

Richard Baxter Foster Letters to his Wife

[All indentions are meant to reflect those found in the original letter.]

Baton Rouge La

May 28, 1864

My Dear Wife,

Maj Hudson got off this morning taking with him 4 letters that I have written to you in the last five days while he has been waiting to get off – He will take them to Cairo and mail them there. I think they will go some quicker than to go from here to New Orleans first. I got yours of April 16th May 9th today & you had got mine of April 16 taking just six weeks before a letter can go both ways and that is better than has often been done. Orvin poor boy was still very sick, suffering a great deal and did not think he would ever get well, I am sorry for his sufferings. I hope he will recover perfect health and live a long and useful life – but I hope above all that he will be prepared for life or death for joy or sorrow that his peace is made with God and that life or death as God pleases will be alike welcome. Words are feeble to express the yearning of soul that I have to be with you in this hour of trouble of sickness, pain and & suffering, perhaps death though I cannot help but hope that Orvin will live & be a better man both in body & soul for his sickness I assure you that my thoughts are with you con-

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stantly I want to see those two babies Nettie and [L_] more than you can think. You can kiss them every day for me, that is you and Phrone. I don't suppose you see Phrone every day but infer that she has been down ^{a good deal} while Orvin has been sick I am having as good a time as a soldier away from home, wife, and children could have. I have to [] hard to be sure but I do not count that any disadvantage I undoubtedly enjoy myself the better for that. But my work itself is pleasant my associations are all pleasant. I feel that I am doing good. I am not suffering any hardship except separation from my family and last though I know it will not be least in your estimation my health is perfectly good. I was never better. I have a good appetite, sleep well, bathe every day in the same glorious old river that receives the waters of Salt Creek and think and dream of home. I get later news today from the North. It seems that a week ago to day today Grant made a new movement. The papers do not state its nature. It was too soon to do more than to say that the army was moving. I can only form a conjecture as to its course. And my conjecture is that like the first move May 4th & like the second May 7th it is intended to turn Lee's left flank or force him to take a new position to fight.

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Grant goes ahead, 100,000 men may die but he is going to Richmond. I am glad of it. It will cost less that way than any other. It will be a big fight. It has already been a big fight, but it won't cost any more in battle than a dozen small battles scattered through a year or two & if it ends

the war this year will save a great many lives that would be lost by sickness. I suppose you know enough about war to know that it is an almost universal rule that more men are lost by sickness than by battle. There is generally much more sickness than is necessary through men not knowing how to take care of themselves. For instance the 1st Ind. Ast. now in the Fort with us is a veteran Regiment returned from its furlough since we were here and one third of its present members are new recruits, that third furnish 82 per cent of the sick in the Regiment. I infer that Grant's fighting with Lee in Virginia up to the last date that I have heard has been about even with the moral advantages on our side for we are advancing every time we change front. But Sherman in Georgia seems to meet with more decided success than Grant. He has actually whipped Johnson twice and compelled him to fall back. Without detracting at all from the great merits of Grant I believe Sherman is the best general we have got. He will move an army faster & with less transportation than any

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other. He has developed the same quality in this respect that the politicians [] so much afraid of in Fremont. In this department I suppose we shall only try to stand on the defensive until the present struggle is decided in Va. & Ga. Then if we are successful there an army of 50,000 or perhaps 100,000 can come down here & sweep the country from the river to Mexico like a whirlwind. I hope to go that trip yet.

I saw a letter today from the 56th U. S. Inf (Col'd) formerly [] Ak [] of which Mr. Guylee of Sidney was Colonel. It seems that Guylee has resigned. I guess because he was afraid to go before the board the Regt [] going been first organized without officers being examined an Gen'l Thomas calling all the doubtful cases before the board. The state of that Regt is not as good as ours. Several officers keep wenches & one who has a wife & grown daughters at home has not sent home a dollar in a year, while he keep a woman with him dressed in silks. I don't suppose such things are common in the army but they sometimes occur. Our Lt Col commanding the Regt is a boy as it were only 23 year old and he has been round the world a good deal and rather a wild boy. You would not suppose that he would control officers under him [] to wildness so well as a minister of middle age & acknowledged ability would you? If you would not you would be mistaken. The first

[The following text is written around the edges and margins of the letter]

Colonel of the 35th was a minister and the present Col. Brooks is a minister formerly editor of the Christian Advocate, but no such goings on as exist in his Regt are allowed in Col Bransons. Notwithstanding his youth he is respected by every officer in the Regt & though we have pretty good officers some of them need a master & that is just what they have got in Col Branson & just what those other fellows did not get in the Methodist minister. Good night. Sweet dreams. Sweet rest. Sweet thoughts be there – Will I know how to act with women & children after living 3 years with nobody but soldiers. Most soldiers swear a good deal. I am sorry to say that our soldiers are growing worse in that respect. It is mainly the fault of one or two offices but I presume the 7th Iowa swore worse than most Regts do.

Baxter

You are a good woman to write to me so often as you do. I love to get your letters even if you don't write long ones. Once more Good bye Baxter