My dear Jane

I wrote you a kind of a letter a day or two ago, just to let you know how and where we were, but so hurried that I could not make it satisfactory to myself, and I can scarcely hope it will be so to you. Now that I have more time I will go on with my journal and give you a methodical account of our movements and wanderings since the raising of the siege.

As soon as Sherman and Granger [Gordon Granger] arrived the rebels started off, and then our corps and the 23d were moved up after them, taking the north side of the Holston. Granger's men moved up on the south bank of that river. Sherman's forces went back to Chattanooga. To conceal the leaving of Sherman we had to press on closely so as to impress the rebels with the idea that the whole force was upon them. But it was of no use. They no doubt were well informed of all our movements by the citizens, who, say what any one likes, are as a whole disloyal. They are as a majority favorable to the rebel cause and the only reason they are not in arms against us is their manners and cowardice. The 23d Corps took the lead in the pursuit, our corps following until we reached Rutledge. Here we had to wait for supplies. It is impossible to move an army without food. As we could not get enough from Knoxville we had to spread over the country on our way and take all the corn and wheat that we could find. If there were any mills in the neighborhood we took it to them and ground it. By that means we were able to give each man from three quarters to one pound of flour or meal each day. We took and killed all the cattle, hogs and sheep that we could find. I was sent back to Knoxville with teams for supplies, but could not get a loaf of bread or even an ear of corn. On the morning of the 10th I arrived at Blain's X Roads where we now are, and at the intersection of the Tazewell road met our convalescents and furloughed men direct from Cumberland Gap on their way to Knoxville. I was glad to see by this that the way was again open homewards; not that I was expecting to go, but that a mail might soon be expected. Some of these convalescents turned back and came on with me to camp. It turned out to be a cold drizzly night and it was long after dark before I got into camp. When I saw the first camp fires my horse whinnied and freshened up and I expected soon to get to bed, for I felt very tired and not altogether well. But I was sadly disappointed; it was not our camp. For five miles more I had to go from camp to camp enquiring for our Division. No one appeared to know where it was. The troops I was among was the 23d Corps. It appears that while I was at Knoxville, Longstreet had made a stand and the 23d Corps skedaddled back behind the 9th
placing it once more in the front. At last I reached the sentinels of the 9th Corps, late at night. I could tell as soon as I passed the line - their challenge makes a man stop at once - it is peremptory - give the countersign quickly or get a ball in the stomach. Once in the line I soon found our quarters. I could not sleep that night. The news was bad. In trying to get some wheat to a mill about seven miles on our right Johnny had gone out with 50 men - the rebels had fired on them across the river, and then crossed after them - The men broke and fled - some had come back and Johnny was missing. As he rode on a white horse I presumed he would be marked by every rifle and I feared the worst for him. Dick Holmes and Stevenson came to our quarters during the night inquiring if we had got any word of him. The next morning I would have liked to go and search the woods for him, but Lt. Justice had to go to Bean's Station and I had to stay at home. During the day Col. Dawson received orders to go and take and hold the mill. Towards night he sent back word that Johnny was safe. He had gathered some of his men by him, returned the rebels fire and had his wheat in the mill grinding, while he spent the evening with the young ladies in the house and slept in a feather bed all night, unconscious of the uneasiness about him in Camp. On the next Sunday morning a messenger arrived announcing the arrival of one of our supply trains. We took possession of an empty grocery store in Rutledge and had our provisions put in it. By this train we got sugar & coffee again, enough to make half rations to the end of the month. The next day our other train came, but Gen. Parke took it from us and gave it to the 23d Corps. The soldiers all remembered him in their prayers that day! But worse still our third train in crossing Clinch Mountain was captured by Longstreet. He also captured some of the troops defending that pass. The commissary of these troops when they fell back to us had even the impudence to come to us for supplies for his men, when by their cowardice they had lost us the best train that ever crossed that mountain. 100 good men could have held that mountain against 50,000! By the way none but Lt. J. had had the foresight to have trains of supplies on the road, and it look hard to see them given away so tamely. Longstreet now becoming bolder, not only made a stand but advanced towards us. His cavalry hovered around our flanks for a day or two, and then suddenly swept round in one of the valleys towards our rear. Of course we had to go back once more to protect the 23d Corps. On the night of the 15th Dec. cold, rainy, muddy and sloughy were the roads. After standing in line of battle all day, now and then skirmishing, our famished men received the order to retreat. That was not the order they wanted. They only desired a charge. Here was a good field, and before them the men that were about escaping. They could not understand it. Slowly and growling like a great mastiff
whose master has called him back from pouncing on some unlucky cur, our men turned again toward Knoxville. How I pitied them. They are in rags - Soap they have not seen for weeks - few have blankets - many are barefooted - most who have shoes have their toes sticking out - many have their feet hacked and bleeding. Through mud and sloughs they slowly toiled all night, and arrived at this place towards morning to commence entrenching. In a few hours our position was taken, rifle pits and barricades grew up in lines across the country. Longstreet soon appeared, but retired very much disgusted no doubt. He does not appear disposed to attack the 9th Corps any more. He tried to work round our flanks, but the position we had taken prevents that and I suppose there will be no fight. The 4th Corps has since arrived and have been thrown out across the country on both our flanks. They have skirmishes every day, but we seldom inquire the result. Spear's [James Gallant Spears] Cavalry are across the river, skirmishing. Last night the 23d. Corps went off somewhere and today we are alone.

Johnny and Willie are very well. So am I. Yesterday was Christmas. No doubt you were thinking of us and our poor fare. But as every one now has to depend pretty much on their own exertions, we are becoming very expert in foraging. We had a roast turkey, roast beef, pound cake, vegetable soup, sugar, coffee, stewed peaches, crackers and biscuits for dinner. The turkey was a big one, but four of us ate it all up. I am as well as ever, and weigh 150 pounds. The climate is the best in the United States, and we have very few on the sick list. There is some rumors of our going on to Baltimore this winter to Burnside's command. Will let you know as soon as I can if it is true or not. I did intend to answer your letters dear, but have been interrupted a good deal since I commenced this, and I have deferred it till a quieter moment.

With much love and many kisses I am ever yours affectionately
William