

Dec. 14th, 1864

Dear Miss C.,

Yours on Nov. 26th came to hand several days since – I had just sent by hand a letter to your address, care of Mr. Ells of Macon as I was aware that there was probably no communication directly by mail with Milledgeville – and really I feared that you might have found it politic to refugee again. I am much relieved by the information that Sherman treated you well, or rather didn't treat you any at all. I have learned to-day that the Federal Army did not enter Griffin, but veered to the left, passing southward through McDonough. The accounts of his march through Georgia continue to arrive but we will never know one-half the destruction and desolation, heart-rending poverty and grim want he left in his rear. Many of our wealthiest citizens in Jones were reduced from affluence to utter destitution & necessarily must depend upon the charity of their more fortunate friends for subsistence. Wheeler's Cavalry were scarcely less savage – that band of robbers despoiled and plundered with as much grace as a Hun or a Yankee. Enormities were committed under the plea of military necessity – and under no plea which compels us to disown them as comrades in arms. Private letters from Georgia convey this information and the statements are made upon good authority. You made a mistake in seeking an asylum in Milledgeville – The "old house at home" has not yet been shelter for a "blue coat", and I hope, as Sherman has gone, will never be.

I would have replied even earlier to your letter, but we have taken a very cool tramp through the snow and mud upon the bloody right. We were gone two or three days – returned last Sunday afternoon – the Yankees had moved a column of infantry, cavalry and artillery in the direction of Weldon. We (our brigade) moved to the right ten miles to occupy a portion of the lines vacated by the forces sent in pursuit of this raiding column of the enemy. It reminded me forcibly of the trip we had in the valley of Virginia last winter – we are again [illegible] our feet with plasters & listening to the music of the big guns & watching for mortar shells, and suffering from nothing but soreness caused by the hard marching alluded to above - - -. The army is preparing quarters for the winter season – Drills, inspections and the routine of camp duties are being resumed. The troops are cheerful and confident – the campaign hasn't taken a particle of starch out of their spirits, and tho' some of us are Georgians, we are not yet ready to "Knock under" - You Georgians, I learn have grown much more patriotic since Sherman has introduced you to the despotism you'll encounter, when you return to the "old flag". You have felt the iron heel, and it has crushed the beauty and life of Middle Georgia, to engender a spirit of hatred to the enemy and create a patriotism to place all upon the "altars of sacrifice". If there ever existed a taint of reconstruction in Georgia, I am glad that the enemy has marched thro' the state – The atmosphere in that section is becoming purified and the prospect of wasted fields and smokened ruins intensifies it. It were better that everything had been destroyed than that Georgians should have nourished a cowardly sentiment of a desire to return to the union for no other purpose than that of securing their wealth.

"Better the fire upon thee roll-
better the blade, the shot, the bowl,
than crucifixion of the soul"

Fire amongst chemists is a very good purifier, and Sherman has used it well. His march is worth to the State more than all the patriotic speeches and proclamations that could have been addressed to us upon the subject.

I was interrupted yesterday so much that I discontinued my writing – and wishing you a good morning, (it's just after daybreak), I resume.

The many regiments in the Confederate service, particularly those of the infantry arm, have been reduced by prolonged and arduous campaigns to mere handfuls of men, and in consequence thereof Pres. Davis in his message to congress recommends consolidation. His suggestion is wise, and will accrue to the efficiency of the service in several respects. Commands, when they have become small from the casualties of war, lose their interest, which tends to decrease the discipline; and under the old regime no matter how few men there were borne on the rolls, every company had, (because it was entitled to them by law), four officers. So, if the present system were continued in force, we would ultimately have an army of officers, or anyhow it would bear a strong resemblance to McPherson's clan, which when assembled, had "Six and thirty pipers and four and twenty men".

Our time-serving Congress, when consolidation was recommended last year, declined to act upon the suggestion, urging gravely that the sensibilities of many gallant officers would be wounded in the event. This objection to the President's suggestion, while it is intended to compliment this class, is certainly a reflection upon their common sense and patriotism, for verily no man with common sense, seeing the wisdom of the measure, would be embarrassed in returning to the ranks, (in which are many of his peers), and no patriot would hesitate to shoulder his musket, seeing the emergency which demanded his services as a private soldier. By a little calculation the number of men added to the army by consolidation & the reduction of surplus officers, would amount nearly to 12,000 – and that of veterans, not conscripts and partial cripples to burden the Surgeon's reports and crowd the hospitals, but brave, intelligent veterans of four years' experience in war and inured to hardship and exposure. This number of men is equal to one of Grant's corps, and would whip in an open field any two in the Federal armies. As a matter of financial importance, its effect would not be inconsiderable. The government feeds them anyhow, and their extra pay as officers might enter into Mr. Trenholm's sinking fund to reduce the currency – and to some extent retard the operations of Memminger's Perpetual Wheel, which at every revolution burdens our Young Republic with thousands of debts.

Mr. Miles has introduced a resolution into the House and the Military Committee have reported a bill for carrying the President's suggestion as to consolidation into effect. It will probably be adopted, and in company with many other "redundant excrescences" and ornamental appendages, I await my fate. It is quite a theme of conversation, and many young officers, who have expanded wonderfully since promotion, await the edict which taketh away the gold lace, with fear and trembling. As for my part I like the thing amazingly, and hail the day with joy, when I'll again shoulder my musket. I expect however, if officers retired under this proposed Act of Congress are not conscribed on the spot, to join Mosby's command in the mountains and on the Potomac, whose exploits have made it famous already. Then away with red tape and general orders! No undue or harsh restraint but with all the freedom of Byron's Corsair-

“as far as the breezes bear & the billows foam,
Survey our Empire and behold our home”.

I hope that we've reached the conclusion of this year's campaign at last, and retrospect of the last eight months is terrible. In my own company, which I commanded throughout the campaign, ten have been killed and twenty disabled permanently by the loss of limbs, etc. Many have been slightly wounded whom I do not enumerate in the lists of killed & disabled. I have great reason to feel thankful to the God of Battles for a preservation almost miraculous. Special Providence, it seems, was invoked in my behalf by the prayers of the good at home. Before we left Orange C.H., I had for amusement replied to one of these matrimonial advertisements, or rather begun a “correspondence with a view to matrimony” & retained a rough copy of a letter I had written to the young lady advertising. I placed it in a woolen jacket pocket which I wore in the wilderness fights. A bullet struck the jacket above the region of the heart, & might have penetrated but for the resistance furnished by this letter. I was deeply impressed with this incident, & have preserved the old letter. On May 23rd my company had 20 men, & after the engagement I was alone, but slightly wounded myself with a grape shot, whose force was nearly spent by passing through a man immediately in my front. When so many great and good fall, why should I be spared?

I am again in a quandary as to where to address this. You may be in Griffin, or Macon, or probably are yet sojourning in the Capital. I suppose you'll get it if directed to either of the three places. Farewell! Compliments to Mrs. H. & family.

Yours,
Eugene S. Mitchell