

---

---

# Voices of the Past

---

---

The Letters of Bell Robison

Civil War

1864

Belle Plain 12<sup>th</sup> May/64

I should have mentioned my dear mother in my first the name of this place We are within about ten miles of Fredericksburg. Hear the cannonading very distinctly. I know you'd never guess where I lodged last night I say lodged because I did not sleep at all The only time I felt like sleeping I was aroused by something crawling on my face and there was a big worm (didn't I give it a send) That was about two o'clock. I had a choice of two places : on a boat in company with some soldiers and some negros (of course the former would be no objection whatever but the idea of sleeping with the big negros) or with the Surgeons in a tent and as Dr. Carrier was taking charge of me I prepared the latter By the way I was so pleased to meet him yesterday He was at Warrenton and Falls Church with us, and I should have said I got completely drenched yesterday, was dressing wounds and was obliged to keep the wet clothes on all night Had damp straw to lie on, my waterproof hood on my head, and my blanket shawl and an army blanket Dr. C insisted on me taking; had his overcoat and a gum blanket for himself so I was fixed ten times better than many of the soldiers Oh I wish you could see some of the sad sad sights I went to work soon as I arrived yesterday dressed some terrible wounds was afraid to undertake it at first but now I don't hesitate at all. I have found the kindest friends among the Christian Commission They have done all for me that lay in their power, and Oh what a great work they and the Sanitary Com. are doing. Jane confident the soldiers would suffer ten times more than they do.

I dressed one wound this morning that had maggots in it though I think that could have been avoided by keeping it well wet which is very necessary. The wounded are being taken away and the well ones coming to go to the front. Last night the Gurillas captured twenty of our ambulance teams took the forty horses and the drivers and left the ambulances stand with the wounded in them. There are a number of Rebel wounded here but I haven't seen them yet. A soldier told me he thought there were not less than forty thousand killed and wounded. If you could see the sight you couldn't avoid shedding tears and to hear them say when their wounds are being dressed, "never mind, I'm a soldier." Sure enough they are soldiers. Oh the bravery it is the success makes them feel so One will say Mrs. Will you dress my wound please, another will say Madam and another Miss How could any one refuse to grant such a favor Last evening one boy says "this is a queer place for a woman" ~~another~~ I asked him if he didn't think it wright "Oh yes" Oh if you could see how dirty I am I don't think you ever see me look so at home. Hal's and my baggage was taken to Fredericksburg I presume by mistake as all the ladies went on there so I haven't a pr. of stockings to change and nothing else but hdkys. I forgot to say that last evening about fifteen hundred wounded of the sixth corps arrived here and as there was no place to put them they were obliged to remain in the ambulances and I'm told there were six died, and I wish you could see the mortar here It is terrible, with all the said sights there is a boat

load coming and the band is playing so sweetly. I came out of the tent before five this morn went to work and worked til the C. Com said I must take some breakfast, a piece of bread and butter, some crackers and cup of coffee. I gess think it tasted good didn't dare look at the dirt At dinner we had cold ham about half and inch thick bread and crackers, today some Jersey men came on as volunteer nurses brought some nice hams and dried beef left it with the C. Com I got ~~and~~ man to cut some of the latter and give it to the men in an tent and the gentleman had given them some cheese.

I haven't seen Hal since yesterday she is on a boat I presume We didn't go on the Connect. as there was more than enough to do here and they are comparatively comfortable on the boats Besides they are only there or four hours on the way and are taken to comfortable hospitals We may go on to Fredericksburg tomorrow Would go tonight if there was a way but I don't think it would be altogether safe to go at night for several reasons and we would probably mire. A delegation has just arrived for the Christian Com. twenty four and they are certainly needed. The cry from Fredericksburg is for lint and bandages Men dying for want of having their wounds dressed Two thousand it is said will die from mortification. Oh it is sad.

Here I sit in the C-C-tent surrounded with them, frequently a kind word from are of them, it is impossible for me to get around on almost so. I hear there is an ambulance train two miles long out ~~of town~~ ready to come in Friday 12<sup>th</sup> Here I am and don't know what to do it is so muddy and raining so hard. I have a very sever headache just for want of rest and attention to Nature's call. I lodged with three of the Surgeons last night slept apart of the night are fixed comfortably as we can expect Of if it would only cease raining I want to be at work badly and don't know what to do. I have proposed to have a bucket of water bason and sponge then have those who can walk come to my or our tent and I can dress their wounds. It looks now as if the Sun was trying to shine I do hope it will, many of the men have their boots covered with mud to the tops so you may think I can't get about much but I think if it clears it will soon dry. I will make this letter answer for all as I can't have time under the circumstances to write all This is certainly the greatest battle that has fought yet and I think is going to be the greatest victory What news we get is so good I just had for my breakfast about a table spoon full of coffee I filled my cup with \_\_\_\_\_ water one Boston cracker and an apple a Surgeon brought from W yesterday The latter tasted good. As Dr. Carrier is going to W to return I'll give him this letter with a separate note to take to Jane. Read this and forward to Mother and she may send to H or perhaps you'd better send to H first as I haven't written there lately

With much love to all All your

Daughters, sister

Bell Robison

I have written this by snatches

Dr. H. and other with Gov. Curtin are just about to stand for Fredericksburg, The Dr. sends kind regards to all. They will walk I think, don't know if I'm going on or not. I washed my face this morning the first time since I came off the had plenty of water but no place to wash