

Orange C. H.
Sept. 22 1863

My dear Wife—

I recd your letter of the 16th and intended to answer it last night but was prevented. I was delighted to hear from you. I fear this letter may not reach you for 4 or 5 days as it is probable from the indications this evening that the Yankees will reach the Central RR between Gordonsville & Charlottesville. The cavalry and part of the infantry (Yankee) have been fighting most of the day—and as far as heard from Stuart is giving back. They came today near the ford about a mile distant from where we turned back the enemy.

We rode past Genl. Hill's Hd. Qrs. this evening. They are fighting at Liberty Mills, about 3 miles from where we went. The enemy rode out in the direction of Johnson's Division. They seem to get the advantage of our cavalry most of the time. Genl. Lee has sent out Wilcox Division, but the difficulty is that they will not be able to intercept them, and there is a strong probability that they will reach Charlottesville. Our infantry so far has not been fighting further than to skirmish a little, and it is said have entrenchments thrown up at all the fords. There is still a strong probability of a general engagement. We are sanguine of success.

We have recd the intelligence of the victory of Bragg. How anxious we do feel that it may not turn out as has the good intelligence on former occasions. The victory is saddened by the probable death of Genl Hood. He has been a faithful and brave officer.

I have not much news to write to you. Most of the ladies are gone, and since Ewell's Corps moved to Raccoon ford, the town looks lonesome. Tell King that Bob staid all night with me Sunday night. He was getting along very well. Went in to the regiment Monday.

I saw old Mr. Lipscomb today. He was enquiring about you. I think he had on a little tea. He invited me very kindly to come and see him.

I have become acquainted with the family of Mrs. Williamson. She is the mother in law of Dr. Newton, whom you saw. I have been waiting on a sick son and find them very pleasant.

Poor D. H., he seems to be never right—always getting whipped or abused.¹ I dont know whether he is true or not. Maybe he just dont want to fight, but I tell you that the day of retribution is swiftly coming upon those that will not give a helping hand in this our time of need, and they ought to be crushed and ground into powder.

I have just heard from the battlefield. Tis said that we have captured about 150 prisoners, have probably lost some, not many killed. Part of the Yankee force has gone on to Charlottesville, and our force after them. We have just excitement enough here to give a lively turn to conversation, and excite the ladies a little. You know we dont expect the cavalry to suffer much.

Give my love to all the children. I may hear some news by morning and will leave a little space. We expect to be most of the night attending to the wounded that are coming in.

Wednesday morning. No news this morning. No further indications of a general fight. Oh my, how cold my toes got last night—frost this morning. I am reading "No Name," good novel.

My best love to you. How much I do love to think of you and love you, and I long to be with you. Continue to write frequently. Kiss the children for me. Tell them I think of them every day and want to see them very much.

Ever your devoted husband H Black

¹D. H. is probably Daniel H. Hoge, a prominent lawyer in Montgomery County. He was known to be a Unionist and a member of a Unionist organization.

Brandy Station,
Sunday night, Nov. 1, 1863

My dear Mollie

I recd a letter today from a very handsome lady to play cupid. Although not accompanied by her likeness yet her image was so indelibly impressed upon my mind that the likeness itself could not recall the features more vividly than they are impressed. I first met her in a village in Western Va when I was about 17 years old and she 8. I afterwards saw her frequently and occasionally was in her company, and notwithstanding the disparity in our ages, I became so favorably impressed with her fair face and gentle manners that I frequently said to myself that I wished she was older or I younger.

In 3 or 4 years she had grown so much that the disparity in age seemed to grow less. Never did a lady witness the budding of a flower with more requisite pleasure than did I the budding of that pretty little girl into womanhood. She made much of my thoughts while in Mexico and more upon my return home. While at the University of Va., I not infrequently found my thoughts wandering from the dry textbook to contemplate by the aid of memory the features and form of this little girl.

After I completed my studies, I traveled in the west and expected to find a home in some western state, but not finding a place to suit me, together with the persuasions of that fair face, induced me to return.

I entered, as you know, actively into the pursuit of my profession with the determination to make at least a fair reputation and tried to withdraw my thoughts from everything else, but I found this little fairy constantly and pleasantly intruding into all my plans, whether of pleasure or interest. At this period she met me politely and respectfully but seemed to grow more distant, coy & reserved, so that I frequently thought that even the ordinary attentions of common politeness & courtesy were no special source of pleasure to her.

In a few instances when she had arrived at about the age of 15 this shyness and reserve seemed to be forgotten, and I would pass an hour or two in the enjoyment of her company with great pleasure to myself and I imagined with at least satisfaction, if not enjoyment, to her. I began to think that my happiness was identified with hers. I began to pay her special visits or at least seek opportunities by which I might be in her company. I sought her society on pleasure rides and thought it not a hardship to ride 65 miles in 24 hours if part of the time might be spent with her. She always exhibited or observed the decorum of modest reserve which might be construed into neither encouragement nor discouragement.

After the deliberation & reflection which I thought due to a matter which involved my happiness for life, I felt that her destiny and mine were probably intended to be united, and that all the adverse counsel which I could give myself could bring no objections. I felt that I ought both as a matter of duty and happiness give my whole life to her, who for 9 years had had my attention and devotion, though concealed love.

After a few little billets and interviews, and with a full declaration of the love I desired to bestow, I received a measured and loving response and was made most happy in

the anticipation of the celebration of the nuptials fixed at some 6 months hence. This time glided nicely & happily, though not too rapidly, away from me. The hours of leisure were spent with her and my visits were always welcomed with that cordial welcome, that maiden modesty, so much to be admired. 'Tis true that on one occasion she did rest her elbow upon my knee and look with confidential pleasure in my face and made me realize that indeed I had her whole heart.

Suffice it to say, the happy day of our marriage arrived and since then, hours, days, and years of time, confidence & happiness passed rapidly away, and only to make us feel that happy as were the hours of youthful days, they compare not with those of later years and perhaps even these may be not equal to that which is in reserve for us.

I dont know how much pleasure it affords you to go over these days of the past, but to me they will ever be remembered as days of felicity. And how happy the thought that years increase the affection & esteem we have for each other to love & be loved. May it ever be so, and may I ever be a husband worthy of your warmest affections. May I make you happy and in so doing be made happy in return. A sweet kiss and embrace to your greeting.

But maybe you will say it looks ridiculous to see a man getting grayhaired to be writing love letters, so I will use the remnant of my paper otherwise.

I was surprised to hear you say that Crockett McDonald was handsome, for he was one of the ugliest boys that I knew when he was about 10 years old. It is not surprising that we look alike, for he is my double cousin.

I am very glad you have had an opportunity to hear through him from our friends in Wisconsin. I would be delighted to hear of James trading off his farm and going to Missouri. I hope to see the day when I will know that not one of our relatives is in Yankeeland, and I hope Retta may find a more congenial clime.

This is a lonesome place, especially on Sunday. No preaching. No ladies. Nothing but soldiers. I have spent this day in and about the Hospital; however, this morning I went over to Major Harrison's to send him to Staunton (sick) and had a nice plate of oysters. He gave me yesterday a piece of white pudding. I brought it home and gave it to the man we have cooking for us. He looked at and finally cut into it to see what it was made of. He says, "Why, it is stuffed with corn meal." So you may know our cook is not a man of much experience, though we do very well. There is a surgeon on duty with me now who has a servant who is no cook but does our other work.

Dont send Jim Price. He is too much of a rascal. He would soon leave us and steal more than he is worth.

The cavalry moved today, and it is supposed to be on a raid. I will probably add a line in the morning.

Monday morning. Nothing new. The cook spoiled the white pudding. He took it out of the skin & fried & fried. I forgot to tell him how to cook it. Write more frequently. My best love to all.

Yours affectionately H Black

*Hospital 2 Corps,
Brandy Station
Nov. 6 [1863]*

My dear Wife

I rcd your letter by Tob Robinson this morning. Also rcd one written two or three days before it on the 1st. I was glad to hear from you & glad that Tob brought it, as it relieves Nan. Tell her to inform the Conscript Office of all that are home unnecessarily that they may be sent back.

This is a windy, blustery day. The wind came near baptizing, I mean capsizing, our tent. It blew over Dr. Heagy's bed and it is now covered all over with leaves and dust. It is but the foreshadowing of what we will have if we stay here in our tents this winter—which looks now improbable from the winter quarters being built.

I was at a review yesterday of the cavalry by Genl. Lee, the first of this kind that I have witnessed during the war. It passed off pleasantly & handsomely except that 4 men were thrown in a charge and one of them seriously hurt. The force is not as large as I expected to see. A few ladies were out.

Officers are beginning to look out places for their wives. Genl. Ewell brings his own down tomorrow. Mjr. Ballard & Dr. Coleman talk of keeping house. Mrs. Ballard was at the review yesterday. I think they will have a hard time of it.

I was very much pleased at the way in which you answered my love letter, though you do me injustice in regard to the likeness—for I left it not that it was a burden to me to carry it, but for fear that I might lose it—and being the only likeness which we have of our dear little Charly whose life seems so precious I would have regretted its loss very much. So you see, you put exactly the wrong construction before it—that is if you are not joking, to which opinion I incline.

I rcd two more letters from Miss Josie T., but I believe I replied to but one—the first one—as you thought it was not necessary to answer the others, as her brother could do so.

I am glad to hear that Dr. Stone has come back—would like if he could be assigned to this army for duty.

Is Dr. Wade at home on furlough, or is he stationed at Christiansburg, examining conscripts. Someone so informed me.

It turns out that the Rev. Mr. Neal who is with me is a distant relation—through the Alexander branch of the family. It was at his father's that Retta staid as she came from the west, and he came with her to Peterstown. He seems to be a good and faithful young man. Mr. Miller came up and took dinner with him today. I think he will make a good chaplain, though not the dictionary that Mr. Lewis was.

I am glad to hear that Alex is getting such a large amount of property on hand. As

Kent claims Billy, I suppose he will have to claim the colt, but I think he better not ride the colt till his cousin John works him or uses him awhile.

I am sorry to hear that you and your Cousin Lizzy have exhausted all your resources to get cured. Your cases are truly deplorable. You are truly unapproachable and can say "touch me if you dare."

Well, the Major is more fortunate than I, for he has so lately been at home that he ought not to go again for twice 4 1/2 months, but as my time is hardly 1/3 so long, I must, I think, make you less independent and help you.

I have been watching with unusual interest the treatment of a case in my tent which, much to my relief, seems to be cured. The case is that of Dr. Eliason, a great big fellow, weighing about two hundred and who, of course, can carry as much itch as almost any body else. The remedy which I think cut it short with him was Fowler's solution, though he used the sulphur ointment for about one week.

If you can not get rid of it by extreme applications, I would commence with five drops on a bread crumb, taken just after eating—and three times a day—increasing one drop a day until you get up to 8 drops, and continue at that for about two weeks unless you find it making you sick at the stomach and causing your eyes & head to pain you when you should reduce the dose to one that you can bear.

This is becoming a a favorite remedy in the army, and I would advise you to use it if you can not get rid of it otherwise. Another suggestion is in regard to washing your clothes. It is said the little animal upon which the disease depends can [incomplete]

Hospital 2 Corps A. N. Va.
Orange C. H.
Nov. 9, 1863

My dear Wife

Very unexpectedly I find myself back at Orange. On Saturday evening the enemy made an attack on Hays & Hokes Brigades who were in breastworks on the north side of the Rappahannock at the railroad crossing and at Kelly ford on Rodes Division—driving the latter back with the loss of about 60 killed & wounded and 30 or 40 prisoners—and capturing about 1200 of the former, including the wounded (except about 40) & killed, which was probably considerable as they fought very bravely before surrendering.

This loss has given rise to a good deal of criticism in the army as to where the blame of the misfortune should rest. I understand the [Richmond] Enquirer has a very severe article condemning in strong terms the Brigadier Generals. This is very unjust, for they are brave men and were merely obeying orders.

So with General Early in whose division these brigades are. I was riding on General Ewell's staff yesterday and heard a good deal of talk among the various officers, and the conclusion I came to was that it rests between the engineer who planned the works and Genl. Lee. Genl. Early and many others say the former.

The fault was that the enemy could have an enfilade fire upon our troops and could not be seen until within fifty yards of the works. Others say that they can not see any reason why our troops were on that side of the river at all. Be all this as it may, it was quite an unfortunate affair for us and the result of bad management somewhere.

The whole army was ordered to fall back, which they did Saturday night to within two miles of Culpeper C.H. where a line of battle was formed Sunday morning. The men threw up a long line of breastworks, and it is surprising how soon and how well this work was done. Our men have fought so much & so often that they seem to be very familiar with their duties. Besides, they have learned to do that which will preserve their lives.

The throwing up of these breastworks was only a ruse on the part of Genl. Lee to give him time to get all the sick, wounded & stores to the rear. About 2 o'clock the enemy came in sight and halted, except some cavalry who came unexpectedly upon the infantry on the extreme left and were well punished. About sundown large fires were built up along the whole line, and the retreat resumed, the troops nearly all crossing the Rapidan before daylight.

All are now occupying the same positions they did before we commenced the campaign just one month ago. The general impression now is that we are stationed for the winter unless the Yankees advance, and if they do this that we will fight them hard in this favorable position.

I have gotten a very comfortable room in the upstairs of the frame house attached to the hospital. Dr. Heagy and Mr. Neal are my roommates. Drs. Magruder, Eliason & Wilkerson in an adjoining room—the latter now at home on furlough. There was a great rush here today for rooms, and I believe I succeeded better than most any one else.

Henry came back this evening and asked me to take him again, which I did—and glad to get him, for there is a vast difference between a bad cook & a good one. I saw Mr. Lipscomb in the street, and he enquired as usual about the Madam.

If I had a good place to put a tent, I believe I would rather be in it, for I feel that I am already taking cold, though it may be from the exposure of the last two nights, and by lying in a cold room at Genl. Early's Hd Qrs last night on the floor with any bedding but my overcoat & saddle blanket. Between short rations, loss of sleep & [missing word] I was in fine plight for a good sleep tonight.

I was with Major Palmer most of the day yesterday, and he is very well. My love to all.

Ever yours, H Black

Orange C. H.
Nov. 25, 1863

My dear Wife

I recd your letter written on Sunday this evening, and as a week had not intervened since the last I presume you have gotten over your attack of the Blues and concluded to go on in the "same good old way."

I never was an advocate for this periodical letter writing; it looks too much like a business transaction instead of a pleasure. And the letters are too much like those that commence with "I take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well, hoping these few lines may find &c." There is more head than heart about these. Is it not so? & cant you write best when you feel like talking to me and not from a mere sense of duty. I feel that the spirit moves me every 3 or 4 days, and like the Quakers I then have to write regardless of the remark that we write more letters to each other than any other couple.

I dont like your being deprived of flour. I had hoped that during my absence those who had supplies would furnish my family with what they could eat at the market price. I ask it for nothing less. And as the General's memory serves him so badly, I would not renew the application for this or other articles. At the same time, I would not manifest the slightest concern on the subject towards him. Such things have become not only incident to the war, but a part and parcel of it.

If you have difficulty in getting the flour closer to home, write a note to Major Kent and say to him that I asked you to request him to furnish what you might need. ⁸ And if he has it, I am sure he will let you have it.

How much money have you? If you have not enough, ask your Uncle Ed for what you need, and I will replace it when I go home or sooner if I have an opportunity to send it. Did you get the boots for Alex.

That pitiful legislature which we had might have saved our people much trouble and suffering, but they were afraid of the Mighty people. They were a body of men unequal to the emergency, and I expect but little from them when they meet again but to devise some means by which they can commute their pay by disparaging Confederate money.

We are again under orders to be ready to move at a moment's notice. The enemy has been making some demonstrations at Ely's ford, and it is said some have crossed the river. This ford is near Chancellorsville, and it may be that another battle may take place in that Wilderness Country. It is thought by many that Meade will be compelled to fight to satisfy his government. Our men are in good spirits, and if we fight we expect a victory.

Dr. Wilkerson returned last night. I look for Dr. Heagy tomorrow, and then our mess will be full again.

Your dream, if realized, would be a great pleasure to me, and my part of it I hope to enjoy ere the winter passes off.

I went round to see Mrs. Lipscomb this evening, but she was not at home. I have not

called on her yet but must do so.

I hope Charly will be well when I go home this time that I may hear him talk and sing.

Mr. Neal preached a good sermon tonight. If he will study, he will make a good preacher.

Give my love to all the children. I want to see them very much. I hope they are growing up to be good & affectionate children, loving and obeying their Ma, and learning to read and write.

Hoping that you are no longer on half rations and may continue to get along well, and that you will save me a mess of sausage and no worst, I remain your ever devoted husband.

Many sweet kisses to you. H.B.

Monday morning. No news from the front this morning.