

Gaines Mills Miss.

July 18, 1863

My dear Jane

I wrote you a few days ago, but probably you will hardly get it, as the rebels have been in our rear since then and very likely have got it. When I closed we were before Jackson, disputing with Gen. Johnston for possession of it. There was continual skirmishing while there, and our division lost about eighty men. The second division lost about twenty; so Dr. Hosack tells me. He has charge of the field hospital of that division. Some of the wounds are very severe. The men are getting over them better than we supposed they could in this weather. One man who had been shot through the neck the ball going in at one side and out at the other, and another ball in at his breast out at his side into his arm and his arm broken was supposed by the surgeon to be dying- as he lay bleeding beside one of his comrades already dead, the Surgeon ordered the attendants to dig two graves, one for the dead man and the other for the one soon to be dead. But the man did not die and yesterday morning he was sitting up eating his breakfast and told the surgeon he would live to dig his grave yet.

Yesterday morning there was to be a general assault on the enemy's whole line, but we could not find him in the morning-he had skedaddled during the night. Our flag now surrounds the highest buildings in Jackson. It is not much larger than Butler, but the buildings are rather better. Our men pillaged it pretty well. When we got over into the enemy's works we found that he had been the worst hurt in the last few days operations. Their loss amounted to several hundred. Large trenches had been dug in which the dead were buried and many buildings were full of wounded. Three or four hundred prisoners remained behind and more were coming in every hour. They gave up voluntarily-they were tired of the war. The citizens had fled to the woods beyond the city, to avoid our shells which we had dropped in with great precision. As soon as the second division had been moved over into Jackson we were moved back and started Northward for ten miles up to these Mills. We are on the Pearl river now and have plenty of water once more. Our stay here is likely to be a short one. We have to destroy a piece of railroad that will only take us a day or two, and then we return to Vicksburg, where the boats are ready to take us away. The original order directed us to go to Pittsburg, but I am not sure but that it may be changed by this time, especially as I learn that we have lost a good deal of the ground we formerly held in Kentucky. It is likely we will return there. If not we may still go to Pittsburg. I shall not have time to stray off even if we do go that way. Lt. Justice has his leave of absence-it came after we got down here, but as it was

only for fifteen days he could not go from here, for it would take all that time to go and return. But now he will start from the nearest point to home on our return trip, and when he goes I must stay and conduct the business. I cannot do otherwise. The last mail brought word of his mother's death, and he is more than ever anxious to go home now. However in a few weeks I will be able to tell you more about our future prospects. I am very glad to see a prospect of getting out of this place. Our men are giving out in alarming numbers. Fever and ague is very prevalent. Eighteen men in Co. G. are sick now. The attendance and hospital care is very bad-the men die on the road, in the woods and in the fields. Thomas Nelson appears to be getting better. Capt. Maxwell gave up yesterday and went to the hospital. Johnny is very well. I overtook the regiment yesterday on the march, and found him sweating profusely. I offered him my horse to ride a while but he would not. He is terribly sun burnt, but looks hearty. He complains of nothing but want of sleep. That he will get now since the siege operations are over. Willie is well. So am I. I am as well as ever, and even better after my little spell. My appetite is wonderful again, and I am as strong as ever.

From the rumors that are reaching us I infer that we are getting rather the better of the rebels this season. I hope it is so and that another such years work will finish the whole business. I should think they ought to be tired of it hereabouts, and I know they are. We have given them reason to be. We had a little rain last night. It was very much wanted. I would like it to rain enough to fill the cisterns on our way to Vicksburg again, so that we will not have to drink out of the mud puddles. The blackberries are done, but the peaches are getting ripe. So is the corn. We are getting only half rations from the government, but still have plenty. We confiscate all the cattle we come across, and have fresh meat everyday. We boil it with the corn, and stew the peaches. Sometimes put crackers in and these with a stray hog, sheep, goose or turkey makes pretty good living. If the Gov. gave us no rations at all we would not starve here. Some fields have four hundred acres of corn in. It is nearly all good, and keeps our beasts from starving. If we get a few days leisure at some point I will have a good bit of writing to do in getting our accounts up. But it is not likely we will have much rest in this region. Since I commenced writing this we have orders to move again-I don't know where to. But we seldom do know till we are on the way. There are about 5000 of the rebels which we cut off from the main army by our rapid advance, left in our rear and perhaps we are going back to close on them. They will not fight. They are coming in in small parties and giving up. Most of them are from Tennessee and want to go home. They are tired of the war. So are we, but not tired enough to give up without winning-

we have gone too far to give up now.

The men in our regiment have no opportunity of writing now as they left their knapsacks and paper behind at Milldale and Flower hill. This you may tell any of their friends that are anxious at not getting word. None from about our neighborhood are sick except Maxwell. At least not that I know of. All who went with me are well that are with us. Those who are detailed away from the regiment I don't see, and can't tell. Yesterday I saw and spoke to most of our old neighbors and found them well. Among them I remember now Henderson George, Moore's boys, Craig, Gilfillan, Gills etc. Tommy Glenn was left sick at Milldale, but was getting better when we left. Hugh Dillinger also is well. I have thus far departed from my habit of attending to my own business, to attend to others, but you need not send them word unless they inquire. When the boys get back to their knapsack they will send word themselves no doubt. I got time this morning to write to Joe Kirk-perhaps he won't get it though. I had no time to write to James Nelson yet, and will not today on account of having to move again so soon. Will try to do it sometimes, but he should have written to me. I find the people very solicitous to get letters, as though we had nothing to do but write to them, but they are very slow to answer. For instance M. Board, Uncle William etc.. One letter does them. I often wonder the soldiers write at all. It is no easy matter to get a sheet of paper sometimes and then the ink, pen etc. If the folks at home had to carry their writing apparatus along with them always, they would not think it such a small matter. I have been very fortunate in having such advantages in having a desk always along since I have been with Lt. Justice.

If I had plenty of time now I could have plenty of reading. The soldiers have plundered all the libraries in the country and there are some fine ones. Books are lying along the roads and in the fence corners. They get tired carrying them and throw them away. I have no room and can't carry them either. Once in a while I pick one up, but throw it away again like the rest. So with the furniture-one day we sit on a sofa or rocking chair, and the next on the ground. But such things we generally smash up before we leave. It is a good thing such a state of affairs does not exist in our country. If so I would feel very uneasy about you darling. But I think you are safe from all such annoyances, unless the copperheads commence it, and if they do, this destruction here will not be a name for what they will get when we return. We will have experience enough to give them something they never dreamed of. But I hope such things will never happen. There has been enough of it already. It has fallen where it was deserved.

I have no expectations of hearing from you again till we get

back to Vicksburg—there maybe a mail there for us. However I shall keep you advised of our movements as I have opportunity. With respects to the folks and much love to yourself I am yours.

Affectionately,

William