



U. S. A. Gen Hospital  
Chester Pen  
Jan

Dear Ellie,

It is very difficult for me to answer the demands of all my correspondents, so you will not be surprised at my delay in answering your letters. When I sit down to write, there are so many waiting for letters that I do not know where to commence, & when once I have made a beginning, I never know when to stop, & when finally I have sealed my letter & sent it to mail, I remember that I have omitted the very things I wanted most to say. I received a day or two since a note from Geo. R. Davis enclosing a letter from the Agent in Boston saying that by some neglect the freight on my box was not prepaid, adding that it should not occur again, & remitting me 50 cts. So the fault was in Boston, & not in Philadelphia or Chester as I supposed. I had pd the freight only a day or two before I rec. Mr Davis' letter & had the box bro't up. We were delighted with it. I carried an armful of magazines & a few books into my ward Sunday morning & many of my men are busy with them still. The Norwegian boy was very much pleased with The March to Washington, & said if ever he went back to Norway he

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Date: January 1863

Description: Rebecca Usher wrote this letter to her niece, Ella Bacon, about her work as a nurse at the U.S. Hospital in Chester, Pennsylvania.

would like to take that book with him. I told him he might have it which pleased him very much. An old man from "York State", who was discharged yesterday said he should like the Eulogy on John Quincy Adams to take home with him; & as he had sent three sons to the war & then enlisted himself, I could not refuse him. The Dominoes I gave to a man lately arrived from the battle of Fredericksburg & he was very grateful for them. The beautiful stockings sent by Mrs Jones I have not yet disposed of but am reserving them for some special occasion. The tobacco came very opportunely as I had given out my last bit. You will please thank Winthrop Jordan & the other donors for me. A bit of Tobacco is like food to the hungry & rest to the weary. The bosomed shirts were very acceptable. We use them for laying out the dead & we sometimes give them to a soldier going home on a visit & very rarely to one going to a party or going out to pass Sunday. But not often as it makes too much work for the wash women to do them up. The towels I have not dispensed yet, as I think it best to keep something in the locker; but no doubt shall have such an urgent call before many days that I cannot resist it. You should have seen us over our barrel! You can hardly imagine what an exquisite pleasure it is to open a box at a hospital. No miser ever counted his gold with half the zest, with which we handle & count the nice warm clothing & delicate comforts sent to the soldiers. Tears of gratitude rise to all our eyes & exclamations of delight burst from our lips, as

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we bring up from the depths of the box, the many things which we scarcely dared hope for, in this our country's time of need. If we could know that our army in the field was as well supplied the pleasure would be without alloy. Most of the flannel shirts were given to men who were sent back to their regiments. The stockings were given to the General & the slippers were distributed through the wards. They were particularly acceptable, as the only slippers Mrs Tyler had, were so large no body could wear them. Even for those wounded in the foot we were obliged to alter them & make them smaller. I saw very few pocket handkerchiefs I distributed through my ward. As the ward master told me they were very much in need of them. The dried apples were sent to the kitchen, & all the sick & disabled who were well enough to eat them luxuriated upon them for some time. They all thought them very nice. The jellies I divided between Miss Newhall, Louise & myself. Two of the flannel shirts I gave to Louise & two I kept to dispense myself; one of these I gave to my dyptheria patient, whom they had stripped, as soon as he arrived here, & sent all his clothes to the wash house & replaced his two shirts with only a cotton one. It is a rule here that the clothes shall be taken off from the newly arrived & sent to the wash house, which is an excellent rule provided it had a supplement - that they should be furnished with sufficiently warm clothing, while their own was being made ready for them. But common sense is made to yield to red tape here, as well as every where <sup>else</sup> throughout the army. The other shirt I gave to a sick man who had been served the same trick in a Philadelphia Hospital, & never got his own

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flannels back or any others to replace them. The Soldiers suffer a great deal in this way. There are so few people in the employ of Government, that are at the same time honest, intelligent, & efficient; that there seems to be no help for them. It is a rule here that no smoking shall be allowed in the wards. Now it is a great comfort to some of these wounded men to smoke occasionally & my ward master tells the men not to let the Officer of the Day catch them smoking, & I uphold him in it. By the way I have a nice little ward master. To be sure he is n't a "six footer", not more than five feet four, but he's a handsome gentlemanly fellow & I like him very much. Three of my four nurses are everything I could wish. So I am very fortunate in my ward & we all move on most harmoniously. The little game of question & answer which Lorrie Jones sent I gave to a young German, who was very much pleased with it, said it was like what they had in Germany, & he soon had the Germans collected around him deep in the game. The Raspberry vinegar sent by Mrs Rand we were especially glad of as we were entirely out of it, & there were several sick men who needed it. The Turtle amused them very much. One man said he only wished he had some of the soup, the idea of it made his mouth water. Sat Jan. 17<sup>th</sup> It is almost impossible to write letters here we have scarcely a moment we can call our own. I intended to have finished this & sent it to you a week ago; but I was so many

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things have happened to prevent me. In the first place my men all have drawn new overcoats, & they all wanted pockets in them. Then we have a woman sick in the house - ~~one of the soldiers wives~~ wife of one of the soldiers, who takes a great many odd moments as she is entirely dependant on the ladies to take her meals to her, & to entertain her she gets so low spirited & homesick. Yesterday morning one of my men had his arm operated on & a large piece of dead bone extracted. They gave him Ether & he sang all the time during the operation, & is doing well now. Last evening we had a negro concert for the soldiers - a band of music came down from Phil - with a band of negro minstrels. The dining room was filled with soldiers - & they were so anxious to see & hear, that many of them climbed up to the rafters where they looked like sailors manning the yard arms, while others were arranged upon the side beams, with one arm around the water pipes. They all seemed to enjoy it very much, & at the close it was announced upon the authority of the Chaplain that the Paymaster would be here next week, which was received with deafening cheers of acclamation. I only hope he will come with greenbacks enough to pay off the soldiers. By the way, do you know why the Greenbacks are like the Jews? I'm afraid you do as it has been in the papers. Because they are the issue of Abraham & do not know their Redeemer, very profane - but isn't it good! Now I must go to my ward but will finish this afternoon.

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Sat P.M. I go to Chester this afternoon with Louise to do a little shopping. Follet Sally's sister - Mrs Whitney was here from Washington yesterday to see Miss Newhall. They had not met for 21 years. She is a very pleasant woman very genial & enthusiastic & very patriotic. She was in Maryland on a farm when the war broke out & had a good deal of conflict with her rebel neighbors. There was a conspiracy to take her husband & bring him before Gen. Stuart, but he escaped. She had lived in the midst of Slavery ever since she left Portland I believe; but she had lived with her ears & eyes open & has always realized its hideousness. It is refreshing to meet a northern woman whose home had been & still is in a slave state with a moral sense sufficiently acute to see & feel the influences of the peculiar institution in all its repulsiveness. I was very much pleased with her. Miss Newhall is going to Washington in February to make a visit, & Mrs Whitney invited Louise & I to accompany her & if our men are well enough to be left think we shall probably go for a day or two. We can go & return for \$5.00. Mrs Whitney is well acquainted with all the Fessenden's & brought messages from Mary & Fanny Anderson. Mary D. Fessenden & Fanny are both at Dr. Perley's. Write me where Georgia Richardson lives that I may call & see her sometime. We have given out within a fortnight 300 lbs of new socks besides most of those sent upon Maine & 50 or 60 lbs sent to Mrs Tyler from Boston, & now we have to work with a good deal of energy to see that they are washed, dried, & mended so that all the men can have a change once a fortnight. We are determined to accomplish this often - but now & then there

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comes a rainy week that puts everything back. Have received your Mother's newspapers to day am delighted with Gov Coburn's message or that part relating to national affairs. do I have not read the other parts. Also with the extract from Gen Bank's Proclamation. He is a true philosopher, & reads history to some purpose. We know the end must be well & for the best interests of humanity - but the loss of life & the amount of suffering are fearful! & then if one third part of the men in office in the Government & in the army were only honest & earnest, if they had faith - faith in justice - freedom & human progress - how soon this weight of despair would be lifted from the heart of the nation. Ask Mat to send me a comforter in her box. I sometimes have a sick man who suffers very much from the hard beds & if I had a comforter today over the bed to make it softer would be a great relief to him. I have now ~~one~~ wounded at the battle of Fredericksburg in the leg who has an attack of inflammatory rheumatism a boy of 16 who complains very much of his bed, but to night we have done what we could to make him comfortable. If your mother has Dr Hanes work Arctic Expeditions & Irving's life of Washington & will send them to me in Mat's box I will take good care of them & bring them back to her. Shall try & write to Nathan next & then I shall answer May's letter. I wish you all success in your Theatricals, but dont make yourself sick over them. Think you might repeat them for the benefit of the nurses when we return. With love to all my friends very truly

Your Aunt Bep.

If you can send me any more Segar boxes they will be acceptable. only the tops

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