My dear Jane

I feel as though I ought to write you to day, it being Sabbath and no work on hand, but what to write I cannot imagine for since the last time I wrote you we have been sitting here as quietly and even more so than you are at Liberty. Our tent is pitched in a lot about twice the size of our garden, and till to day I have not been out of it for a week, so you can see that I know very little of what is going on around us from my own observation. I have had a good opportunity of getting our old Brigade business settled up, and have embraced it. I think that if we remain here three days longer I will be done with it entirely, and then will have a very idle time of it. We have had some unpleasant and rainy weather lately, but it has cleared up and the sun is shining as brightly and everything is as cheerful as though a vast number of men were not gathering around this neighborhood soon to engage in mortal strife.

The bells on the churches are ringing their call for morning service, but the call in our camp is different. No Sabbath for the soldier to day. It is - Strike tents - fall in - Forward - and another Brigade is gone. One first brigade was ordered off to Morristown yesterday. Our third is across the Holston river two miles below here. The second is still here, but under marching orders. Today part of the Second division moved - I don't know where. Troops are arriving and departing from this place in great numbers. What can it mean? Thousands of cavalry arrive. All the blacksmiths in the army are ordered to shoe their horses at once - all other work stands still till they are attended to and then they are off. Dusty columns of infantry arrive daily and train on train of artillery. The roads are blocked with supply trains and even then the men are on half rations. Some large operation is on foot. Burnside must be either threatened with an attack and they are reenforcing him, or else he is about making an attack on some one. Reliable news we get now. Rumor has Hooker coming with 40,000 men. Wilcox [Orlando Bolivar Wilcox] is here with 10,000 from Indiana - Parke, [John Grubb Parke] Shackleford, [James Murrell Shackelford] Carter [Samuel Powhatan Carter] and others are here, and every hill and valley is bristling with bayonets, but where the storm will burst we cannot tell. We have rumors of Hurlbut [Stephen Augustus Hurlbut] hurrying up from Memphis, Osterhaus [Peter Joseph Osterhaus] from Tallahoma, Grant from Natchez and all joining with Rosecrans to sweep out the country clear to the Atlantic. I can scarcely form an idea of what it all means, and having heard what is being done elsewhere, one thing is certain, that the party making the attack will be at a
disadvantage. From the hilly nature of the country we could defend ourselves against double numbers, and I suppose the rebels could do the same. Their troops however are not reliable. They are deserting in great numbers and coming into our lines. From fifty to sixty a day come in through our brigade lines. The town is full of rebel uniforms. The new Tennessee regiments forming in Knoxville are fast filling up. Col. L. is recruiting the Roundheads with Tennesseans, anxious to get revenge for cruelties perpetrated on them. Willie has just come across the river to see us. He says about fifty have joined our regiment. He is well. He has gone down to see the city. Johnny is well. He will go across and stay with the brigade this week. Lt. Justice and I will have to stay at Division headquarters. They will not likely be moved till the brigades are called together again. They are now eighty miles apart.

We have a good prospect of being on short allowance soon. We have to get our supplies still from Crab Orchard. That is one hundred and sixty miles away and the roads are horrible. Besides our wagon master telegraphed us that our own cavalry had taken our provision train from him and used it themselves on the way. The great question with the soldier now is rations. We are getting a full ration of bread from the bakery here, and a pound and a quarter of fresh beef daily, but only half allowance of sugar and coffee. These are the only rations issued now. Bread, beef, sugar and coffee. We are none the worse off yet in our mess. We get plenty of apples, potatoes etc to buy, and are living well. Our African turns out to be a very good cook, and withal very clean in all his department.

I shall turn my attention to fishing in a few days, as soon as I get my papers finished, and between one thing and another it is not likely we will fare any worse than we have done before. The horses and mules fare the worst. It is impossible to haul forage for them from any great distance, and the great number of cavalry here have eaten up everything like grain. They are nearly as badly off as they were at Fredericksburg last winter. While I write the whistle of the locomotive announces another train and I hear the drums & trumpets of the troops from it filing over the hills.

You will hear of the nature and result of this movement long before you get this. Perhaps you will never get it. Our mail is one of the most uncertain things here. We have had no arrival since the mail that brought yours of the 13th. I will write to you oftener dear as soon as I can find that the letters go on. We have numerous rumors of guerrillas. Probably there are some about.

The houses are more numerous and closer together here than they were about Crab Orchard. Do you remember the style in which
Lt. Justice got his white "shirt done up in Kentucky?" Well he did not wear it since. The other day he sent it over to a very nice brickhouse near here to see if they could wash and iron it. They undertook it, and sent it back just in the same way as you saw it. He will keep it and try it again in Georgia & North Carolina when we get over there.

Has winter come in Mercer Co. yet? I suppose there will be a great deal of fuss there this week regarding the Election. It doesn't bother us here. We have substituted the cartridge box for the ballot box in deciding matters.

You may possibly be in considerable anxiety dear about getting word from us here. But you need not think at any time that there is a long interval between our letters, that anything is wrong. The only cause that will prevent you hearing from us will be the irregularities in the mail. If anything should happen to us you will hear from some of us. Johnny, Willie or Lt. Justice will write if I can't, so you need not fear anything is wrong till you hear that it is so.

I would certainly like to be marching homeward darling, but in fact am doing so. This is the right way. A little farther on, a battle or two more and then, home again. It is the speediest way and best route. I don't want to have to come back again. I am growing quite stout – have burst the buttons off my clothes and if you were here now could give you another job of sewing.

Remember me to father, mother and all our friends. Give my love to the children and a double portion for yourself with many kisses

Your affectionate Husband

William