
U.S. Hospital Camp “A”
Near Frederick Maryland
Thursday Jan 29th 1863
Sister Carrie

Two weeks ago last Saturday I commenced looking for a letter from home and have looked patiently and anxiously ever since and in [...]am still on the anxious seal—though with a slight falling off of patience. It is now over a month since I have heard a word from that direction and this is the third letter that I have written besides I sent you an antique magazine dating as far back as 1819. Did you receive it? I did not send it because I thought it would interest you but more for a curiosity as well as to show you the kind of reading matters furnished those that cannot help themselves. I believe it makes some comments upon the progress of the arts and sciences in America compared with England[.]

I also mailed father a paper a few days ago which contained the message of the Gov of Delaware[.] I read it with some interest and consider it a free, open, manly, expression of his views of the present condition of affairs drawn from sound reasoning[.] Notwithstanding the State being a Slave State he still adheres to the union and laws, Quite different from the Gov. elect of New York. I believe he is a traitor at heart, he expresses as much. How our present troubles will terminate is beyond the conjecture of human reason—I believe it would puzzle either Prophet or Seer. There seems to be more traitors north than south[.] Gloomy indeed must be the days and nights of the President. Were I him I would put on Dictatorial powers and the first man that expressed rebellious sympathies I would impress into the army and let them experience a little of the beauties of the doctrin they are so free to to preach. He has been too easy with traitors. A simple arrest and final release is no punishment. It only makes martyrs of them to be worshiped by their friends when they are released[,] when if they were compelled to receive some punishment they would find what a nice thing it is to sleep in the bed of their own making[,] It would either make union men of them or shut their mouths so they would harp no more about the horrors of this war[.] The war is horrible enough but the soldiers and those that live along the rout experience the worst of it. People at a distance are occasionally reminded of its existence by the death of a friend for whom they mourn for a few days and then forget them[,] but more than that it is but food for their minds in idle moments. I remember before I enlisted how I used to read of battles and skirmishes at different places with as much indifference as I would of the prices current and pass it by as the general news of the day. I did not trouble myself about the headless trunks, broken arms and legs, ghostly wounds, mangled body’s, wreathing in their own blood, and dead that are there. I read as victory or defeat as gain or loss. But the sharp shriek or hoarse moan or even the sight of on that is hit as he clasps his hand to his forehead and falls back to rise no more convinced one of the reality.

What is thought of the changed in the army? does it not make the people feel desponding as to the success of our cause[?] I cannot say what effect the change of commanders will have upon the men. Gen Hooker is liked by the men in his own Corps but is not well known by the whole army. I have seen him a number of times. He is a small man light complexion sandy hair and whiskers and face as red as a beet, small eyes, and his hair stands straight up[,] there is a very good picture of him in the Philadelphia Inquirer[,] if I can get a copy I will send you one. I like Gen. Burnside[,] He acted so manly in taking the whole blame of the defeat at Fredericksburg upon himself, he did not lay the blame upon somebody else even though the non-arrival of the Pontoons did delay the movements[,] The department at Washington were so used to the slow movements of Gen. McClelan that they were not prepared for the quick movements of the new Gen, thus the defeat, it is so seldom that men high is authority will
acknowledge they have a superior we cannot help but admire Gen. Burnsides when he said that Gen McClelan was more capable of handling so large an army than he.

I took dinner a few days ago at a farmers about three quarters of a mile from camp, by the name of Miller. You dont know how odd it seems for me to sit down to the table and eat with a knife and fork. After a while the soldiers threw away all their dishes such as knife fork and plate as our loads were so heavy we felt disposed to lighten them as much as we could if not more than an ounce, so when I came to use them again it seemed odd indeed. I have been at a number of houses in this vicinity and I was struck with the cheapness of every article of furniture. Common wooden chairs rug carpets, tables that have been used since the inmates were children, I noticed the knives and forks the knives were worn down so that the points were not more than half the common width and the forks were mere stubs.

The painting of the wood work of the houses have long ago disappeared before the hand of the housewife. And these are the first families. They are said to ritch. Is it any wonder. When I first got well enough so that I could walk I went out one day to get some butter and I went to a farmers and it happened to be about dinner time and they invited me to stay. I was not slow in accepting as the fare at the hospital here was (and is) miserable. After dinner one of the women of the house spoke to one of the little boys that they had taken and said that he had best stay out of school and help get in the corn. The man spoke and said he would do nothing if he did stay. The woman said she knew better she knew she could get work out of him, so after a while the man went into the field. I went with him, it being in the direction of the camp. We had been there but a short time before the lady of the house with the little boy and horse and cart came out they picked up the corn and the women lifted the basket of corn into the cart as easy as I could. The second trip the girl came out with them. They worked as long as I stayed and I have no doubt they did all the afternoon. The man is a farmer and has about one hundred acres and improvements and had three hired men so they did it from choice. I think I shall marry here.

I heard from Thomas a short time ago he said he had a letter from Albert a few days before and Albert was teaching school at Monroeville Ohio at one dollar a day and board. Better than soldiering at thirteen dollars a month. But then there is no glory in it. You do not know how tedious life in the Hospital is becoming. We have read and re-read everything in our reach worn out all kinds of amusements, checkers, chess, and cards have no attraction. We have tried so long to drown the loneliness of our condition that everything is worn threadbare I do not know what we will do next. I believe I shall go back to the army I know I am not able to do duty but this kind of life will kill me, and I long for a change. I took such a dislike to this Hospital when I first came here that nothing could please me let it be done ever so well. I have quite a number of acquaintances in the city (two miles distance) who would like to have me go and see them but it is so fatigueing for me to walk I do not go often and I cannot get a pass for longer than one day. I have thought strongly of going to the company when they send another squad from here if I do I will let you know by letter at the time I should have went long ago but I feared that the army would move and I knew I could not keep up and then I would suffer for it as it is not as peasant layng out as in the summertime Will do something desperate soon.

Remember me to all I remain your B
Merrill