My dear Jane,

I have been a good deal longer in writing to you than I intended when I closed the last time. However it would have been useless to have written sooner, for no mail has gone back since the one that took 96. A mail arrived here last night, but brought nothing for any of our folks. I like to receive letters well enough, but can suffer the inconvenience of delays better than you can, for I still suppose you are not more than usually exposed or annoyed. But I can imagine you worrying yourself in the absence of word from us that something has gone wrong, while at the same time we are probably as comfortable as we would be at home. The only difficulty in the way of a regular mail is the long and bad route over which it has to be carried. This will be no better, till we go farther west when we may again receive our mail and supplies by rail road.

I hoped for a quiet sabbath once more to write you a few lines in answer to your kind and affectionate letters, but it can scarcely be done in the midst of the crowd of men, horses, mules, cannon, drivers etc. which are huddled together in a small lot on the north side of the Little Tennessee at the bridge. All baggage & non combatants were ordered here last night and here we are still, while the troops are lying on their arms awaiting an engagement on the other side. I wished many times during the last two weeks during the cold wet evenings that I could spend one of them at home with you, but although I know the wish was in vain it makes me more comfortable to think of home and you. None will know the blessings of peace and home as well as the soldier. He will have lived in vain if he fails to appreciate the quiet of home and the blessings of peace after the rough experience of a summer and winter campaign. I shall better know how to appreciate the society of a loving and amiable wife in place of the rough and uncongenial association of the soldier, daily becoming more so by being cut off from the forms and conventionalities of civilization. I don't know what effect these associations have on others, but it only makes me think more and love better my home, wife and children.

Last Sabbath was a very dismal rainy day and although we had nothing to do I felt so lazy that I did nothing but write a letter to Tommy. On Monday it cleared up and still having no work before me went down to the Holston river and spent the day fishing. I had a very bad line, and very bad luck too. I only caught three catfish – they were however large ones. If my line had been good I think I could have done well, but it was a kind of a rope and would scare any well educated or decent fish. As I came back in the evening I found all the camp astir making preparations for an early start the next morning. And so we left Knoxville at daylight.
for Kingston, where we were to go into Winter quarters. Kingston was 40 miles below, and winter quarters sounded well - it looked like a rest for a few months at least. But we little knew what was coming. We marched fifteen miles that day over a muddy road. We camped for the night in a heavy and cold rain. During the night orders reached us ordering us to turn off to the left and hasten to support Genl White, so in the morning off we started through the rain for Loudon. We heard firing all day, and after a while learned that Col. Wolford had been attacked and lost 400 men, all his baggage stores etc. We hastened on and on arriving at Lenoir were informed by Genl. White that he did not need us. We encamped on the road for further orders that day and part of the next when Genl Burnside sent us word to go on, so on we went and came to Loudon, crossing the river encamped on the south side of the Tennessee among the mountains. On Friday night Genl Burnside came by the cars, and yesterday morning everything got into motion, notwithstanding the storm. The rebels emboldened by their previous successes came within sight of us and sent a message ordering us to evacuate the town by 10 o'clock or they would shell us out. Then all horses, wagons, supplies, ammunition trains etc. were ordered back across the river where we now are crowded in a safe place, so close that our horses are nearly in our tents. But instead of the rebels shelling us, we shelled them and have driven them back to Philadelphia, six miles beyond. Our division was not called into action, but the batteries and Ohio & Illinois troops were used, ours remaining in readiness to help if needed. Genl Burnside has put Genl White under arrest for mismanaging affairs here. He was not pleased with our being ordered out of our way, and said that his old troops should no more be run off to every place there was a little picket firing. The new troops here expect to be stuck still on guard somewhere or other and if any enemy appears to fall back and send for the ninth Corps to do the fighting. They were disappointed this time, for Burnside put them all in and let our men rest, if it can be called a rest. The soldiers here now are having a very hard time of it. They are only getting half rations - exactly one half of what they used to get of coffee, sugar and bread, but the usual quantity of beef. No beans, rice molasses or any other thing whatever. This is entirely too little to live on and every one is hungry all the time. The country we have been coming through is so poor we cannot get anything to buy. Besides it rains almost daily and is very cold. The men have no overcoats, and have to sleep on the wet ground - now they haven't got their tents for all have been sent to this side. We can't tell how long this will last, but all depends on how soon we drive the rebels beyond the line of rail road. Fortunately I have not felt any of these hardships yet, for the rations going through our hands we take care to get enough to eat,
and generally we have our tent up too. When we don't I can sleep just as comfortable sitting at the fire. I think I can stand it as well as any one for the next ten months. Willie is with the brigade Commissary Capt Winegar and is very well. Capt W. has resigned and I do not know who will take his place. If Lt. Justice does not get back there they will have to appoint some one else. Willie will likely remain no matter who is appointed, but if not I have no doubt Lt. Justice will get him here. Johnny is well and growing stouter every day. He now weighs more than I do. He is thinking about resigning. Justice wants him to, and will employ him as a civilian clerk at a salary that will be better than if he stays in the army. I think he will do it as soon as he gets paid. I have got rid of my cough and feel as well as ever once more. I have very little to do except go round and keep an eye on things generally around our office and supply train, in fact for all I have to do I might as well be at home.

The skirmishing goes on across the river- we hear the cannon at intervals. Lt. J. is going over directly to see how it goes on. As our brigade is not in I don't care so much about it and will not go over today. I am sorry our mail works so badly dear. It makes me so lazy I don't like to begin to write after so long a rest and getting my hand out, and if it was not to you darling I think very little letter writing would do me. I shall not expect to hear from you for a long time dear, but shall think of you often. Please remember me to all my friends and with much love to yourself and the children I remain

Affectionately
Yours
William