

think about him. Mother, write to me how Nancy and the little boys are getting along. I got thinking last night about little California.[22] O how I wished I had her here for an hour to take care of--dear little girl. I don't think I ever saw a young one I took to so much--but I mustn't slight Hattie; I like her too. Mother, I am still going among the hospitals; there is plenty of need, just the same as ever. I go every day or evening. I have not heard from George--I have no doubt the 51st is still at Crab Orchard.

Mother, I hope you will try to write. I send you my love, and to Jeff and Mat and all--so good-bye, dear mother.

WALT.

LETTERS OF 1864

I

Washington, Friday afternoon, Jan. 29. '64. DEAR MOTHER--Your letter of Tuesday night came this forenoon--the one of Sunday night I received yesterday. Mother, you don't say in either of them whether George has re-enlisted or not--or is that not yet decided positively one way or the

other?

O mother, how I should like to be home (I don't want more than two or three days). I want to see George (I have his photograph on the wall, right over my table all the time), and I want to see California--you must always write in your letters how she is. I shall write to Han this afternoon or to-morrow morning and tell her probably George will come out and see her, and that if he does you will send her word beforehand.

Jeff, my dear brother, if there should be the change made in the works, and things all overturned, you mustn't mind--I dare say you will pitch into something better. I believe a real overturn in the dead old beaten track of a man's life, especially a young man's, is always likely to turn out best, though it worries one at first dreadfully. Mat, I want to see you most sincerely--they haven't put in anything in the last two or three letters about you, but I suppose you are well, my dear sister.

Mother, the young man that I took care of, Lewis Brown, is pretty well, but very restless--he is doing well now, but there is a long road before him yet; it is torture for him to be tied so to his cot, this weather; he is a very noble young man and has suffered very much. He is a Maryland boy and (like the Southerners when they are Union) I think he is as strong and resolute a Union boy as there is in the United States. He went out in a Maryland reg't, but transferred to a N. Y. battery. But I find so many noble men in the ranks I have ceased to wonder at it. I think the soldiers from the New England States and the Western States are splendid, and the

country parts of N. Y. and Pennsylvania too. I think less of the great cities than I used to. I know there are black sheep enough even in the ranks, but the general rule is the soldiers are noble, very.

Mother, I wonder if George thinks as I do about the best way to enjoy a visit home, after all. When I come home again, I shall not go off gallivanting with my companions half as much nor a quarter as much as I used to, but shall spend the time quietly home with you while I do stay; it is a great humbug spreeing around, and a few choice friends for a man, the real right kind in a quiet way, are enough.

Mother, I hope you take things easy, don't you? Mother, you know I was always advising you to let things go and sit down and take what comfort you can while you do live. It is very warm here; this afternoon it is warm enough for July--the sun burns where it shines on your face; it is pretty dusty in the principal streets.

Congress is in session; I see Odell, Kalbfleisch, etc., often. I have got acquainted with Mr. Garfield, an M. C. from Ohio, and like him very much indeed (he has been a soldier West, and I believe a good brave one--was a major general). I don't go much to the debates this session yet. Congress will probably keep in session till well into the summer. As to what course things will take, political or military, there's no telling. I think, though, the Secesh military power is getting more and more shaky. How they can make any headway against our new, large, and fresh armies next season passes my wit to see.

Mother, I was talking with a pretty high officer here, who is behind the scenes--I was mentioning that I had a great desire to be present at a first-class battle; he told me if I would only stay around here three or four weeks longer my wish would probably be gratified. I asked him what he meant, what he alluded to specifically, but he would not say anything further--so I remain as much in the dark as before--only there seemed to be some meaning in his remark, and it was made to me only as there was no one else in hearing at the moment (he is quite an admirer of my poetry).

The re-enlistment of the veterans is the greatest thing yet; it pleases everybody but the Rebels--and surprises everybody too. Mother, I am well and fat (I must weigh about 206), so Washington must agree with me. I work three or four hours a day copying. Dear mother, I send you and Hattie my love, as you say she is a dear little girl. Mother, try to write every week, even if only a few lines. Love to George and Jeff and Mat.

WALT.

II

Washington, Feb. 2, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I am writing this by the side of the young man you asked about, Lewis Brown in Armory-square hospital. He is getting along very well indeed--the amputation is healing up good, and he does not suffer anything like as much as he did. I see him every

day. We have had real hot weather here, and for the last three days wet and rainy; it is more like June than February. Mother, I wrote to Han last Saturday--she must have got it yesterday. I have not heard anything from home since a week ago (your last letter). I suppose you got a letter from me Saturday last. I am well as usual. There has been several hundred sick soldiers brought in here yesterday. I have been around among them to-day all day--it is enough to make me heart-sick, the old times over again; they are many of them mere wrecks, though young men (sickness is worse in some respects than wounds). One boy about 16, from Portland, Maine, only came from home a month ago, a recruit; he is here now very sick and down-hearted, poor child. He is a real country boy; I think has consumption. He was only a week with his reg't. I sat with him a long time; I saw [it] did him great good. I have been feeding some their dinners. It makes me feel quite proud, I find so frequently I can do with the men what no one else at all can, getting them to eat (some that will not touch their food otherwise, nor for anybody else)--it is sometimes quite affecting, I can tell you. I found such a case to-day, a soldier with throat disease, very bad. I fed him quite a dinner; the men, his comrades around, just stared in wonder, and one of them told me afterwards that he (the sick man) had not eat so much at a meal in three months. Mother, I shall have my hands pretty full now for a while--write all about things home.

WALT.

Lewis Brown says I must give you his love--he says he knows he would like

you if he should see you.

III

Washington, Friday afternoon, Feb. 5, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I am going down in front, in the midst of the army, to-morrow morning, to be gone for about a week--so I thought I would write you a few lines now, to let you know.

Mother, I suppose you got my letter written last Tuesday--I have not got any from home now for a number of days. I am well and hearty. The young man Lewis Brown is able to be up a little on crutches. There is quite a number of sick young men I have taken in hand, from the late arrivals, that I am sorry to leave. Sick and down-hearted and lonesome, they think so much of a friend, and I get so attached to them too--but I want to go down in camp once more very much; and I think I shall be back in a week. I shall spend most of my time among the sick and wounded in the camp hospitals. If I had means I should stop with them, poor boys, or go among them periodically, dispensing what I had, as long as the war lasts, down among the worst of it (although what are collected here in hospital seem to me about as severe and needy cases as any, after all).

Mother, I want to hear about you all, and about George and how he is spending his time home. Mother, I do hope you are well and in good spirits, and Jeff and Mat and all, and dear little California and

Hattie--I send them all my love. Mother, I may write to you from down in front--so good-bye, dear mother, for present.

WALT.

I hope I shall find several letters waiting for me when I get back here.

IV

Culpepper, Virginia, Friday night, Feb. 12, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I am still stopping down in this region. I am a good deal of the time down within half a mile of our picket lines, so that you see I can indeed call myself in the front. I stopped yesterday with an artillery camp in the 1st Corps at the invitation of Capt. Crawford, who said that he knew me in Brooklyn. It is close to the lines--I asked him if he did not think it dangerous. He said, No, he could have a large force of infantry to help him there, in very short metre, if there was any sudden emergency. The troops here are scattered all around, much more apart than they seemed to me to be opposite Fredericksburg last winter. They mostly have good huts and fireplaces, etc. I have been to a great many of the camps, and I must say I am astonished [how] good the houses are almost everywhere. I have not seen one regiment, nor any part of one, in the poor uncomfortable little shelter tents that I saw so common last winter after Fredericksburg--but all the men have built huts of logs and mud. A good many of them would be comfortable enough to live in under any

circumstances. I have been in the division hospitals around here. There are not many men sick here, and no wounded--they now send them on to Washington. I shall return there in a few days, as I am very clear that the real need of one's services is there after all--there the worst cases concentrate, and probably will, while the war lasts. I suppose you know that what we call hospital here in the field is nothing but a collection of tents on the bare ground for a floor--rather hard accommodation for a sick man. They heat them there by digging a long trough in the ground under them, covering it over with old railroad iron and earth, and then building a fire at one end and letting it draw through and go out at the other, as both ends are open. This heats the ground through the middle of the hospital quite hot. I find some poor creatures crawling about pretty weak with diarrhoea; there is a great deal of that; they keep them until they get very bad indeed, and then send them to Washington. This aggravates the complaint, and they come into Washington in a terrible condition. O mother, how often and how many I have seen come into Washington from this awful complaint after such an experience as I have described--with the look of death on their poor young faces; they keep them so long in the field hospitals with poor accommodations the disease gets too deeply seated.

To-day I have been out among some of the camps of the 2nd division of the 1st Corps. I have been wandering around all day, and have had a very good time, over woods, hills, and gullies--indeed, a real soldier's march. The weather is good and the travelling quite tolerable. I have been in the camps of some Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York regiments. I have

friends in them, and went out to see them, and see soldiering generally, as I can never cease to crave more and more knowledge of actual soldiers' life, and to be among them as much as possible. This evening I have also been in a large wagoners' camp. They had good fires and were very cheerful. I went to see a friend there, too, but did not find him in. It is curious how many I find that I know and that know me. Mother, I have no difficulty at all in making myself at home among the soldiers, teamsters, or any--I most always find they like to have me very much; it seems to do them good. No doubt they soon feel that my heart and sympathies are truly with them, and it is both a novelty and pleases them and touches their feelings, and so doubtless does them good--and I am sure it does that to me. There is more fun around here than you would think for. I told you about the theatre the 14th Brooklyn has got up--they have songs and burlesques, etc.; some of the performers real good. As I write this I have heard in one direction or another two or three good bands playing--and hear one tooting away some gay tunes now, though it is quite late at night. Mother, I don't know whether I mentioned in my last letter that I took dinner with Col. Fowler one day early part of the week. His wife is stopping here. I was down at the 14th as I came along this evening, too--one of the officers told me about a presentation to George of a sword, etc.--he said he see it in the papers. The 14th invited me to come and be their guest while I staid here, but I have not been able to accept. Col. Fowler uses me tip-top--he is provost marshal of this region; makes a good officer. Mother, I could get no pen and ink to-night. Well, dear mother, I send you my love, and to George and Jeff and Mat and little girls and all.

WALT.

Direct to care of Major Hapgood as before, and write soon. Mother, I suppose you got a letter I wrote from down here last Monday.

V

Washington, March 2, 1864. DEAR MOTHER--You or Jeff must try to write as soon as you receive this and let me know how little Sis is. Tell me if she got entirely over the croup and how she is--also about George's trunks. I do hope he received them; it was such a misfortune; I want to hear the end of it; I am in hopes I shall hear that he has got them. I have not seen in the papers whether the 51st has left New York yet. Mother, I want to hear all about home and all the occurrences, especially the two things I have just mentioned, and how you are, for somehow I was thinking from your letters lately whether you was as well as usual or not. Write how my dear sister Mat is too, and whether you are still going to stay there in Portland avenue the coming year. Well, dear mother, I am just the same here--nothing new. I am well and hearty, and constantly moving around among the wounded and sick. There are a great many of the latter coming up--the hospitals here are quite full--lately they have [been] picking out in the hospitals all that had pretty well recovered, and sending them back to their regiments. They seem to be determined to strengthen the army this spring to the utmost. They are sending down many to their reg'ts that are

not fit to go in my opinion--then there are squads and companies, and reg'ts, too, passing through here in one steady stream, going down to the front, returning from furlough home; but then there are quite a number leaving the army on furlough, re-enlisting, and going North for a while. They pass through here quite largely. Mother, Lewis Brown is getting quite well; he will soon be able to have a wooden leg put on. He is very restless and active, and wants to go round all the time. Sam Beatty is here in Washington. We have had quite a snow storm, but [it] is clear and sunny to-day here, but sloshy. I am wearing my army boots--anything but the dust. Dear Mother, I want to see you and Sis and Mat and all very much. If I can get a chance I think I shall come home for a while. I want to try to bring out a book of poems, a new one, to be called "Drum-Taps," and I want to come to New York for that purpose, too.

Mother, I haven't given up the project of lecturing, either, but whatever I do, I shall for the main thing devote myself for years to come to these wounded and sick, what little I can. Well, good-bye, dear mother, for present--write soon.

WALT.

VI

Washington, March 15, 1861. DEAREST MOTHER--I got a letter from Jeff last Sunday--he says you have a very bad cold indeed. Dear Mother, I feel

very much concerned about it; I do hope it has passed over before this. Jeff wrote me about the house. I hope it will be so you can both remain in the same house; it would be much more satisfaction.... The poor boy very sick of brain fever I was with, is dead; he was only 19 and a noble boy, so good though out of his senses some eight days, though still having a kind of idea of things. No relative or friend was with him. It was very sad. I was with him considerable, only just sitting by him soothing him. He was wandering all the time. His talk was so affecting it kept the tears in my eyes much of the time. The last twenty-four hours he sank very rapidly. He had been sick some months ago and was put in the 6th Invalid Corps--they ought to have sent him home instead. The next morning after his death his brother came, a very fine man, postmaster at Lyne Ridge, Pa.--he was much affected, and well he might be.

Mother, I think it worse than ever here in the hospitals. We are getting the dregs as it were of the sickness and awful hardships of the past three years. There is the most horrible cases of diarrhoea you ever conceived of and by the hundreds and thousands; I suppose from such diet as they have in the army. Well, dear mother, I will not write any more on the sick, and yet I know you wish to hear about them. Every one is so unfeeling; it has got to be an old story. There is no good nursing. O I wish you were--or rather women of such qualities as you and Mat--were here in plenty, to be stationed as matrons among the poor sick and wounded men. Just to be present would be enough--O what good it would do them. Mother, I feel so sick when I see what kind of people there are among them, with charge over them--so cold and ceremonious, afraid to touch them. Well,

mother, I fear I have written you a flighty kind of a letter--I write in haste.

WALT.

The papers came right, mother--love to Jeff, Mat, and all.

VII

Washington, March 22, 1861. DEAREST MOTHER--I feel quite bad to hear that you are not well--have a pain in your side, and a very bad cold. Dear Mother, I hope it is better. I wish you would write to me, or Jeff would, right away, as I shall not feel easy until I hear. I rec'd George's letter. Jeff wrote with it, about your feeling pretty sick, and the pain. Mother, I also rec'd your letter a few days before. You say the Browns acted very mean, and I should say they did indeed, but as it is going to remain the same about the house, I should let it all pass. I am very glad Mat and Jeff are going to remain; I should not have felt satisfied if they and you had been separated. I have written a letter to Han, with others enclosed, a good long letter (took two postage stamps). I have written to George too, directed it to Knoxville. Mother, everything is the same with me; I am feeling very well indeed, the old trouble of my head stopt and my ears affected, has not troubled me any since I came back here from Brooklyn. I am writing this in Major Hapgood's old office, cor. 15th and F streets, where I have my old table and window. It is dusty and chilly

to-day, anything but agreeable. Gen. Grant is expected every moment now in the Army of the Potomac to take active command. I have just this moment heard from the front--there is nothing yet of a movement, but each side is continually on the alert, expecting something to happen. O mother, to think that we are to have here soon what I have seen so many times, the awful loads and trains and boat loads of poor bloody and pale and wounded young men again--for that is what we certainly will, and before very long. I see all the little signs, getting ready in the hospitals, etc.; it is dreadful when one thinks about it. I sometimes think over the sights I have myself seen, the arrival of the wounded after a battle, and the scenes on the field too, and I can hardly believe my own recollections. What an awful thing war is! Mother, it seems not men but a lot of devils and butchers butchering each other.

Dear mother, I think twenty times a day about your sickness. O, I hope it is not so bad as Jeff wrote. He said you was worse than you had ever been before, and he would write me again. Well, he must, even if only a few lines. What have you heard from Mary and her family, anything? Well, dear mother, I hope this will find you quite well of the pain, and of the cold--write about the little girls and Mat and all.

WALT.

VIII

Washington, March 29, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I have written to George again to Knoxville. Things seem to be quiet down there so far. We think here that our forces are going to be made strongest here in Virginia this spring, and every thing bent to take Richmond. Grant is here; he is now down at headquarters in the field, Brandy station. We expect fighting before long; there are many indications. I believe I told you they had sent up all the sick from front. [The letter is here mutilated so as to be illegible; from the few remaining words, however, it is possible to gather that the writer is describing the arrival of a train of wounded, over 600, in Washington during a terribly rainy afternoon. The letter continues:] I could not keep the tears out of my eyes. Many of the poor young men had to be moved on stretchers, with blankets over them, which soon soaked as wet as water in the rain. Most were sick cases, but some badly wounded. I came up to the nearest hospital and helped. Mother, it was a dreadful night (last Friday night)--pretty dark, the wind gusty, and the rain fell in torrents. One poor boy--this is a sample of one case out of the 600--he seemed to be quite young, he was quite small (I looked at his body afterwards), he groaned some as the stretcher bearers were carrying him along, and again as they carried him through the hospital gate. They set down the stretcher and examined him, and the poor boy was dead. They took him into the ward, and the doctor came immediately, but it was all of no use. The worst of it is, too, that he is entirely unknown--there was nothing on his clothes, or any one with him to identify him, and he is altogether unknown. Mother, it is enough to rack one's heart--such things. Very likely his folks will never know in the world what has become of him. Poor, poor child, for he appeared as though he

could be but 18. I feel lately as though I must have some intermission. I feel well and hearty enough, and was never better, but my feelings are kept in a painful condition a great part of the time. Things get worse and worse, as to the amount and sufferings of the sick, and as I have said before, those who have to do with them are getting more and more callous and indifferent. Mother, when I see the common soldiers, what they go through, and how everybody seems to try to pick upon them, and what humbug there is over them every how, even the dying soldier's money stolen from his body by some scoundrel attendant, or from [the] sick one, even from under his head, which is a common thing, and then the agony I see every day, I get almost frightened at the world. Mother, I will try to write more cheerfully next time--but I see so much. Well, good-bye for present, dear mother.

WALT.

IX

Washington, Thursday afternoon, March 31, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I have just this moment received your letter dated last Monday evening. Dear mother, I have not seen anything in any paper where the 51st is, nor heard anything, but I do not feel any ways uneasy about them. I presume they are at Knoxville, Tennessee. Mother, they are now paying off many of the regiments in this army--but about George, I suppose there will be delays in sending money, etc. Dear mother, I wish I had some money to send you,

but I am living very close by the wind. Mother, I will try somehow to send you something worth while, and I do hope you will not worry and feel unhappy about money matters; I know things are very high. Mother, I suppose you got my letter written Tuesday last, 29th March, did you not? I have been going to write to Jeff for more than a month--I laid out to write a good long letter, but something has prevented me, one thing and another; but I will try to write to-morrow sure. Mother, I have been in the midst of suffering and death for two months worse than ever--the only comfort is that I have been the cause of some beams of sunshine upon their suffering and gloomy souls, and bodies too. Many of the dying I have been with, too.

Well, mother, you must not worry about the grocery bill, etc., though I suppose you will say that it is easier said than followed (as to me, I believe I worry about worldly things less than ever, if that is possible). Tell Jeff and Mat I send them my love. Gen. Grant has just come in town from front. The country here is all mad again. I am going to a spiritualist medium this evening--I expect it will be a humbug, of course. I will tell you next letter. Dear mother, keep a good heart.

WALT.

How is California? Tell Hat her Uncle Walt will come home one of these days, and take her to New York to walk in Broadway. Poor little Jim, I should like to see him. There is a rich young friend of mine wants me to go to Idaho with him to make money.

X

Washington, Tuesday afternoon, April 5, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I got a letter from Jeff yesterday--he says you often work too hard, exposing yourself; I suppose, scrubbing, etc., and the worst of it is I am afraid it is true. Mother, I would take things easy, and let up on the scrubbing and such things; they may be needed perhaps, but they ain't half as much needed as that you should be as well as possible, and free from rheumatism and cold. Jeff says that ---- has had the chicken pox. Has she got all over it? I want to hear. So Nance has had another child, poor little one; there don't seem to be much show for it, poor little young one, these times. We are having awful rainy weather here. It is raining to-day steady and spiteful enough. The soldiers in camp are having the benefit of it, and the sick, many of them. There is a great deal of rheumatism and also throat disease, and they are affected by the weather. I have writ to George again, directed to Knoxville. Mother, I got a letter this morning from Lewis Brown, the young man that had his leg amputated two months or so ago (the one that I slept in the hospital by several nights for fear of hemorrhage from the amputation). He is home at Elkton, Maryland, on furlough. He wants me to come out there, but I believe I shall not go--he is doing very well. There are many very bad now in hospital, so many of the soldiers are getting broke down after two years, or two and a half, exposure and bad diet, pork, hard biscuit, bad water or none at all, etc., etc.--so we have them brought up here. Oh, it is terrible, and getting

worse, worse, worse. I thought it was bad; to see these I sometimes think is more pitiful still.

Well, mother, I went to see the great spirit medium, Foster. There were some little things some might call curious, perhaps, but it is a shallow thing and a humbug. A gentleman who was with me was somewhat impressed, but I could not see anything in it worth calling supernatural. I wouldn't turn on my heel to go again and see such things, or twice as much. We had table rappings and lots of nonsense. I will give you particulars when I come home one of these days. Jeff, I believe there is a fate on your long letter; I thought I would write it to-day, but as it happens I will hardly get this in the mail, I fear, in time for to-day. O how I want to see you all, and Sis and Hat. Well, I have scratched out a great letter just as fast as I could write.

Wednesday forenoon. Mother, I didn't get the letter in the mail yesterday. I have just had my breakfast, some good tea and good toast and butter. I write this in my room, 456 Sixth st. The storm seems to be over. Dear mother, I hope you are well and in good spirits--write to me often as you can, and Jeff too. Any news from Han?

WALT.

XI

Washington, April 10, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I rec'd your letter and sent the one you sent for George immediately--he must have got it the next day. I had got one from him before yours arrived. I mean to go to Annapolis and see him.

Mother, we expect a commencement of the fighting below very soon; there is every indication of it. We have had about as severe rain storms here lately as I ever see. It is middling pleasant now. There are exciting times in Congress--the Copperheads are getting furious and want to recognize the Southern Confederacy. This is a pretty time to talk of recognizing such villains after what they have done, and after what has transpired the last three years. After first Fredericksburg I felt discouraged myself, and doubted whether our rulers could carry on the war--but that has passed away. The war must be carried on, and I could willingly go myself in the ranks if I thought it would profit more than at present, and I don't know sometimes but I shall as it is. Mother, you don't know what a feeling a man gets after being in the active sights and influences of the camp, the army, the wounded, etc. He gets to have a deep feeling he never experienced before--the flag, the tune of Yankee Doodle and similar things, produce an effect on a fellow never such before. I have seen some bring tears on the men's cheeks, and others turn pale, under such circumstances. I have a little flag; it belonged to one of our cavalry reg'ts; presented to me by one of the wounded. It was taken by the Secesh in a cavalry fight, and rescued by our men in a bloody little skirmish. It cost three men's lives, just to get one little flag, four by three. Our men rescued it, and tore it from the breast of a dead

Rebel--all that just for the name of getting their little banner back again. The man that got it was very badly wounded, and they let him keep it. I was with him a good deal; he wanted to give me something, he said, he didn't expect to live, so he gave me the little banner as a keepsake. I mention this, mother, to show you a specimen of the feeling. There isn't a reg't, cavalry or infantry, that wouldn't do the same on occasion.

Tuesday morning, April 12. Mother, I will finish my letter this morning. It is a beautiful day to-day. I was up in Congress very late last night. The house had a very excited night session about expelling the men that want to recognize the Southern Confederacy. You ought to hear the soldiers talk. They are excited to madness. We shall probably have hot times here, not in the army alone. The soldiers are true as the North Star. I send you a couple of envelopes, and one to George. Write how you are, dear mother, and all the rest. I want to see you all. Jeff, my dear brother, I wish you was here, and Mat too. Write how Sis is. I am well, as usual; indeed first rate every way. I want to come on in a month and try to print my "Drum-Taps." I think it may be a success pecuniarily, too. Dearest mother, I hope this will find you entirely well, and dear sister Mat and all.

WALT.

XII

Washington, Tuesday noon, April 19, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I haven't

heard any news from home now in more than a week. I hope you are well, dear mother, and all the rest too. There is nothing new with me. I can only write the same old story about going to the hospitals, etc., etc. I have not heard anything since from George--have you heard anything further? I have written to him to Annapolis. We are having it pretty warm here to-day, after a long spell of rain storms, but the last two or three days very fine. Mother, I suppose you got my letter of last Tuesday, 12th. I went down to the Capitol the nights of the debate on the expulsion of Mr. Long last week. They had night sessions, very late. I like to go to the House of Representatives at night; it is the most magnificent hall, so rich and large, and lighter at night than it is days, and still not a light visible--it comes through the glass roof--but the speaking and the ability of the members is nearly always on a low scale. It is very curious and melancholy to see such a rate of talent there, such tremendous times as these--I should say about the same range of genius as our old friend Dr. Swaim, just about. You may think I am joking, but I am not, mother--I am speaking in perfect earnest. The Capitol grows upon one in time, especially as they have got the great figure on top of it now, and you can see it very well. It is a great bronze figure, the Genius of Liberty I suppose. It looks wonderful towards sundown. I love to go and look at it. The sun when it is nearly down shines on the headpiece and it dazzles and glistens like a big star; it looks quite curious.

Well, mother, we have commenced on another summer, and what it will bring forth who can tell? The campaign of this summer is expected here to be more active and severe than any yet. As I told you in a former letter,

Grant is determined to bend everything to take Richmond and break up the banditti of scoundrels that have stuck themselves up there as a "government." He is in earnest about it; his whole soul and all his thoughts night and day are upon it. He is probably the most in earnest of any man in command or in the Government either--that's something, ain't it, mother?--and they are bending everything to fight for their last chance--calling in their forces from Southwest, etc. Dear mother, give my love to dear brother Jeff and Mat and all. I write this in my room, 6th st.

WALT.

XIII

Washington, April 26, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--Burnside's army passed through here yesterday. I saw George and walked with him in the regiment for some distance and had quite a talk. He is very well; he is very much tanned and looks hardy. I told him all the latest news from home. George stands it very well, and looks and behaves the same noble and good fellow he always was and always will be. It was on 14th st. I watched three hours before the 51st came along. I joined him just before they came to where the President and Gen. Burnside were standing with others on a balcony, and the interest of seeing me, etc., made George forget to notice the President and salute him. He was a little annoyed at forgetting it. I called his attention to it, but we had passed a little too far on, and

George wouldn't turn round even ever so little. However, there was a great many more than half the army passed without noticing Mr. Lincoln and the others, for there was a great crowd all through the streets, especially here, and the place where the President stood was not conspicuous from the rest. The 9th Corps made a very fine show indeed. There were, I should think, five very full regiments of new black troops, under Gen. Ferrero. They looked and marched very well. It looked funny to see the President standing with his hat off to them just the same as the rest as they passed by. Then there [were the] Michigan regiments; one of them was a regiment of sharpshooters, partly composed of Indians. Then there was a pretty strong force of artillery and a middling force of cavalry--many New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, R. I., etc., reg'ts. All except the blacks were veterans [that had] seen plenty of fighting. Mother, it is very different to see a real army of fighting men, from one of those shows in Brooklyn, or New York, or on Fort Greene. Mother, it was a curious sight to see these ranks after rank of our own dearest blood of men, mostly young, march by, worn and sunburnt and sweaty, with well-worn clothes and thin bundles, and knapsacks, tin cups, and some with frying pans strapped over their backs, all dirty and sweaty, nothing real neat about them except their muskets; but they were all as clean and bright as silver. They were four or five hours passing along, marching with wide ranks pretty quickly, too. It is a great sight to see an army 25 or 30,000 on the march. They are all so gay, too. Poor fellows, nothing dampens their spirits. They all got soaked with rain the night before. I saw Fred McReady and Capt. Sims, and Col. Le Gendre, etc. I don't know exactly where Burnside's army is going. Among other rumors it is said they [are]

to go [with] the Army of the Potomac to act as a reserve force, etc. Another is that they are to make a flank march, to go round and get Lee on the side, etc. I haven't been out this morning and don't know what news--we know nothing, only that there is without doubt to be a terrible campaign here in Virginia this summer, and that all who know deepest about it are very serious about it. Mother, it is serious times. I do not feel to fret or whimper, but in my heart and soul about our country, the forthcoming campaign with all its vicissitudes and the wounded and slain--I dare say, mother, I feel the reality more than some because I am in the midst of its saddest results so much. Others may say what they like, I believe in Grant and in Lincoln, too. I think Grant deserves to be trusted. He is working continually. No one knows his plans; we will only know them when he puts them in operation. Our army is very large here in Virginia this spring, and they are still pouring in from east and west. You don't see about it in the papers, but we have a very large army here.

Mother, I am first rate in health, thank God; I never was better. Dear mother, have you got over all that distress and sickness in your head? You must write particular about it. Dear brother Jeff, how are you, and how is Matty, and how the dear little girls? Jeff, I believe the devil is in it about my writing you; I have laid out so many weeks to write you a good long letter, and something has shoved it off each time. Never mind, mother's letters keep you posted. You must write, and don't forget to tell me all about Sis. Is she as good and interesting as she was six months ago? Mother, have you heard anything from Han? Mother, I have just had my breakfast. I had it in my room--some hard biscuit warmed on the stove, and

a bowl of strong tea with good milk and sugar. I have given a Michigan soldier his breakfast with me. He relished it, too; he has just gone. Mother, I have just heard again that Burnside's troops are to be a reserve to protect Washington, so there may be something in it.

WALT.

It is very fine weather here yesterday and to-day. The hospitals are very full; they are putting up hundreds of hospital tents.

XIV

Washington, April 28, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I thought I would write you just a line, though I have nothing of importance--only the talk of the street here seems more and more to assert that Burnside's army is to remain near here to protect Washington and act as a reserve, so that Grant can move the Army of the Potomac upon Richmond, without being compelled to turn and be anxious about the Capital; also that Burnside can attend to Lee if the latter should send any force up west of here (what they call the valley of the Shenandoah), or invade Pennsylvania again. I thought you would like to hear this; it looks plausible, but there are lots of rumors of all kinds. I cannot hear where Burnside's army is, as they don't allow the papers to print army movements, but I fancy they are very near Washington, the other side of Arlington heights, this moment. Mother, I wrote yesterday to Han, and sent one of George's letters from Annapolis.

Mother, I suppose you got my letter of Tuesday, 26th. I have not heard anything from you in quite a little while. I am still well. The weather is fine; quite hot yesterday. Mother, I am now going down to see a poor soldier who is very low with a long diarrhoea--he cannot recover. When I was with him last night, he asked me before I went away to ask God's blessing on him. He says, I am no scholar and you are--poor dying man, I told him I hoped from the bottom of my heart God would bless him, and bring him up yet. I soothed him as well as I could; it was affecting, I can tell you. Jeff, I wrote to Mr. Kirkwood yesterday to 44 Pierrepont st. He sent me some money last Monday. Is Probasco still in the store in N. Y.? Dear sister Mat, I quite want to see you and California, not forgetting my little Hattie, too.

WALT.

2 o'clock, 28th April. DEAREST MOTHER--Just as I was going to mail this I received authentic information [that] Burnside's army is now about 16 or 18 miles south of here, at a place called Fairfax Court House. They had last night no orders to move at present, and I rather think they will remain there, or near there. What I have written before as a rumor about their being to be held as a reserve, to act whenever occasion may need them, is now quite decided on. You may hear a rumor in New York that they have been shipped in transports from Alexandria--there is no truth in it at all. Grant's Army of the Potomac is probably to do the heavy work. His army is strong and full of fight. Mother, I think it is to-day the noblest army of soldiers that ever marched--nobody can know the men as well as I

do, I sometimes think.

Mother, I am writing this in Willard's hotel, on my way down to hospital after I leave this at post office. I shall come out to dinner at 4 o'clock and then go back to hospital again in evening.

Good bye, dear mother and all.

WALT.

XV

Washington, May 3, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I received your letter dated last Friday afternoon, with one from Mr. Heyde. It seems by that Han is better, but, as you say, it would be much more satisfactory if Han would write to us herself. Mother, I believe I told you I sent a letter to Han last week, enclosing one of George's from Annapolis. I was glad to get Heyde's letter, though, as it was. Mother, I am sorry you still have returns of your cold. Does it affect your head like it did? Dear mother, I hope you will not expose yourself, nor work too much, but take things easier. I have nothing different to write about the war, or movements here. What I wrote last Thursday, about Burnside's Corps being probably used as a reserve, is still talked of here, and seems to be probable. A large force is necessary to guard the railroad between here and Culpepper, and also to keep from any emergency that might happen, and I shouldn't

wonder if the 9th would be used for such purpose, at least for the present. I think the 51st must be down not very far from Fairfax Court House yet, but I haven't heard certain.

Mother, I have seen a person up from front this morning. There is no movement yet and no fighting started. The men are in their camps yet. Gen. Grant is at Culpepper. You need not pay the slightest attention to such things as you mention in the Eagle, about the 9th Corps--the writer of it, and very many of the writers on war matters in those papers, don't know one bit more on what they are writing about than Ed does. Mother, you say in your letter you got my letter the previous afternoon. Why, mother, you ought to [have] got it Wednesday forenoon, or afternoon at furthest. This letter now will get in New York Wednesday morning, by daylight--you ought to get it before noon. The postmaster in Brooklyn must have a pretty set of carriers, to take twice as long to take a letter from New York to you as it does to go from Washington to N. Y. Mother, I suppose you got a letter from me Friday, also, as I wrote a second letter on Thursday last, telling you the 9th Corps was camped then about sixteen miles from here.

About George's pictures, perhaps you better wait till I hear from him, before sending them. I remain well as usual. The poor fellow I mentioned in one of my letters last week, with diarrhoea, that wanted me to ask God's blessing on him, was still living yesterday afternoon, but just living. He is only partially conscious, is all wasted away to nothing, and lies most of the time in half stupor, as they give him brandy copiously. Yesterday I was there by him a few minutes. He is very much averse to

taking brandy, and there was some trouble in getting him to take it. He is almost totally deaf the last five or six days. There is no chance for him at all. Quite a particular friend of mine, Oscar Cunningham, an Ohio boy, had his leg amputated yesterday close up by the thigh. It was a pretty tough operation. He was badly wounded just a year ago to-day at Chancellorsville and has suffered a great deal; lately got erysipelas in his leg and foot. I forget whether I have mentioned him before or not. He was a very large, noble-looking young man when I first see him. The doctor thinks he will live and get up, but I consider [it] by no means so certain. He is very much prostrated. Well, dear mother, you must write and Jeff too--I do want to see you all very much. How does Mat get along, and how little Sis and all? I send my love to you and Jeff and all. We are having a very pleasant, coolish day here. I am going down to post office to leave this, and then up to my old friends the O'Connors to dinner, and then down to hospital. Well, good-bye, dear mother, for present.

WALT.

Tuesday afternoon, 3 o'clock. Mother, just as I was going to seal my letter, Major Hapgood has come in from the P. O. and brings me a few lines from George, which I enclose--you will see they were written four days ago.

XVI

Washington, May 6, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I write you a few lines, as I know you feel anxious these times. I suppose the New York papers must have it in this morning that the Army of the Potomac has made a move, and has crossed the Rapidan river. At any rate that is the case. As near as I can learn about Burnside's army, that lies in the rear of the Army of the Potomac (from Warrenton, Virginia and so to Rappahannock river and up toward Manassas). It still appears to be kept as a reserve and for emergencies, etc. I have not heard anything from the 51st. Mother, of course you got my letter of Tuesday, 3rd, with the letter from George dated Bristoe station. I have writ to George since, and addressed the letter Warrenton, Va., or elsewhere, thinking he might get it.

Mother, the idea is entertained quite largely here that the Rebel army will retreat to Richmond, as it is well known that Grant is very strong (most folks say too strong for Lee). I suppose you know we menace them almost as much from up Fortress Monroe as we do from the Rapidan. Butler and W. F. Smith are down there with at least fifty or sixty thousand men, and will move up simultaneously with Grant. The occasion is very serious, and anxious, but somehow I am full of hope, and feel that we shall take Richmond--(I hope to go there yet before the hot weather is past). Dear mother, I hope you are well, and little California--love to Jeff and Mat and all.

WALT.

Mother, you ought to get this letter Saturday forenoon, as it will be in

N. Y. by sunrise Saturday, 7th.

Mother, the poor soldier with diarrhoea is still living, but, O, what a looking object; death would be a boon to him; he cannot last many hours. Cunningham, the Ohio boy with leg amputated at thigh, has picked up beyond expectation now!--looks altogether like getting well. The hospitals are very full. I am very well indeed--pretty warm here to-day.

XVII

Washington, Monday, 2 o'clock--May 9, '64. DEAREST MOTHER--There is nothing from the army more than you know in the N. Y. papers. The fighting has been hard enough, but the papers make lots of additional items, and a good deal that they just entirely make up. There are from 600 to 1000 wounded coming up here--not 6 to 8000 as the papers have it. I cannot hear what part the 9th Corps took in the fight of Friday and afterwards, nor whether they really took any at all--(they, the papers, are determined to make up just anything). Mother, I received your letter and Han's--and was glad indeed to get both. Mother, you must not be under such apprehension, as I think it is not warranted.

So far as we get news here, we are gaining the day, so far decidedly. If the news we hear is true that Lee has been repulsed and driven back by Grant, and that we are masters of the field, and pursuing them--then I think Lee will retreat south, and Richmond will be abandoned by the Rebs.

But of course time only can develop what will happen. Mother, I will write again Wednesday, or before, if I hear anything to write. Love to Jeff and Mat and all.

WALT.

XVIII

Washington, May 10, '64 (1/2 past 2 p.m.) DEAREST MOTHER--There is nothing perhaps more than you see in the N. Y. papers. The fighting down in the field on the 6th I think ended in our favor, though with pretty severe losses to some of our divisions. The fighting is about 70 miles from here, and 50 from Richmond--on the 7th and 8th followed up by the Rebel army hauling off, they say retreating, and Meade pursuing. It is quite mixed yet, but I guess we have the best of it. If we really have, Richmond is a goner, for they cannot do any better than they have done. The 9th Corps was in the fight, and where I cannot tell yet, but from the wounded I have seen I don't think that Corps was deeply in. I have seen 300 wounded. They came in last night. I asked for men of 9th Corps, but could not find any at all. These 300 men were not badly wounded, mostly in arms, hands, trunk of body, etc. They could all walk, though some had an awful time of it. They had to fight their way with the worst in the middle out of the region of Fredericksburg, and so on where they could get across the Rappahannock and get where they found transportation to Washington. The Gov't has decided, (or rather Gen. Meade has) to occupy Fredericksburg

for depot and hospital--(I think that is a first rate decision)--so the wounded men will receive quick attention and surgery, instead of being racked through the long journey up here. Still, many come in here. Mother, my impression is that we have no great reason for alarm or sadness about George so far. Of course I know nothing. Well, good-bye, dearest mother.

WALT.

Mother, I wrote you yesterday, too. Tell dear brother Jeff to write me. Love to Mat. The poor diarrhoea man died, and it was a boon. Oscar Cunningham, 82nd Ohio, has had a relapse. I fear it is going bad with him. Lung diseases are quite plenty--night before last I staid in hospital all night tending a poor fellow. It has been awful hot here--milder to-day.

XIX

[Washington] May 12, 1/2 past 5 p.m. DEAREST MOTHER--George is all right, unhurt, up to Tuesday morning, 10th inst. The 51st was in a bad battle last Friday; lost 20 killed, between 40 and 50 wounded. I have just seen some of the 51st wounded just arrived, one of them Fred Saunders, Corporal Co. K, George's company. He said when he left the 51st was in rear on guard duty. He left Tuesday morning last. The papers have it that Burnside's Corps was in a fight Tuesday, but I think it most probable the 51st was not in it.

Fred McReady is wounded badly, but not seriously. Sims is safe. You see Le Gendre is wounded--he was shot through the bridge of nose.

Mother, you ought to get this Friday forenoon, 13th. I will write again soon. Wrote once before to-day.

WALT.

XX

Washington, May 13, 1864, 2 o'clock p. m. DEAREST MOTHER--I wrote you a hurried letter late yesterday afternoon but left it myself at the P. O. in time for the mail. You ought to have got it this forenoon, or afternoon at furthest. I sent you two letters yesterday. I hope the carrier brings you your letters the same day. I wrote to the Brooklyn postmaster about it. I have heard from George up to Tuesday morning last, 10th, till which time he was safe. The battle of Friday, 6th, was very severe. George's Co. K lost one acting sergeant, Sturgis, killed, 2 men killed, 4 wounded. As I wrote yesterday, I have seen here Corp. Fred Saunders of Co. K, who was wounded in side, nothing serious, in Friday's fight, and came up here. I also talked with Serg. Brown, Co. F, 51st, rather badly wounded in right shoulder. Saunders said, when he left Tuesday morning he heard (or saw them there, I forget which) the 51st and its whole division were on guard duty toward the rear. The 9th Corps, however, has had hard fighting since, but whether the division or brigade the 51st is in was in the fights of

Tuesday, 10th, (a pretty severe one) or Wednesday, I cannot tell, and it is useless to make calculations--and the only way is to wait and hope for the best. As I wrote yesterday, there were some 30 of 51st reg't killed and 50 wounded in Friday's battle, 6th inst. I have seen Col. Le Gendre. He is here in Washington not far from where I am, 485 12th st. is his address. Poor man, I felt sorry indeed for him. He is badly wounded and disfigured. He is shot through the bridge of the nose, and left eye probably lost. I spent a little time with him this forenoon. He is suffering very much, spoke of George very kindly; said "Your brother is well." His orderly told me he saw him, George, Sunday night last, well. Fred McReady is wounded in hip, I believe bone fractured--bad enough, but not deeply serious. I cannot hear of his arrival here. If he comes I shall find him immediately and take care of him myself. He is probably yet at Fredericksburg, but will come up, I think. Yesterday and to-day the badly wounded are coming in. The long lists of previous arrivals, (I suppose they are all reprinted at great length in N. Y. papers) are of men three-fourths of them quite slightly wounded, and the rest hurt pretty bad. I was thinking, mother, if one could see the men who arrived in the first squads, of two or three hundred at a time, one wouldn't be alarmed at those terrible long lists. Still there is a sufficient sprinkling of deeply distressing cases. I find my hands full all the time, with new and old cases--poor suffering young men, I think of them, and do try, mother, to do what I can for them, (and not think of the vexatious skeddaddlers and merely scratched ones, of whom there are too many lately come here).

Dearest mother, hope you and all are well--you must keep a good heart.

Still, the fighting is very mixed, but it seems steadily turning into real successes for Grant. The news to-day here is very good--you will see it [in the] N. Y. papers. I steadily believe Grant is going to succeed, and that we shall have Richmond--but O what a price to pay for it. We have had a good rain here and it is pleasanter and cooler. I shall write very soon again.

WALT.

XXI

Washington, May 18, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I will only write you a hasty note this time, as I am pretty tired, and my head feels disagreeable from being in too much. I was up yesterday to Carver hospital and again saw the man of the 51st, Thos. McCowell, who told me of George, up to latter part of Thursday, 12th inst. I questioned him, and his story was very clear, so I felt perfectly satisfied. He is wounded in hand; will be transferred soon to New York and may call on you. He is a young Irishman, and seems to be a very good fellow indeed. I have written to George, day before yesterday. Did you send my last letter to Han? If not, send it yet. Mother, I see such awful things. I expect one of these days, if I live, I shall have awful thoughts and dreams--but it is such a great thing to be able to do some real good; assuage these horrible pains and wounds, and save life even--that's the only thing that keeps a fellow up.

Well, dear mother, I make such reckoning of yet coming on and seeing you. How I want to see Jeff, too--O, it is too bad I have not written to him so long--and Mat, too, and little California and all. I am going out now a little while. I remain first rate, as well as ever.

WALT.

XXII

Washington, Monday forenoon, May 23, '64. DEAR BROTHER JEFF--I received your letter yesterday. I too had got a few lines from George, dated on the field, 16th. He said he had also just written to mother. I cannot make out there has been any fighting since in which the 9th Corps has been engaged. I do hope mother will not get despondent and so unhappy. I suppose it is idle to say I think George's chances are very good for coming out of this campaign safe, yet at present it seems to me so--but it is indeed idle to say so, for no one can tell what a day may bring forth. Sometimes I think that should it come, when it must be, to fall in battle, one's anguish over a son or brother killed would be tempered with much to take the edge off. I can honestly say it has no terrors for me, if I had to be hit in battle, as far as I myself am concerned. It would be a noble and manly death and in the best cause. Then one finds, as I have the past year, that our feelings and imaginations make a thousand times too much of the whole matter. Of the many I have seen die, or known of, the past year, I have not seen or heard of one who met death with any terror. Yesterday

afternoon I spent a good part of the afternoon with a young man of 17, named Charles Cutter, of Lawrence city, Mass., 1st Mass. heavy artillery, battery M. He was brought in to one of the hospitals mortally wounded in abdomen. Well, I thought to myself as I sat looking at him, it ought to be a relief to his folks after all, if they could see how little he suffered.

He lay very placid in a half lethargy with his eyes closed. It was very warm, and I sat a long while fanning him and wiping the sweat. At length he opened his eyes quite wide and clear and looked inquiringly around. I said, "What is it, my dear? do you want anything?" He said quietly, with a good natured smile, "O nothing; I was only looking around to see who was with me." His mind was somewhat wandering, yet he lay so peaceful, in his dying condition. He seemed to be a real New England country boy, so good natured, with a pleasant homely way, and quite a fine looking boy. Without any doubt he died in course of night.

There don't seem to be any war news of importance very late. We have been fearfully disappointed with Sigel not making his junction from the lower part of the valley, and perhaps harassing Lee's left or left rear, which the junction or equivalent to it was an indispensable part of Grant's

plan, we think. This is one great reason why things have lagged so with the Army. Some here are furious with Sigel. You will see he has been superseded. His losses [in] his repulse are not so important, though annoying enough, but it was of the greatest consequence that he should have hastened through the gaps ten or twelve days ago at all hazards and come in from the west, keeping near enough to our right to have assistance

if he needed it. Jeff, I suppose you know that there has been quite a large army lying idle, mostly of artillery reg'ts, manning the numerous forts around here. They have been the fattest and heartiest reg'ts anywhere to be seen, and full in numbers, some of them numbering 2000 men. Well, they have all, every one, been shoved down to the front. Lately we have had the militia reg'ts pouring in here, mostly from Ohio. They look first rate. I saw two or three come in yesterday, splendid American young men, from farms mostly. We are to have them for a hundred days and probably they will not refuse to stay another hundred. Jeff, tell mother I shall write Wednesday certain (or if I hear anything I will write to-morrow). I still think we shall get Richmond.

WALT.

Jeff, you must take this up to mother as soon as you go home. Jeff, I have changed my quarters. I moved Saturday last. I am now at 502 Pennsylvania av., near 3rd st. I still go a little almost daily to Major Hapgood's, cor. 15th and F sts., 5th floor. Am apt to be there about 12 or 1. See Fred McReady and others of 51st. George's letter to me of 16th I sent to Han. Should like to see Mr. Worther if he comes here--give my best remembrance to Mr. Lane.

I may very likely go down for a few days to Ball Plain and Fredericksburg, but one is wanted here permanently more than any other place. I have written to George several times in hopes one at least may reach him. Matty, my dear sister, how are you getting along? O how I should like to

see you this very day.

XXIII

Washington, May 25, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I have not heard anything of George or the reg't or Corps more than I have already written. I got Jeff's letter on Sunday and wrote to him next day, which you have seen, mother, of course. I have written to Han and sent her George's letter to me dated 16th. I have heard that the 9th Corps has been moved to the extreme left of the army. I should think by accounts this morning that the army must be nearly half way from Fredericksburg to Richmond. The advance can't be more than 30 to 35 miles from there. I see Fred McReady about every other day. I have to go down to Alexandria, about 6 miles from here. He is doing quite well, but very tired of the confinement. I still go around daily and nightly among wounded. Mother, it is just the same old story; poor suffering young men, great swarms of them, come up here now every day all battered and bloody--there have 4000 arrived here this morning, and 1500 yesterday. They appear to be bringing them all up here from Fredericksburg. The journey from the field till they get aboard the boats at Ball plain is horrible. I believe I wrote several times about Oscar Cunningham, 82nd Ohio, amputation of right leg, wounded over a year ago, a friend of mine here. He is rapidly sinking; said to me yesterday, O, if he could only die. The young lad Cutter, of 1st Massachusetts heavy artillery, I was with Sunday afternoon, (I wrote about in Jeff's letter) still holds out. Poor boy, there is no chance for him at all.

But mother, I shall make you gloomy enough if I go on with these kind of particulars--only I know you like to hear about the poor young men, after I have once begun to mention them. Mother, I have changed my quarters--am at 502 Pennsylvania av., near 3d street, only a little way from the Capitol. Where I was, the house was sold and the old lady I hired the room from had to move out and give the owner possession. I like my new quarters pretty well--I have a room to myself, 3d story hall bedroom. I have my meals in the house. Mother, it must be sad enough about Nance and the young ones. Is the little baby still hearty? I believe you wrote a few weeks after it was born that it was quite a fine child. I see you had a draft in the 3d Congressional district. I was glad enough to see Jeff's name was not drawn. We have had it awful hot here, but there was a sharp storm of thunder and lightning last night, and to-day it is fine. Mother, do any of the soldiers I see here from Brooklyn or New York ever call upon you? They sometimes say they will here. Tell Jeff I got a letter yesterday from W. E. Worthen, in which he sent me some money for the men. I have acknowledged it to Mr. W. by letter. Well, dear mother, I must close. O, how I want to see you all--I will surely have to come home as soon as this Richmond campaign is decided--then I want to print my new book. Love to Mat--write to a fellow often as you can.

WALT.

XXIV

Washington, May 30, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I have no news at all to write this time. I have not heard anything of the 51st since I last wrote you, and about the general war news only what you see in the papers. Grant is gradually getting nearer and nearer to Richmond. Many here anticipate that should Grant go into Richmond, Lee will make a side movement and march up west into the North, either to attempt to strike Washington, or to go again into Pennsylvania. I only say if that should happen, I for one shall not be dissatisfied so very much. Well, mother, how are you getting along home?--how do you feel in health these days, dear mother? I hope you are well and in good heart yet. I remain pretty well: my head begins to trouble me a little with a sort of fullness, as it often does in the hot weather. Singular to relate, the 1st Mass. artillery boy, Charles Cutter, is still living, and may get well. I saw him this morning. I am still around among wounded same, but will not make you feel blue by filling my letter with sad particulars.

I am writing this in Willard's hotel, hurrying to catch this afternoon's mail. Mother, do you get your letters now next morning, as you ought? I got a letter from the postmaster of Brooklyn about it--said if the letters were neglected again, to send him word. I have not heard from home now in some days. I am going to put up a lot of my old things in a box and send them home by express. I will write when I send them. Have you heard anything from Mary or Han lately? I should like to hear. Tell Jeff he must write, and you must, too, mother. I have been in one of the worst hospitals all the forenoon, it containing about 1600. I have given the men

pipes and tobacco. (I am the only one that gives them tobacco.) O how much good it does some of them--the chaplains and most of the doctors are down upon it--but I give them and let them smoke. To others I have given oranges, fed them, etc. Well, dear mother, good-bye--love to Matty and Sis.

WALT.

Fred McReady is coming home very soon on furlough--have any of the soldiers called on you?

XXV

Washington, June 3, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--Your letter came yesterday. I have not heard the least thing from the 51st since--no doubt they are down there with the army near Richmond. I have not written to George lately. I think the news from the Army is very good. Mother, you know of course that it is now very near Richmond indeed, from five to ten miles. Mother, if this campaign was not in progress I should not stop here, as it is now beginning to tell a little upon me, so many bad wounds, many putrefied, and all kinds of dreadful ones, I have been rather too much with--but as it is, I certainly remain here while the thing remains undecided. It is impossible for me to abstain from going to see and minister to certain cases, and that draws me into others, and so on. I have just left Oscar Cunningham, the Ohio boy--he is in a dying condition--there is no hope for

him--it would draw tears from the hardest heart to look at him--he is all wasted away to a skeleton, and looks like some one fifty years old. You remember I told you a year ago, when he was first brought in, I thought him the noblest specimen of a young Western man I had seen, a real giant in size, and always with a smile on his face. O what a change. He has long been very irritable to every one but me, and his frame is all wasted away. The young Massachusetts 1st artillery boy, Cutter, I wrote about is dead. He is the one that was brought in a week ago last Sunday badly wounded in breast. The deaths in the principal hospital I visit, Armory-square, average one an hour.

I saw Capt. Baldwin of the 14th this morning; he has lost his left arm--is going home soon. Mr. Kalbfleisch and Anson Herrick, (M. C. from New York), came in one of the wards where I was sitting writing a letter this morning, in the midst of the wounded. Kalbfleisch was so much affected by the sight that he burst into tears. O, I must tell you, I [gave] in Carver hospital a great treat of ice cream, a couple of days ago--went round myself through about 15 large wards--(I bought some ten gallons, very nice). You would have cried and been amused too. Many of the men had to be fed; several of them I saw cannot probably live, yet they quite enjoyed it. I gave everybody some--quite a number [of] Western country boys had never tasted ice cream before. They relish such things [as] oranges, lemons, etc. Mother, I feel a little blue this morning, as two young men I knew very well have just died. One died last night, and the other about half an hour before I went to the hospital. I did not anticipate the death of either of them. Each was a very, very sad case, so young. Well mother,

I see I have written you another gloomy sort of letter. I do not feel as first rate as usual.

WALT.

You don't know how I want to come home and see you all; you, dear mother, and Jeff and Mat and all. I believe I am homesick--something new for me--then I have seen all the horrors of soldiers' life and not been kept up by its excitement. It is awful to see so much, and not be able to relieve it.

XXVI

Washington, June 7, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I cannot write you anything about the 51st, as I have not heard a word. I felt very much disturbed yesterday afternoon, as Major Hapgood came up from the paymaster general's office, and said that news had arrived that Burnside was killed, and that the 9th Corps had had a terrible slaughter. He said it was believed at the paymaster general's office. Well, I went out to see what reliance there was on it. The rumor soon spread over town, and was believed by many--but as near as I can make it out, it proves to be one of those unaccountable stories that get started these times. Saturday night we heard that Grant was routed completely, etc. etc.--so that's the way stories fly. I suppose you hear the same big lies there in Brooklyn. Well, the truth is sad enough, without adding anything to it--but Grant is not destroyed yet, but

I think is going into Richmond yet, but the cost is terrible. Mother, I have not felt well at all the last week. I had spells of deathly faintness and bad trouble in my head too, and sore throat (quite a little budget, ain't they?) My head was the worst, though I don't know, the faint spells were not very pleasant--but I feel so much better this forenoon I believe it has passed over. There is a very horrible collection in Armory building, (in Armory-square hospital)--about 200 of the worst cases you ever see, and I had been probably too much with them. It is enough to melt the heart of a stone; over one third of them are amputation cases. Well, mother, poor Oscar Cunningham is gone at last. He is the 82d Ohio boy (wounded May 3d, '63). I have written so much of him I suppose you feel as if you almost knew him. I was with him Saturday forenoon and also evening. He was more composed than usual, could not articulate very well. He died about 2 o'clock Sunday morning--very easy they told me. I was not there. It was a blessed relief; his life has been misery for months. The cause of death at last was the system absorbing the pus, the bad matter, instead of discharging it from [the] wound. I believe I told you I was quite blue from the deaths of several of the poor young men I knew well, especially two I had strong hopes of their getting up. Things are going pretty badly with the wounded. They are crowded here in Washington in immense numbers, and all those that come up from the Wilderness and that region, arrived here so neglected, and in such plight, it was awful--(those that were at Fredericksburg and also from Ball Plain). The papers are full of puffs, etc., but the truth is, the largest proportion of worst cases got little or no attention. We receive them here with their wounds full of worms--some all swelled and inflamed. Many of the amputations have to be

done over again. One new feature is that many of the poor afflicted young men are crazy. Every ward has some in it that are wandering. They have suffered too much, and it is perhaps a privilege that they are out of their senses. Mother, it is most too much for a fellow, and I sometimes wish I was out of it--but I suppose it is because I have not felt first rate myself. I am going to write to George to-day, as I see there is a daily mail to White House. O, I must tell you that we get the wounded from our present field near Richmond much better than we did from the Wilderness and Fredericksburg. We get them now from White House. They are put on boats there, and come all the way here, about 160 or 170 miles. White House is only twelve or fifteen miles from the field, and is our present depot and base of supplies. It is very pleasant here to-day, a little cooler than it has been--a good rain shower last evening. The Western reg'ts continue to pour in here, the 100 days men;--may go down to front to guard posts, trains, etc.

Well, mother, how do things go on with you all? It seems to me if I could only be home two or three days, and have some good teas with you and Mat, and set in the old basement a while, and have a good time and talk with Jeff, and see the little girls, etc., I should be willing to keep on afterward among these sad scenes for the rest of the summer--but I shall remain here until this Richmond campaign is settled, anyhow, unless I get sick, and I don't anticipate that. Mother dear, I hope you are well and in fair spirits--you must try to. Have you heard from sister Han?

WALT.

You know I am living at 502 Pennsylvania av. (near 3d st.)--it is not a very good place. I don't like it so well as I did cooking my own grub--and the air is not good. Jeff, you must write.

XXVII

Washington, June 10, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER--I got your letter dated last Wednesday. I do not always depend on ----'s accounts. I think he is apt to make things full as bad as they are, if not worse.

Mother, I was so glad to get a letter from Jeff this morning, enclosing one from George dated June 1st. It was so good to see his handwriting once more. I have not heard anything of the reg't--there are all sorts of rumors here, among others that Burnside does not give satisfaction to Grant and Meade, and that it is expected some one else will be placed in command of 9th Corps. Another rumor more likely is that our base of the army is to be changed to Harrison's Landing on James river instead of White House on Pamunkey.

Mother, I have not felt well again the last two days as I was Tuesday, but I feel a good deal better this morning. I go round, but most of the time feel very little like it. The doctor tells me I have continued too long in the hospitals, especially in a bad place, Armory building, where the worst wounds were, and have absorbed too much of the virus in my system--but I

know it is nothing but what a little relief and sustenance of [the] right sort will set right. I am writing this in Major Hapgood's office. He is very busy paying off some men whose time is out; they are going home to New York. I wrote to George yesterday. We are having very pleasant weather here just now. Mother, you didn't mention whether Mary had come, so I suppose she has not. I should like to see her and Ansel too. The wounded still come here in large numbers--day and night trains of ambulances. Tell Jeff the \$10 from Mr. Lane for the soldiers came safe. I shall write to Jeff right away. I send my love to Mat and all. Mother, you must try to keep good heart.

WALT.

XXVIII

Washington, June 14, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER. I am not feeling very well these days--the doctors have told me not to come inside the hospitals for the present. I send there by a friend every day; I send things and aid to some cases I know, and hear from there also, but I do not go myself at present. It is probable that the hospital poison has affected my system, and I find it worse than I calculated. I have spells of faintness and very bad feeling in my head, fullness and pain--and besides sore throat. My boarding place, 502 Pennsylvania av., is a miserable place, very bad air. But I shall feel better soon, I know--the doctors say it will pass over--they have long told me I was going in too strong. Some days I think

it has all gone and I feel well again, but in a few hours I have a spell again. Mother, I have not heard anything of the 51st. I sent George's letter to Han. I have written to George since. I shall write again to him in a day or two. If Mary comes home, tell her I sent her my love. If I don't feel better before the end of this week or beginning of next, I may come home for a week or fortnight for a change. The rumor is very strong here that Grant is over the James river on south side--but it is not in the papers. We are having quite cool weather here. Mother, I want to see you and Jeff so much. I have been working a little at copying, but have stopt it lately.

WALT.

XXIX

Washington, June 17, 1864. DEAREST MOTHER. I got your letter this morning. This place and the hospitals seem to have got the better of me. I do not feel so badly this forenoon--but I have bad nights and bad days too. Some of the spells are pretty bad--still I am up some and around every day. The doctors have told me for a fortnight I must leave; that I need an entire change of air, etc.

I think I shall come home for a short time, and pretty soon. (I will try it two or three days yet though, and if I find my illness goes over I will stay here yet awhile. All I think about is to be here if any thing should

happen to George).

We don't hear anything more of the army than you do there in the papers.

WALT.

Mother, if I should come I will write a day or so before.

The letter of June 17, 1864, is the last of Whitman's, written from Washington at or about this time, that has been preserved and come down to us. Many, probably many more than have been kept, have been lost; indeed, it is a wonder that so many were saved, for they were sent about from one member of the family to another, and when once read seem to have been little valued. The reader will have noticed a certain change of tone in the later letters, showing that Whitman was beginning to feel the inroads which the fatigues, the unhealthy surroundings of the hospitals, and especially the mental anxiety and distress inseparable from his work there, were making upon even his superb health. Down to the time of his hospital work he had never known a day's sickness, but thereafter he never again knew, except at intervals which grew shorter and less frequent as time went on, the buoyant vigor and vitality of his first forty-four years. From 1864 to the end of 1872 the attacks described in his "Calamus" letters became from year to year more frequent and more severe, until, in January, 1873, they culminated in an attack of paralysis which never left him and from the indirect effects of which he died in 1892.

But for years, though often warned and sent away by the doctors, during his better intervals and until his splendid health was quite broken by hospital malaria and the poison absorbed from gangrenous wounds, he continued his ministrations to the sick and the maimed of the war. Those who joined the ranks and fought the battles of the Republic did well; but when the world knows, as it is beginning to know, how this man, without any encouragement from without, under no compulsion, simply, without beat of drum or any cheers of approval, went down into those immense lazar houses and devoted his days and nights, his heart and soul, and at last his health and life, to America's sick and wounded sons, it will say that he did even better.

R. M. B.

As at thy portals also death,
Entering thy sovereign, dim, illimitable grounds,
To memories of my mother, to the divine blending, maternity,
To her, buried and gone, yet buried not, gone not from me,
(I see again the calm benignant face fresh and beautiful still,
I sit by the form in the coffin,
I kiss and kiss convulsively again the sweet old lips, the cheeks, the
closed eyes in the coffin;)
To her, the ideal woman, practical, spiritual, of all of earth, life,
love, to me the best,

I grave a monumental line, before I go, amid these songs,
And set a tombstone here.

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Footnotes:

[1] His brother, Capt. (afterwards Col.) George W. Whitman, born 1829, now (1897) residing in Burlington, N. J.

[2] His favorite sister, Hannah Louisa Whitman (Mrs. C. L. Heyde), born 1823, now (1897) residing in Burlington, Vt.

[3] His brother, Thomas Jefferson Whitman, born 1833, died 1890.

[4] Brig.-Gen. Edward Ferrero, commanding Second Brigade, Second Division, Army of the Potomac, under whose command the 51st Brooklyn Regiment fought at Fredericksburg. George Whitman was a captain in this regiment.

[5] Martha, wife of "Jeff." She died in 1873. "1873.--This year lost, by death, my dear dear mother--and just before, my sister Martha--the two

best and sweetest women I have ever seen or known, or ever expect to see"
(WALT WHITMAN, "Some Personal and Old Age Jottings").

[6] "Jeff's" little daughter, Mannahatta. She died in 1888.

[7] His brother, Andrew Jackson Whitman, born 1827, died 1863. His other brothers at this time, besides those previously mentioned, were Jesse Whitman, born 1818, died 1870, and Edward Whitman, born 1835, died 1892.

[8] Martha.

[9] Mannahatta.

[10] William Douglas O'Connor, born Jan. 2, 1832. He was a journalist in Boston in early life, went to Washington about 1861, first as clerk in the Light House Bureau, and later became Assistant Superintendent of the United States Life-Saving Service; died in Washington, May 9, 1889. He was one of Whitman's warmest friends, and the author of "The Good Gray Poet."

[11] The Monitor foundered off Cape Hatteras in a gale December 29, 1862.

[12] "Jeff."

[13] A copy of the 1860 (first Boston) edition of "Leaves of Grass," which Whitman used for preparing the next (1867) edition. From various evidence this is the same copy, with his MS. alterations, which Secretary Harlan

found in Whitman's desk at the Interior Department in 1865, and which he read surreptitiously before discharging the poet from his position. It is now in the possession of Mr. Horace L. Traubel, of Camden, N. J.

The reference to "Drum-Taps," published in 1865, shows that it had already taken shape in MS.

[14] Andrew Whitman's wife.

[15] Jessie Louisa Whitman.

[16] His sister, Mary Elizabeth Whitman (Mrs. Van Nostrand) born 1821 now (1897) residing in Sag Harbor, L. I.

[17] Mrs. Whitman's maiden name was Louisa Van Velsor.

[18] Mrs. Abby Price, an intimate friend of Whitman, and a friend and neighbor of his mother.

[19] Mrs. Price's son, a naval officer.

[20] Mrs. Price's daughter, and sister of the Helen mentioned later.

[21] Formerly of Thayer & Eldridge, the first Boston publishers of "Leaves of Grass" (1860 Edition).

[22] Jeff's daughter Jessie was originally called California.