

Baton Rouge.
Dec. 28th ¹⁸⁶² to Jan. 2nd 1863.

My darling sister.

Here I am away off on the banks of the Mississippi, with two thousand miles of rebel territory separating me from home. It is a strange, roving life that the soldier leads. He lives on uncertainty in a far higher degree than he who treads the path of civil life.

But if the soldier be an intelligent, true-hearted, patriot there is a calm satisfaction in the midst of all the turmoil, discomfort & suspense that war exists in the camp. But now I think of it, I am

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but a poor moralizer & had better
confine myself to facts.

We stopped at Ship Island
about forty eight hours. Seven or eight
heavily laden transports came to anchor
after us, one of them bearing Gen. Banks
& staff. On Sat. A.M. your brother
managed to get on shore to take a
look at the contrabands about a hundred
of whom are quartered on the island.
Some of them showed considerable
intelligence. They "braced de Lord" that
the Yankees had come to deliver them.
I succeeded in buying some very good
hog-cake. It was a rich luxury I
assure you to taste it, coarse as it
was, after the disgusting fare that
had been forced upon us on shipboard.

The island was merely a
succession of shifting sand reefs.

Two companies of the 13th Maine Reg.
were all the troops that occupied
the place. The most thickly populated

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part of the island is the silent
city of the dead where lie, ^{sleeping} some
some or five hundred sailors & soldiers.

By a mistake our steamer
had very nearly left me behind if the
men of our company had about
concluded to bid good by, for the
moment at least, to the "little orderly".
By dint of hard effort I regained the
Illinois ere she set sail. At four o'clock
P.M. we weighed anchor, under orders
to proceed to St. Orleans. During the
night the ship rolled heavily with
a very rough sea. & many of our
members ~~for ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~~~ sought
nature's kindly though unceremonious
relief. Fortunately I felt not the
faintest inclination to court father
Neptune's favors.

At daybreak we found ourself
off the I. bet pass of the Mississippi.
Some half dozen transports lay near
us, like vessels waiting to be

boarded by a pilot. Before we reached the bar of the river the water began to be discolored by the corruption that the mighty "Father of Waters" sweeps down in its course through secession soil. After we crossed the bar, great mud puddings began to appear above the surface of the water, & presently there was a semblance of a channel within margins of mud to represent banks.

After an hour of steady progress the apologies of banks showed a rank dense growth of swamp grass which to our ocean weary eyes seemed really beautiful. About this time we passed Pilot Town, an irregular mob of houses set squat down in the swamp & intended for the accommodation of river pilots.

Soon we began to see trees covered with brilliant foliage, affording delight to our eyes & substantial

comfort to our souls.

About noon we passed Fort Jackson, the scene of our glorious naval victory last Spring. A portion of the 31st Mass. Reg., which was recruited from the same section of the state with the 52nd, was stationed at the Fort.

Loud & earnest were the cheers that rang from regiment back to regiment as we passed. Hurray ^{for} the dear old Bay State, the key stone in freedom's glorious temple.

Fort Jackson, presented an appearance quite contrary to my expectations. Its base I should judge to be raised some fifteen or twenty feet above the river level. It appears to be a very formidable earth work faced with brick & mounted with guns of the heaviest calibre. It has one tier of casemates of guns en barbette, as thick, ^{stationed} as

convenient. In short the place looks as though it might ^{well} answer for one of Uncle Sam's trusty fearages, though not particularly elegant bulldogs. Fort G. Phillips, which lies nearly opposite Jackson, looks less formidable than its neighbor, but is evidently capable of considerable effective service.

After passing the forts, orange groves & sugar plantations were quite in vogue. Imagine how the sons of the frozen north opened their eyes, at the sight of the trees loaded down with their golden treasures, which formed a delightful contrast with the living green of the foliage. Then the glory of the broad fields of waving cane in the very prime of its beauty! Our sky was clear & fathomless, the water beneath smooth as a mirror of the air around us soft & fragrant with the sweetness of Ceres' offering.

It seemed like an enchanted dream, so delicious was the fascination that took hold upon me. I was almost ready to whisper to myself, "What magic spell is upon me? Whence this sweet delight?"

But soon a sight met my gaze that rudely startled my kindling fancy. It brought me to painfully realize that this was no fairy land, that withering light cursed the region whose external beauty was but a cloak for its inward rottenness. Here and there on the various plantations began to be seen bands of slaves plying their tasks under the goad of the oppressor. All my puritan blood ~~was~~ stored within me at the sight, & with the trumpet of God's eternal justice I longed to proclaim liberty throughout the land & to all the inhabitants thereof. Oh! this waiting, waiting, waiting; this hearing the

groans of the children of bondage; this witnessing the damning process of the degradation of God's image! Let it be endured no longer, but let us in the name of the most high God call down fire from Heaven to destroy the ministers of sin who ^{do} sacrifice at the altar whose fires are kindled of Hell! Tender treatment of this rebellion fits instigators & abettors, as well talk about tender treatment of the Father of lies & his confederates.

I believe that the mission of our great army henceforth should be to lay waste & destroy. Let cities & towns be wiped out that they may not give aid & comfort to this hateful cause. Let misery & death be sown wide & cast over this polluted country till the scourging be sufficient to wipe away the guilt that has brought upon the nation this tremendous flood tide of evil.

This is talking in terrible earnest

but God's ministry of vengeance
 blazes like, the red, ^{quick,} bolt from Heaven.
 Gigantic crimes in which a great nation
 has participated are not effiated
 without the bloody sacrifice. The sooner
 and the more thoroughly the work
 of atonement is done, the better.

If my petty life must be
 laid upon the altar for my share
 of the guilt or for another's, gladly
 will I yield it, that righteousness
 may be attained & future blessing
 may be assured. God speed the
 day when the right shall prevail
 & our nation shall be pure and happy!

Let me see, where was I?

Excuse my wandering & my strong
 language. I can't help it. I am
 talking with my sister, dear Annie.
 & my feelings will out.

Well, all day long we gazed

on the great natural beauty that surrounded us. Some of the plantations showed painful evidence of the self-imposed ruin that their former owners had brought upon them. At many points on the river "the contrabands" gathered to give us greetings of hearty was the welcome we received. At one place there was a variegated assemblage decked in all the colors of the rainbow beside the hue with which nature had adorned the human form divine.

Exceedingly expressive were the tokens of good will which these simple-hearted children of the sun gave us. One woman seemed quite ungovernable in the joyful exuberance of her feelings. All her limbs came into lively play,

while only the astonishing tenacity of the muscles of her neck prevented her head from taking French leave of her shoulders. Finally in the delirium of her delight, losing self-possession & equilibrium

at once, she rolled down the river bank, but fortunately recovering herself, at it she went again more fiercely than ever, while roars of laughter echoed far and near from shore to shore.

Some of the establishments that lay along the bank were very extensive & splendid. The negro quarters formed little villages, & the white-washed cabins in some cases looked quite neat.

We passed the rebel Senator. Benjamin's place, a fine affair. He is now Attorney General of the traitor confederacy.

We dropped anchor in the stream half a mile off the St. Orleans levee. Having passed a most delightful day. If you could have seen the man's face brighten as the day progressed & could have heard the hum of cheerful voices all over the ship, you might have realized perhaps what inexpressible relief it was to our patriot throng to feel that they were drawing near the

close of their tiresome, comfortless, sickening
ocean voyaging.

We kept six crowded transports in
sight of us all the day. All we
saw of the city that night was the
row of lights that stood in long array
upon the levee. In the morning we
found ourselves lying off the French
portion of the city, which had little
of architectural beauty to boast, with
the exception of a magnificent building
yet incomplete, designed for an Orphan
Asylum.

About noon we steamed up the
river three miles & dropped anchor close
to the levee; said levee is a continuous
wharf, first class make, broadly sloping
down to the river & extending along
the whole city front. Till dark the
orange peddlers hovered & around the
ship in their little skiffs & received
most liberal patronage. In the evening
our 1st Lieut. a fellow Sergeant & myself.

went on shore. We first visited St. Mary's Market, which, though not of great extent, is the finest affair of the kind I have seen. The table almost came, as I sat down to a meal of good fresh bread, nice strong coffee, & passable fish. I saw home comforts;—one knows not how good God's commonest blessings are till He sees fit in a measure to withhold them.

After our repast we strolled a ways about the city, passing the Academy of Music just as its golden audience was leaving. A few ladies graced the throng, & gave our eyes after some satisfaction. I didn't know before how good the sight of a woman was,—another of those common—no uncommon, though plentiful, blessings, the home-guards cannot fully appreciate.

We visited the St. Charles' Hotel, the boast of the city, which we found to be a

massive structure of N. England granites, substantiated in kind, though not particularly beautiful in appearance.

As we wandered through the streets, I was painfully impressed with a sad sense of the utter desolation that prevailed. It was the early hour of evening but hardly a footman did we meet during our long walk through the most stirring part of the city; while the occasional rattling of a stray vehicle over the pavement served only to make the loneliness seem more lonely. At long intervals a single light would gleam from some dwelling though it might indicate the presence of life seemed like a lone sentinel stationed to guard the surrounding ^{solitary} ~~desolation~~ from being disturbed.

The next morning I took a view of the city & daylight only made more glaring the look of desolation which the veil of darkness had half concealed. The long rows of magnificent stone

which the lack of all ^{business} demand kept closed the streets lined with fine residences, forsaken by once haughty occupants, the deflection that marked the bearing of what few inhabitants ^{we met} except the once abused lower class, showed in clearcut tokens the ruinous progress that a self-imposed curse had brought upon the queen of Southern cities.

About noon we weighed anchor & commenced a trip up the river under orders to proceed to Baton Rouge (or Logue). Suffering, as I did, under a serious attack induced by a rather free indulgence & in delicious oranges & by the use of the villainous Mississippi water, I witnessed little of the scenery till it was too dark to enjoy it. Our officers had word that the day before a boat had been found upon some thirty miles from N. Orleans & several of the crew killed. Our guns were ordered out & loaded, & every preparation made for battle. One seven crowded transports were

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conveyed up the river by several gunboats. We passed the point of apprehended danger during the night without alarm & at 7 o'clock A.M. Dec. 11th, ~~anchored~~ ^{halted} off the city of B. R. The place is beautifully situated upon a commanding bluff that rises by a fine slope some forty or fifty feet from the river level. The morning was exquisite, with a clear sky a genial sun, & a still atmosphere. Suddenly a loud report broke upon the quiet that had reigned. Rushing to the other side of the ship, to see whence so bellicose a sound proceeded, on the instant I saw a splendid puff of fire & smoke to issue from the iron side of the gunboat Essex. Half a dozen shells, or thereabouts, were ^{being} making grand music as they sped forth on their mission of conciliation.

Some smart running was visible in the streets of the city, but many of the inhabitants came down to the water's edge.

No response being made to the firing of our gunboats a skiff put out from the Katardin whose crew landed & proceeded to raise ~~the~~ "Old Glory" over the State House. How the shout rose as the banner we love appeared against the clear sky!

The 41st Mass. Reg. was the first to land, next the 28th Conn. & then came our turn. We marched up the bluff, & took our station behind breastworks that were thrown up by our troops after the battle last August. Near us was a wide tract covered with the ruins of burned dwellings. We learned that on our approach some two or three hundred rebels who had been holding the place, "Skedaddled," so to speak, in the tallest kind of hurry.

During the P. M. we pitched our tents, while the officers found themselves capital quarters in a fine mansion, close by us.

The next day I took a little ramble about the town. The same melancholy air of desolation

every where provided that so painfully impressed me at N. Orleans. This once beautiful town, seemed to have settled down in a kind of despairing helplessness, without life enough to lament the day of its prosperity. Scarce a store was open for such use as were some men designed for show than traffic. For every article of merchandise commanded such fabulous prices that no common piece could meet the demand. The inhabitants were seen few & far between, nor did their looks strongly remind one of "angel visits".

I made a tour of exploration over the state-house, a most noble edifice. Its architectural proportions are the finest of most any building I have seen. It is in the Castilian style. The towers are very massive & finely affect the corners. The building is of brick, made to represent white marble; its position is at once exceedingly beautiful & very commanding. The view of the river is very fine if one can obtain an outlook

to upon a very wide sweep of country from its windows & towers. The interior finish of the edifice was of the nicest sort, but within its walls was the darkest picture ever had seen. Broken chairs, shattered window-glass, massive volumes, newspapers, state documents &c &c &c were strewn in most charming confusion over the floors. Both the Senate Hall of the "House" were superb halls, but I must confess that there was considerable satisfaction to my Yankee eyes as I gazed on the speaking monument of the ruin, that marked the very spot where Jataro held his council of state long enough to induce a set of southern fools to pass the ordinance of secession.

But how I babble, forgive me that your patience is so tried but I don't seem to have the power of condensation of thought.

On Friday Dec. 19th our regiment was ordered on picket duty. Your brother in charge of a squad of three men were stationed at the farthest outpost. We took post at a deserted secession house, which gave

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evidence of having been occupied by a family that made some pretension both to piety & refinement. I found several Methodist journals, fragments of the Eclectic, and an old copy of Tacitus' Histories which latter work had a young lady's name on its page written in a neat hand. The last mentioned fact gave me a little comfort, moreover it was only last winter that I was studying the same treatise at college.

We confiscated some sweet potatoes for supper & roasted them in the fireplace of our captured cattle. Of course we made of them tea, with a little sugar, butter & salt that we obtained of some neighboring contrabands.

During the afternoon we passed a contraband over our lines, who escaped from the rebels at Port Hudson, some dozen miles to the north of us, where they are strongly entrenching themselves & are concentrating a large force. The poor fellow was pursued by men & bloodhounds, fired at, & nearly overtaken.

I had nearly discharged my gun at him, in accordance with my orders, as at first he attempted to run, but my loud assurances that he should not be harmed if he gave himself up, brought him to us at last. He was carried off with a good many other poor slaves when our forces occupied the city, & forced to work on the rebel fortifications.

During the night little occurred to alarm. Though such a tremendous medley of harmonious discord never ^{before} distracted my sensitive ear. Bloodhounds baying, horses neighing, donkeys braying, wildcats screeching &c &c, in the old phrase, made "night hideous." In the morning we confiscated ^{seized} & roasted a good fat hen, getting a first rate breakfast. I really quite enjoyed my first experience of picketing in the enemy's country. Though there was actual danger in the business, which served to give it the more zest.

We were quite near the battle-field of

Aug 6th, which I purpose to visit on the first opportunity.

In a skirmish a short time since our cavalry captured a Brig. Gen. —, a paroled prisoner, together with a Lieut. & a few more rebel scamps. They were confined in the State House. Last Sabbath P.M., said State House took fire by some unexplained means. It burned all the night making a grand spectacle, & though the destruction of a noble work of art the fire seemed to me to be a purging flame. How are the mighty fallen!

Last Sabbath our regiment attended service with the 24th Conn in the Meth. Church. It did my heart good to sit once more in the house of God & I felt as though I wanted to shout when the walls rang with sublime Old Hundred sung by a thousand soldier voices. After the first service I went to a negro prayer meeting in the vestry below. The singing had a weird, wild, sort of harmony to it that acted strongly on the feelings, why, you could not tell, the poor wretches were delighted to see us & after the meeting

came crowding about us to shake hands & bless us.

Now, dearest Annie, you are quite wearied out with my prolix style. Well you are responsible for suffering such an infliction of a brother to be put upon your kind patience. But bear with me yet a season, my sister. Let a true brother's heart in a measure atone for a head that may not be over strong.

Let me again ask my sister to pray for me. There are a good many little trials & vexations that accompany my position which require much Christian grace & much manliness of soul to bear without murmuring. Particularly if one be of a sensitive, quick temperament, is it hard to keep the spirit from drooping a little at times. If God brings me home again in safety, I want your brother to come back to you more noble, manly & strong than when he left you & you wish the same.

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very many of the men are much reduced by
change of climate & the effects of Mississippi
river water. There must be near 20,000 troops
here. You may hear of an attack upon
Port Hudson or some neighboring point soon.
It is quite likely our regiment may not be
engaged in the fight, but may remain here
to garrison the city. If we are called upon
God give us courageous victory! We hope to
do our duty.

About 1000 contrabands are now within
our lines & still they come flocking in.
I will tell you more about them some
other time.

My love to all of Mr. Rydman's family,
especially remember me to dear little Tommy.
My regards also to your mother & the General (3).
Direct as before advised, Banks Express.
Your brother
with much love

Martin L. W.