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William C. Nelson to Maria C. Nelson (5 July 1864)

William Cowper Nelson

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Petersburg, Va, July 5th 1864,

My Dear Mother;

I have not heard a word from home, since May 20th, but attribute the failure to the irregularity of the mails, I have written many times since leaving Orange, and hope that you have received some of the letters at least, The Rail Road which was cut, between here and Danville has not been entirely repaired yet, but the mail communication has been resumed, and I hope in a few days to hear from you, Affairs at this point are now extremely dull, Grant's advance upon Richmond, seems to have dwindled down to a siege of Petersburg, if indeed it can be called a siege, when we have free access to all the country back of us, it is true all the R.R.s, have been cut, but the Road to Richmond and beyond to Charlottesville &c. has been repaired, and the others soon will be, The Yankees can never capture Richmond, or defeat Gen Lee, by destroying ^{Rail Roads} they may subject us to inconvenience, and ^{for a time,} deprive us of the privilege of hearing from home, but that is not crushing the Rebellion, Since your arrival at this point, our divisions has been amused by being sent out on flank movements, some of which have proven quite successful, having resulted in the capture of some 2000 prisoners, pieces of Artillery, besides a number of wagons, ambulances and contrabands, these latter were captured with a party of Cavalry raiders whom we intercepted on their return, from one of their pillaging expeditions, The Yankees do not seem disposed, any more, to charge our works and prefer the safer mode of Warfare, of standing at a distance and throwing shells into the city, they indulge in this delightful pastime every day and frequently at night, yesterday being the

glorious 4th. They gave us a grand benefit, shelling furiously throughout the day and a great portion of the night, but it all amounts to nothing. I have heard of no casualties at all. The citizens living in the exposed portions of the city, have all removed, and we have no troops quartered in the city, so the only real injury done by the bombardment, is the destruction of private property, which as you yourself have abundantly witnessed, is a special delight of Grant and his minions, so I suppose they will continue it, until they have either destroyed the city, or compelled to leave here, the latter I think the more probable event. It would be inadvisable on our part to attack them here, as they are strongly fortified, and it would be at an immense sacrifice of human life, that they could be driven out of them, and then they have only the short distance to City Point to go, when they are under the protection of their gunboats; but diversions can be made in other directions, which may cause them to change their base, as effectually as an attack in the front would. General Early with one Corps of this Army and a large body of Cavalry is reported to have crossed the Potomac at Harper's Ferry, and two of the Yankee Corps which were in our front are known to have been withdrawn, Burwells and Warren, although it is not known where they have gone, rumor says to Washington and I have strong hopes of going into Maryland again, this year. For when once the tide sets that way, the whole Army is almost sure to go, but it may be that Grant will recross to the North bank of the James and make a desperate assault upon Richmond, that I think would be the most fortunate event that could happen to us, as he would in all human probability be unsuccessful, and would so cripple his Army his Army acts give us greatly the advantage.

I have made no acquaintances at all in Petersburg. I have only visited one house, and that was to see a wounded friend, Col. Harris of the 12th, who was severely wounded in the head by a stray shot a week or two since, but who is now I am glad to state recovering. In a former letter I stated that Petersburg was not a pretty place at all, I will modify that expression of opinion a little, by now stating that some portions of the city, are quite passable, one or two streets are quite pretty, and there are many elegant residences, tho' the most of them now, alas! are untenanted. Two weeks ago, when we first came here, I attended church, and there was quite a large congregation of ladies in attendance, Day before yesterday I went again, and there were only two ladies present, and our church was I believe the only one which was opened at all, and here the services were held in the basement, in view of the fact that the shells were falling in the immediate neighborhood, but none struck the church, and I thought the services more impressive than I had ever witnessed before, although the long drawn aisle and fretted vaults, together with all the appliances and pomps of fashion, were wanting. After service we had the privilege of partaking of the Blessed Communion, that holy token of our faith in our only Redeemer and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who took upon himself the form of man, and suffered all the indignities that man could inflict on him, and finally gave up his life, that all who believe on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. Where all who love him shall come, and where sickness, sorrow, and death shall not be known, where there shall be no more partings, no more separations, that we may all be re-united there, if not in this world, is my daily prayer.

April 6th Everything this morning is very quiet, with the
perception of an occasional shell, thrown into the city.
I suppose the Yankees keep up that practice, merely for
the purpose of letting us know that they are still about.
Last evening, I formed the acquaintance of Mrs. Dr. Wright
and her two daughters, of Norfolk. Dr. Wright was the in-
dividual who shot a Yankee Officer, in command of
a negro company, in Norfolk some time ago; and for
which offence, he was tried and executed by the military
despotism there prevailing. His family shortly thereafter
moved to this place, where they are now residing in a nice
little cottage in the suburbs. They are very elegant people,
and the young ladies are quite interesting, so if we
remain here any length of time, I shall cultivate
their acquaintance.

We have had no rain here, except one little
shower, (which hardly sufficed to lay the dust) for
more than a month, it is exceedingly hot, dry and
dusty, as a natural consequence, the only consolation
is that the Yankees are probably suffering more than
we are, as the locality which they are now inhabiting
is said to be almost destitute of water.

Hoping soon to hear from you, and with regards
to all Friends,

I remain,

Your Affectionate Son,
Will: C. Nelson,