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Daniel Foster Letter to Richard Baxter Foster May 11, 1863

Daniel Foster

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Camp of the 33rd Mass. Vol. near Aquia Creek Va. May 11th 1863

Dear Brother

Your long & most welcome letter came to hand
last Friday, the day after our return to Camp from our
last forward march. At daylight on Monday April
27th we started for Kelley's ford, 30 miles distant with 8
days rations in our haversacks. Crossed the Rappahannock
at 12 o'clock on Tuesday night. Camped the next
night on banks of the Rappahannock. & on Thursday night
in the woods near Chancellorsville, 14 miles from Fred-
ericksburg. Hooker was then & had with him 17000 men.
Friday was spent in fixing the enemy's & strengthening our
position. Our line of battle was in the form of a
triangle some ten miles long, resting on U. S. ford
at the River where three pontoon bridges were thrown
across for our supplies which reached us on pack
mules. The front was on the plank road between
Fredericksburg & Gordonsville. The whole line of ten miles
was strongly intrenched. The fighting commenced
on Saturday by an attempt of Lee to break through
our line on the plank road & effect a junction
with Jackson who was in our rear with 40000 men.
Every charge made by Lee was repulsed. At 3 o'clock
the 2^d Brigade of the 2^d Div. 11th Army Corps, i.e. our Brigade
was ordered to leave. Knapsacks & all clothing not worn.

for a disturbed reconnaissance. While we were away
Jackson with his 40000 men massed in heavy
columns was suddenly hurled upon our Corps. It is
Dutch except our Brigade, Howard hastened Sigel's place
but did not do Sigel's work, for he allowed himself to
be surprised & driven back in a most disgraceful
manner. A thing which Frank Sigel would never
have done. Hooker with Mead, Devens & Will &
presumably restored his broken lines, during
the night by a night attack. Still this surprise
was a fearful disaster. We were recalled but 11 o'clock
Saturday night lay down half a mile from our
old place. That night we were shelled for over an
hour. During the night Hooker charged upon Jack-
son's Corps & drove them back half a mile.
At daylight Sunday morning we were marched
on the run to a position on the left which we were to
hold with three lines behind the one in the rifle pits.
The battle opened at daylight & raged without
lull for 8 hours. After that it continued but
not so furiously till night. We were not attacked
nor called up from our position. So we were
not under fire at all. The Rebel loss was
enormous. not less than 20000 in all, ours
was less than half as many. Several attacks

were made on our line Monday & Tuesday but
were all repulsed. In the mean time Lee had
received heavy reinforcements. It had set in
a pouring rain the river was rising rapidly,
our supplies were precarious. & Hooker thought best
to retreat the river & make the army safe. This
was effected & we are back in our old camp for
a few days. Soon to move again. The
whole army is enthusiastic & believes in Hooker.
McClellan never began to have such a hold
on the army as Hooker does today. When he says
forward again we shall follow him again full
of heart.

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I have just received a letter from Gen.
Saxton of Beaufort promising me a Captain's Commission
in the colored L. C. vol. if I will come to Beaufort S.C.
I have applied for leave of absence for twenty
days & go there. If it is granted I shall go &
shall use my utmost endeavors to get you
there too with a Commission. I believe in
the arming of the slaves that they may help
crush this rebellion & secure their own freedom
with it the respect of the world. I am
ready to give myself wholly to that work & hope
I may be allowed to do so.

In regard to your religious opinions you have
my fullest sympathy & I can only say hold
on to the religion of Reason & disband all author-
ity over conscience & Reason. God is our only Lord &
King. The Church has no jurisdiction over souls.
Every man must work out for himself the problem
of life. I thank God most devoutly for the
help I receive in this work from Jesus Christ who
can not condemn the worker but that
the worker might be saved through Him.
I receive probation. Oh like all God's crea-
tures. Death can make no back stream. &
I believe that ultimately God will secure
the happiness of all his children. Some differ
with me & we agree to differ. She may go her way
I can never go in the Episcopalian path.
~~But~~ I can put on the hummocks of no
Cred or Church organization & never shall
lose my warmest love to your wife
& children & believe me always
Your loving brother
J. M. Fortin.

I mail the Liberator & Commonwealth to you regularly
every week. Also the Atlantic & Continentals. Keep
up your heart dear Brother for the future is before you
& we shall win the Crown. S. F.