

Washington, D.C. September 11th 1862

My Dear Sister:

Tis a drizzly day with us today, and opprefsively warm and heavy. Just the kind of temperature and atmosphere to make one's head feel muddled as though a gourd filled with coal tar and ochre and one's clothes stick to the body as though rubbed down with molasses. Still the rain is a blessing to country and city for the dry heat of the last month was laying up a stock of fevers that each succeeding day now added to wonderfully, and as for myself, as badly and as thoroughly mixed and grimy as I feel, the rain is soothing and as it were washing away a sort of nervous irritation from which I've suffered exceedingly for the past 48 hours.

The city is again quiet. The excitement incident to the operations up the Potomac having died down as might say the Universal Yankee Nation as represented here of civilized society and national existence has adapted itself to the new circumstances as though they were a normal condition.

Very little is definitely known by the public of what is going on in the army and even the plainest proofs upon which to predicate opinions seem unheeded. Day before yesterday half the remaining cavalry about Washington were forwarded to McClellan and that evening an immense baggage train loaded with private baggage, knapsacks, etc. and were sent in from McClellan. The army has divested itself of everything calculated to encumber its movements. It's in complete time for rapid movements. Yesterday was a busy day at the hospitals in sending off mainly northward convalescence patients able to

endure a journey to New York or New England. A general clearance takes place only when a great battle has taken place or is momentarily expected. The latest indications however by news from above publicly known are the that the rebels will endeavor to recrofs into Virginia without risking a general engagement. I'll not pretend to guefs what they will do, but wouldn't they feel somewhat thunderstruck to find an obstacle consisting of a hundred cannon with men to back them in the way of such an attempt. The usual way of passing obstacles on the march would hardly suffice on such an occasion.

Circumstances have prevented me from going about much since I came to the city though occasionally manage to see some of the sights. I hope to be out of this suspense in a day or two more. This being unable to be prepared for anything is absolutely distrefsing as well as embarafsing. Day before yesterday I was visited by a surgeon just in the night before from the battlefield near Manassas. You can form no idea of the horrors of this place. As late as Saturday, one week after the battle, over one thousand (1000) of our dead still lay on the field wholly uncared for black and swollen and putrid from exposure and in their midst, mostly in open air occasionally in bough huts or booths were 1500 of our wounded with so scanty attendance that many were obliged to be 24 hours at a time without even water and hundreds had received no surgical attendance whatever. And in addition, the country for miles was strewn with dead horses with the bodies of our dead so filling the air with an intolerable stench that life itself was a burden. Great numbers of wounded died from absolute starvation. The party with which the doctor came in were in the third day without food when they reached the union lines. The rebels gave us permission to bury the dead and remove the wounded and so paid no

attention to them themselves but our government underestimated the task, while the rebels seized the hospital trains going out under a flag of truce holding the supplies to be grudgingly doled out upon requisition and appropriated so many of the horses that many of the wagons had to be left behind. The authorities here has pressed into service for the occasion everything in the city. Omnibuses, hacks and furniture carts and many gentleman sent private carriage. The sharpest practice of the rebels however was the seizing as of slaves of near a hundred negro teamsters, mostly omnibus and hack drivers.

Occasionally, conduct as infamous as is brought to light in our own midst. One of the boarders here is a Mr. Witmore or Whitmore of Columbus Ohio assisting the Sanitary Committee in distributing necessities to our sick and wounded. A few days since he sent quite a quantity of articles consisting of shirts, bandages, lint, brandy and wines to one of the hospitals ahead of his own visit, the whole being the amount needed to supply the most pressing wants of several hospitals as ascertained by a previous visit. On his arrival he found that all of the wines and brandy (packed underneath the articles) missing but one bottle, no one had seen it. The remaining bottle he placed on a table partly behind him and while counting the other articles he saw one of the surgeons slip out his hand, take and put that bottle in his pocket and turn to leave the room. These are the kind of men that have charge of one half our sick and wounded. We have some noble men for surgeons, assistants, nurses etc but the conduct of fully one half of them is marked by phases of fraud, deception, theft and brutality at which even an army contractor would blush. How fearfully is the army and the country also for that matter suffering from the indecision and imbecility of most of its rulers. Vacillation and weaknefs marks the movement of some who should be girded with a will of iron. Even the severity which in

some instances has been forced upon the authorities is characterized by a wavering feebleness. The government is strong but its acts are weak. I fear the course events are taking. I fear we are to have a new revolution, and revolutions, end as they may, leave few vestiges of what was before them. I shrink from contemplating our country turbulent with two revolutions, though a little longer of past and present management, incompetent measures, may justify the wiping out of old accounts. I hope it may not come to this, but the whole country is groaning under a load to which incompetency is daily adding. I hope and pray new troubles may be averted. I have no fear that the rebellion now a revolution will succeed. This will be one country, one people.

Your last letter was very welcome. I was greatly amused at the partial list of enlistments in Versailles, and gratified to learn that the quota for the town was made out without drafting, Jimmy North a soldier! Pray did he ask Mr. Pettit about it before he enlisted; and I wonder if Joel will be just suited. The world surely moves and if not twill when they get on the field of battle. I think I see Jimmy surrounding a half dozen rebels or outrunning the light cavalry in headlong pursuit of a defeated enemy. But even Jimmy may be of benefit. I hope so at least.

I am sorry I shall not see George Van Vlack. It seems scarcely credible that he is able to perform military duty. I am most heartily glad to hear he is. Henry I hear nothing about.

The news of Chauncey was a great relief. I learned he was left behind but could ascertain nothing positive as to his situation. I trust he may be sent north soon, and if possible discharged. He has done enough and performed well every duty of soldier. I shall never forget how much I owe him.

Give my love to Jennie S. when you see her. It troubles me to think she is wearing herself out by overwork in the Asylum. And give my love to all the folks at home and remember me to my friends. If I am here long, I'll write to Dora. tell her.

Affectionately yours,

James M. Pettit