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Richard Baxter Foster Letter to his wife March 12 1865

Richard Baxter Foster

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Brays Santiago Texas
Sunday afternoon March 2. 1865

Dear Lucy,

It appears to be of little use to write letters for no mail goes out, and none comes in; but I have a subject to write about today that will not lose its interest especially to the boys - Even by delay. I mean a very curious fish that was killed here yesterday. It is called a saw-fish. Webster's Dictionary gives a picture of it and a little description. It says it is sometimes from 12 to 18 feet long. The individual killed here yesterday is 3 inches less than 12 feet long. It got so near the shore when the tide was up (it was in the lagoon between the Island and mainland) that when the tide went out, he was left in water so shallow that he could not navigate nor escape. A number of persons were engaged in his capture but Lieut Adamson killed him going into the water and putting the gun close to his head. I did not see the fellow till he was hauled out on the sand. His saw is a horny continuation of the upper jaw ~~which~~ ~~has the~~ 3 feet long 2 ft 6 inches long. 4 inches wide at the butt 3 inches at the extremity, which looks like it had been broken off ^{it is} nearly as thick as a man's hand. It has 22 teeth on one side and 20 on the other, about

an inch long on the average. not very regular but sharp. And the whole saw constitutes a formidable weapon. This fish differs materially from the swordfish. It is nearly allied to the shark. Its skin is like a shark's. It had a dozen or so small fish (if they were fish) sticking to it, apparently bloodsuckers, and in its stomach other fish some of them 6 inches long. This fellow's saw is not the most curious part of his organization. Immediately behind the largest fin on each side is what looks like a leg about the size color, shape, and looks of a pig's leg between the knee and foot. It is about 2 feet long and has no joints and no foot, but at ^{near} the extremity two slits or openings reminding one of the nostrils of the nose: only they appear to be usually closed tight.

What is the use of these legs I cannot tell. The whole animal is a curious fellow. I hope Adamson will save the saw & a leg so that you can some day see ^{them} it. I have cut off a piece of the fin about twice as thick as sole leather; if I get it dried without losing it I will send it home. The skin is smooth and tough like a shark's.

I am anxious to know if the shells I sent to you last December ever got home. I think I shall change my tactics

hereafter in sending shells. I propose to put them in light boxes (cigar boxes for instance) and send by mail.

The Mail is allowed to carry packages weighing not more than 4 pounds at 2 cts for 4 ounces or 8 cts a pound. Lieut Robinson gets butter from home, put up in a tin can & that served up in a bag. I have a cigar box nearly full of shells which I intend to send to Delia McCoy of Clayton. After that I will get a box for you. I shall not be in a hurry about it but shall try to send a box of real nice ones.

I went over to the Surf yesterday and took another bath. I would ^{have} liked to have ~~had~~ my boys with me.

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I suppose a mail will come in again sometime. And that I shall hear once more from home. I hear that a late order of the War Department gives all officers who have served three years in any capacity a right to be mustered out if they did not reenlist as veterans. I have not seen the order and do not really believe that it means just that. If it does I can demand to be mustered out on the 17th day of next September.

If I ~~can~~ ^{can} the order, shall I do it?

I want to know beforehand how you feel about it. Before perhaps before this time Grant has taken Richmond and the

war is approaching a rapid close
One of our Captains thinks that
in less than 8 months the war will
close and our troops mustered out.
I hope the war will close but cannot
see the probability of it in that light.
Many of our officers think that Gen Wallace
is here for some important purpose. I think
there can hardly be any doubt as to that but what
it is none of us know. It would not be
proper for me to tell the different guesses that
are made and so little do we know that there
could be no satisfaction in the guesses. You
must make them for yourself till more is
known

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The weather now is pleasant and mild.
It is like May in the North. One day is cold
enough to need a fire but mostly not.
It is as warm on the average as May ^{in the North} and
grass would be as far along if we had any.
I have written a letter today to Roswell.
I did not talk to the men. At full thought
Dear Love, I think of you and
wish I could be with you. It would
even be a great satisfaction to me if I
could know how you are getting along
and what you are doing. I suppose I
must be patient. It is nearly the middle
of March and I have a letter from
you written the 28th of Jan.

Good Bye
Father