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William C. Nelson to Maria C. Nelson (18 December 1863)

William Cowper Nelson

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Camp near Orange C. H., Virginia
September 18th 1862,

My Darling Mother;

It has been so long since I have heard a word from you, that I have begun to feel anxious about the welfare of all the loved ones there. I haven't received a line since September, the letter which Mr. Alexander brought. I am sure you must have written, since then, but nothing has reached me. I have written at least a dozen since then, generally sending the letters by hand, not thinking there would be much possibility of their reaching you by mail.

We are still in the vicinity of Orange Court House, and have some regularly winter quarters, and in all probability we will remain here all winter. Since I last wrote you, Meade as I predicted in a former letter, made an advance by crossing the river below us, but after crossing they advanced but a very short distance, General Lee brought out his Army and offered him battle for four consecutive days, but Meade did not have the temerity to take up the gauntlet, and after remaining in our front for four days, ignominiously retreated without a battle. We pursued him to the river, but did not deem it prudent to follow him any farther, and accordingly returned to our old camp.

I am very pleasantly situated now, I have now a good chance
now to get that fine plate of wood, so I can keep some
portables, the exact weather, we have had, however, no
very cold weather as yet, not so severe as last
winter, we have had no snow at all, with the excep-
tion of a slight drizzle in November.

A note from a former letter concerning the
death of General Brown, no successor has yet been
appointed, but I still remain with the Brigade,
and will be assigned to the staff of the succeeding
insurgent, whoever he may be, Major of Infantry
as Senior Colonel, but I am not in command of the Brigade
and is a very nice, clever gentleman.

I stay most of my time in my tent now, and occupy
myself in reading, I have just finished Scott's
History last week, and am now reading, Romaine's
Life of Napoleon, it is quite difficult to procure any
thing valuable, the Confederate publications as a general
thing are worthless, and no other books can be obtained
here, I have however several small copies of the best
English poets, Young, Thomson, Kirk, Milton, and interest
myself with them, those with the daily papers, and my
Prayer Book and Bible constitute my library, I have
altogether abandoned military studies, but I don't
think my mind less that I was.

I have formed several new acquaintances in the
vicinity of Orange, but visit very seldom, I occasionally
call on the Miles' Millie, and semi-occasionally on
Miss Kate, I went up there the earlier part of this week

and remain overnight, returned to camp next day, the distance is only about fifteen miles, not bad for a Soldier, to go visiting, the people are very kind and gave me a sleeping invitation to spend my Christmas at their, house in all human probability I shall go, One thing is certain if I do go, I will be sure to get a good dinner, for if that family are celebrated for any one thing that thing is good eating, the kite is certainly handsome, but the dinner are superb, I leave you to infer (knowing my proclivities) which is the greatest attraction to your "golden age."

I have another lady friend in the village of Orange, and a gay, dashing creature she is, Miss Fattie Prince by name, and a perfect Die Turner, she is not particularly beautiful, but is nevertheless very attractive, and one of the best girls I ever knew, honest and frank in her disposition, and perfectly free from coquettishness.

I also have some acquaintances over the river, Dr. Grimman's family, they are relations of Capt. Peck, and in company with him, I stayed with them these last weeks, they have very elegant souls, and I liked them much.

I have heard a very distressing rumor in regard to a wealthy and accomplished young lady, a neighbor of ours, which caused me much pain; it is deeply deplored in fact by all her acquaintances and friends in this place; if this is true of the wife of Mr. B. pray that God, in his mercy, will soon put an end to it.

I see by the newspaper that Mr. Stevens is about repaired at the rate
to the Federal Government, and is now in command, with his
my wife's medical.

General Lee is now in Richmond and in consultation
with the President. It is rumored by many that he will
be sent South to command Bragg's Army, and that some
one else will be sent here. It would be loath to lose
Robert, but if the country needs his services down there
I would be willing to make the sacrifice and let
him go, in case Gen. Lee, is sent away. I hope that
Burgess will be sent here, he is my second choice.
I have heard nothing from Buckner's Brigade, since
they left Chickamauga, except that Col. Finck of the
17th Mississippi was severely wounded in the assault
upon Knoxville, Longstreet is now said to be dead,
and Morgan is also reported to be within the Federal
camps since you did not see him from
When did you hear from Sister and when is she?
I wrote her a long letter some time ago, but have
received no response. Neither have I heard from
Tom for months. Where is he?

We have heard that Lee's Cavalry crossed the enemy
across Wolf river, but we do not know whether
he retired thence, or still retains possession
of the country north of Chickamauga.

I have heard a word concerning my trunk
or the clothes sent by Lieut. Jones of the 17th Miss.
The trunk I presume is still at Knoxville.

If Sister could get me out a sufficient quantity
of dark-blue cloth, it would be very nice for
pants and vest, it is the regulation color for
Staff Officers, and being also the Yankee color, would
excite no suspicion by possessing, and would
be easy to smuggle, I imagine. Give my love
to Ben and Courtney and a kin to the latter, when you
write. Good-bye Dear Aunt Mother.

Your loving affectionate son, Wm.