

Chattanooga, Tennessee
February 8th 1863

My dear Sister Mattie:

Are you still in the land of the living? It has been such a long time since we heard from any of you that I may well ask the question - and Oh! Sister Martha what have I not suffered since my last letter to you? Within I believe almost one year ago! Everything that a human being can, without dying. The agony and suspense I endured last spring and summer was dreadful. I am afraid Mr. Hutchinson would be obliged to leave me and join the army. Leave me without anybody to depend upon and in a most critical situation. He however was appointed Judge Advocate on Col. Thompson's Staff and was quartered in Pine Bluff. Of course he hasn't made a single cent since the beginning of the war, and everything to eat was at starving prices. We lived on "short commons" after the vegetable garden gave out. Mr. H. though had laid up something for a rainy day and we fared as well as our neighbors. On the 26th of July my little "Bessie" was born, a little fat, healthy, darling whom Mr. Hutchinson named after his sainted Mother. How I had to conjure and contrive to get clothes for the little thing! Cutting up my own flannels and gowns for her. I was entirely alone at her birth, that is, had no Mother or Sister to comfort or wait on me. Mattie at that time I was almost at death's door, having been ill all summer, teething, and requiring constant attention. Mr. H. was the only nurse for both of us, and oh such hot weather! But, as you see, I managed to survive it, and although I don't think I ever will be as "well as ever", still it is over now and I am thankful that I am as well as I am. As winter advanced everything began to look more gloomy. Mr. Hutchinson was conscripted, our neighbors were all leaving, the yanks were coming, and a perfect panic had seiged the whole State. At this crisis I received a letter from my sister, Mrs. Bruce. She had been writing to me ever since May to come to live in Atlanta, Ga., and this was the first letter that had crossed the Mississippi. She sent her husband's checks for money to defray the expenses, and would take no denial even if we had been inclined to make any. Accordingly, Robert hired a hack to transport us. We sold out everything and started for Vicksburgh, and oh such a trip! It liked to have killed all of us. We crossed the river in sight of the Federal gunboats, staid until one o'clock that night in Vicksburg and then left for Atlanta. Left Christmas Day on the boat going to Montgomery and the next night landed at Atlanta where I fondly hoped we would find a resting place. We were however doomed to disappointment. We learned there that Mr. Bruce had moved to Chattanooga where he was packing pork and making whiskey for the Government - had left word for us to come immediately through, and although we were worn completely out we made one more effort, which brought us to our journey's end. Found them all delightfully situated and looking for us with great anxiety. Spent three days very happily but at the end of that time my baby - my little Bessie, broke out with Erysipelas! Suppose she had caught from some soldiers we had traveled with, and although we had the best physician that could be got and we all nursed her devotedly she died in two weeks, and I thanked God from the bottom of my heart when they told me the breath had gone from her. I never had seen a case of it before but it has left an impression that will never be effaced. She was five months old and weighed twenty-five pounds. I don't suppose she had fallen off a pound when she died, a perfect little beauty, my idol.

She was laid in the vault to be removed to my Father's burying ground in Ky. just as soon as it is practicable. One week after her death Mr. Hutchinson joined his command at Wartrace (?), twenty or thirty miles this side of Murfreesboro. He is at present on Gen. Siddell's Staff, Cleburne's Division - but hopes to be appointed President of the Military Court of Arkansas. Mr. Bruce is working for him now in Congress. He writes to me twice a week and in my last letter from him said they were preparing for a series of battles which would be the most terrible of the war. The Yankees here are determined to whip or be whipped by the first of May. The flower of the Yankee army is in Rosencranz' division who are at Murfreesboro now directly opposed to Cleburne's division under Bragg. The Hospitals in Chattanooga are being got ready for the wounded and Gen. Breckenridge who came to see us yesterday on his way up there made us promise (my Sister and myself) to come as far as Tullahoma (?) and bring our bandages and lint to tend and provide for the wounded after the battle. He, Gen. B., seems more seriously concerned than I have ever seen him. He almost seems to have a presentment of coming evil. His death would be a terrible blow to the South and I do hope he may escape and reap the benefit of the war in which he has played such a conspicuous part. He and my father have been intimate friends and he has interested himself in Mr. Hutchinson's behalf on that account particularly.

Mattie has grown to be a great big girl, a perfect counterpart of her father, and worshipped by him. She cannot talk plain yet but since she has been with her little cousins she has improved a great deal.

My Brother-in-law (Mr. Bruce) has been peculiarly fortunate in the last two years having been packing pork for the Government and making whiskey. He was also elected to Congress from Ky. and was fortunate enough to attract the notice of the English press which complimented his speech on "Privateering" very highly. He is in Richmond now and will remain during the session. We are all very hopeful about going back to Ky. this summer, thinking that by that time there will be peace and there will be no danger in going back to the old homestead. My father has been very successful in his business, tobacco, and I have a brother in Canada who has made a fortune the same way. They write to me urging Mr. H. to come and share it with them as they know Mr. H. is utterly ruined for years to come. I have a little brother who is just twenty years old who has been in three or four battles, a Capt. first, and then promoted to Gen. Taylor's staff, and every cousin I have in the world almost is in the services, some as privates and some, or one rather, "Genop(?) Withers" as a General. I say every cousin, but that is a mistake. I have some in Lincoln's brigade but of them I have nothing to say, having disavowed them long ago. You have heard I suppose of the taking of Arkansas post. It is dreadful to think absent and makes me more thankful that I am on this side of the Mississippi as they on the other side are cut off now from all communication with those on this side, with no arms or ammunition and nothing in the world to defend themselves with.

This is the end of the letter - no signature

