graveyard. But we came to the conclusion to go into the church altogether, and so we did. On the 3d. we had bunks built in one corner of it. It was well we did for we had a pretty heavy rain that night. The bombardment continued up to that time, but toward evening it slackened considerably and it was rumored that we had been holding a parley with them. It was probably so, for on the next day they capitulated and on the Fourth of July Vicksburg fell. It was hardly believed at first. Rumor had taken it so often that we did not believe the report when it came at last. It was variously announced, one man would

call out to us "Vicksburg has gone up," another "Vicksburg has fell." But the same day our large mail arrived also, and I can hardly tell you which pleased me the most; the fall of the city or the arrival of that mail. We nearly lost it after all, for just at the same time we were ordered off towards the Big Black to see after Genl. Johnston's army, and as the mail was very bulky and no time for assorting it Gen. Welch ordered it to be burned. But Col. Leasure's energy saved it, or at least our part of it. He sent our P.M. and three horses down and brought our bags up at once to our own quarters and there they were safe. I was never so provoked at any one in authority as I was to such an order as Welsh gave on that occasion, and I heard a few minutes ago of his narrow escape with a slight regret that he had not at least been disabled enough to send him home. The mail was assorted in the church and I got your two letters, one of the pairs of stockings that George sent, and my maps from New York. Willie also received a pair of stockings from home, and a letter or two from somewhere.

The troops started the same night, and we were ordered to follow as soon as some teams with provisions from Vicksburg arrived. But the teams did not arrive till near morning and we did not leave till near noon on Sunday the 5th...We caught up to the troops in the evening. Such dusty roads I never saw, and such scarcity of water I could have hardly imagined. There is no water except little puddles of rain water, and a few cisterns near the buildings. We remained encamped here in the woods all night and on Monday were ordered forward, but still did not go till Tuesday morning. When we did go the Brigade went by one road, and we had to go by another, with the understanding that we would not overtake them for three days again, at a place called Clinton on the railroad. We had to go back to a cross road to turn off, and advanced ahead of the train a good ways. Towards evening we stopped opposite a large house and waited for the train to come up. We lay down and had a nap till awaked by a thunderstorm. We took refuge on the porch of the house, and after the storm became worse the proprietor came out and kindly gave us permission to sleep in his entry. A specimen of Southern hospitality! How many better men with better houses would have given us their best rooms? The storm raged with great violence. It was a perfect hurricane, but in the hall we were dry anyhow. The train did not get up on account of the storm, and consequently we got no supper. It was a terrible night. Trees were blown down and the Quartermaster of the 35th Mass was instantly killed by one falling on his head. Another man was killed by lightning. So you cannot tell where danger is. Quartermaster Bausman and Dick Holmes both received a shock but not a severe one. Towards day the train again commenced moving, and after toiling through the mud for a few hours we at last reached the Big Black river. What great

people they are here for big names. The Big Black river swollen as it was by such a heavy rain was not near so large a stream as Wolf Creek. Black it was not, but yellow as mud could make it. We halted on the Western side of it and cooked breakfast on the plantation of Mr. Messenger, the wealthiest man in Northern Mississippi. He has gone of course. But his village of negro huts, cotton gin, cotton press, grist and saw mill, and large palace are left behind as well as his 3000 acres of land. The men have made very free with his furniture and you could see the soldiers reclining on sofa & rocking chair or kicking costly picture frames around the yard. After a hasty breakfast the first meal now for 24 hours we crossed the river and in a few hours driving overtook the whole division encamped on the road. We had moved faster than one expected and thus overtook them. They had been in the storm of the night before and were all wet through. The 100th had been on picket all night, and looked pretty hard. Johnny was well. That was the last time I saw him. We started again and during the night encamped on the farm of Mr. Wells a short distance beyond our brigade. Started early the next morning for Clinton which was seven miles off. This was another hard days work - heat intolerable - dust too thick to see through and scarcely enough water to wet each man's lips - fighting too in the advance - rails pulled down to allow the cavalry to scour the country - dead rebels lying in the edge of the woods - carcasses of animals putrefying in the sun - misery and destruction everywhere - cotton houses and cotton gins in flames every where - ordered to stop it - can't be done - the men keep on at it - pass Jeff Davis' brothers' plantation - away goes his cotton, house, gin everything - we reach a woody grove and stop to rest. Were ordered on but I did not feel able to go and made arrangements to stay there all night by a little puddle of water. I was getting feverish and had to have water. I have had the diarrhea or as they call it here the Mississippi quickstep since the 4th, but had no fever till now. I drank and put my head in the water till dark, and then started on. I overtook the train after all before it reached its camping ground. Was up in time to tie my horse along with the others. Started early yesterday again, and halted for dinner - was ordered to move very soon - made several moves after our troops and last night landed where we now are. Today I have had two meals and have some prospect of getting another, yet, but for three days previous I only got one each day. I can hardly give you a description of the country or incidents. Since my bowels got bad I lay as still as possible, and between that and the heat I took very little notice of anything. Willie was along with us most of the way. He is well. I am a good deal better. The fever is all gone and the other complaint is improving as much as this climate will allow. It is strange there is not more

sickness. Col. L. and some of his staff are sick. However before they were sent into action to day the Col. came out on horseback and took command of the brigade. It has suffered somewhat so far. Particularly the 2d. Mich. None of the 100th have been hurt yet. Lt. Justice has just came back from visiting them on the field. He reports Johnny all well. The balls were flying pretty lively - one hit Dave Breckenridge in Co. E. while he was there. It was a spent ball however and did not hurt him. I have not the curiosity to go out that far to day. I have been lying quietly in the shade and feel a great deal better for it. It is now threatening to rain. Large clouds are coming up, and the thunder is so mixed with the cannonade that we cannot tell which is which.

Things are widely different here from Virginia. Warfare in this part of the country is a very different thing. This is war in earnest. Destruction, misery, devastation and everything that can be added to them make the sum of it. We are marching through a dry land. The enemy had cut up the little banks that dammed up the ponds of rain water and drained them. When they could not empty them that way, they threw dead horses, mules and cows into the water. The farther we go the scarcer it becomes. More men give out - water can't be found. The cries of the mules going day after day without water is distressing and never ceases. The man who falls out of ranks by the way is left behind to die. No hospitals on the road - no nurses - the surgeon's have no medicine - plenty of knives and bandages - wagons break down and upset - homes give out - our trains become smaller - provisions get scarce - fortunately Jeff Davis' proclamation to the planters to plant plenty of corn has been obeyed - we roast corn, boil corn, eat corn raw, give it to our cattle. Many a poor fellow I passed on the way done out, lying in the fence corner that will never get home. One thing remarkable was that I never saw a Roundhead left yet. They have all kept up except one & unfortunately I did not see him or I would have tried to have had him placed somewhere that he could be found again. The last seen of him he was seen lying near a mud puddle raving. It was James Nelson's brother Thomas. Perhaps someone will see to him, but I am afraid not, as every one has all that he can do to attend to himself. Strange as it may seem I have lay down on the ground and drank out of a puddle of water as dirty as any you ever say a hog wallowing in on the road side. Where we do find them clean at first, the horses and men soon crowd around them so that they become very foul. I can't imagine why any one who ever drank of the pure water of the North, would ever live in such a wretched country. Yesterday evening on coming into camp orders were passed out not to water our horses, that the waters were poisoned. The Battery that was in first had watered first and finding the horses got sick warned us. Some died that night, some the next day, some were shot, some

bled to death etc. It will be a terrible place in a few days in such a hot sun. So along the road - it was marked with dead mules and horses so that we could find our way back by it again. As we neared the enemy the confusion became worse and worse. We were camping on the ground they occupied the day before. The way was strewn with books, papers, broken furniture, clothing; soldiers throw away their coats, blankets, knapsacks, and carry only their haversack & canteen. The canteen is a precious article - some have none - they steal one from some one else - mine was "Smudged" a few nights ago while I was eating supper. Willie's went before - we still got along by using Lt. Justices in partnership, but it was stolen too. Every thing you can't keep your eyes on is stolen at the first opportunity. The army is becoming demoralized. We look like heathens. We use no tents any more. Few wear coats. I have the same clothes on that I had when I left Milldale - Have not changed shirt or stockings since. I slept in the field, the road or a fence corner without blanket over or under. It is so warm we can sleep very comfortably on the bare ground. But all this does not improve our appearance. We can scarcely get water to wash our hands & faces. Everybody is dirty - everything looks old - we land begrimed with sweat and dust, black as negroes. Landing here a general engagement was expected to day. How sociable danger makes people! Everybody speaks to you - cordially too - perhaps it is the last salute - we expect to meet the enemy in the morning. So it was to day. Many have fallen since I commenced this. The hospital is filling with wounded men - I have been sent for to help to dress them - will go out in the morning if Lt. Justice lets me off. He is away this afternoon and I dare not go without his permission. It will only be temporary, or till after the fight. We have fought all day and gained nothing. They are hauling cotton bales out to make breastworks for our men. The 100th will probably get a rally tomorrow. They were lucky to day. Our batteries have not fired to day. I can't imagine why. The rebels have done good firing. It is rumored that we have been outflanked and the firing appears to indicate it. We are out of supplies and apparently will have trouble getting them.

We have orders to go back to Kentucky as soon as this affair is through. How long it will take we can't give a guess. The Quartermaster of the 8th Mich. went out for curiosity somewhere along our lines and got a shot in his ear as a warning to him.

The rain came in the afternoon after all - it appears as though it would rain all night. We have fixed up a temporary shelter and are quite comfortable.

I have been greatly interrupted and even now cannot get a chance to finish on account of our tent being crowded by people coming in and out of the rain.

Do not be disappointed if it is a good while before I write

again.

I enclose a letter of Jeff Davis' brother's in 1849 to a lawyer who lived here. He contemplated Secession then - preserve it, also another girl to her wounded feller. He didn't get it however as I took it out of the P.O. myself, as well as a lot of envelopes which I wanted very badly. I sent to St. Louis with Ches. M'Bride for some, but he has not returned yet and probably will not reach us at this place. Word has just come in that our men gave way for a while, but rallied again and drove the enemy back farther than they were before. The cannonading has ceased. You will hear the result from the newspapers first. In fact I think it is hardly worth while writing at all from here, for I don't suppose they have any time to attend to mail affairs here now.

Please remember me to all the folks, and excuse my abrupt finish this time.

Yours affectionately  
William