

From William Clarke Quantrill to My Dear Mother

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Stanton, Kansas Terri.

Jan. 26th 1860.

My dear Mother,

I again seat myself down to pen you a few lines, hoping that they may cheer you in a measure, and if so it is all I can do at this time. I have not yet received an answer to the one I wrote to you before this, for the reason that it has not had time to reach here; but I expect to have one by the time you recieve this.

In my last letter I said we had quite fine weather here; but I can now look out of the window at my schoolhouse and see every thing clad in snow & ice, which was put on but last night, and now seems to hold everything in its cold embrace; indeed so sudden has been the change, that it seems not only to have caught the forest & prairie napping in the sunshine but the people also, for I feel it myself and seem to shudder when I look out upon the snow covered ground, & hear the cold wind whistle around & through the forest; and it brings to my recollection scenes which I passed through in the mountains but a short time ago, it makes me think of what one of the party said; (a German) when we were lost at night in the mountains, and he had looked in vain for the trail, he said, "well boys my heart is almost broke when I think that we may all die here to night[.]"

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We laughed at him then, (for we may as well laugh as cry at that time for neither done any good,) but when I have thought of it afterwards & could see what danger we had been exposed to, I feel thankful for having got off as well as I did. But I have slipped through it all compartively easy and I now begin to realize my situation, and see how much easier I have been dealt with than most of my traveling companions were, and I often think that there must have been something else for me to do, that I was spared; for my companions were all strong healthy men & endured no more hardship than myself, still the greater part of them have seen their friends for the last time on this earth; all of this has had a tendency to rouse me & let me see what I have been doing.

It is now noon and I gain write, for I had to stop when it was time for school to begin. The weather has changed some little sin[c]e, and ever and anon the sun bursts through the clouds, melting the snow on the roof, and causes the ice clad forest to sparkle & shine like silver, and the storm is gradually passing away, and it seems it has been only a frown which has passed over the heavens, which are now being lit up with glad smiles, and soon all will be pleasant again. And when I look out upon the snow it reminds me again of my mountain trip; and the excruciating pain we suffered from snow blindness, caused by looking all day on the bright snow; none of us were exempt from this, the sensation is that of having your eyes badly smoked,

which lasted for several days, the eyes become inflamed & swollen[,] causing very much pain.

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There is no news now[.] I believe at present, all is peace and quietness in the country, and all seems to move on smoothly, but times are hard, and the people complain of the taxes [*text stricken through*] which they have to pay, and indeed they are enormous for such a new country, and under the present form of government are not apt to cease.

You have undoubtedly heard of the wrongs committed in this territory by the southern people, or proslavery party, but when one once knows the facts they can easily see that it has been the opposite party that have been the main movers in the troubles & by far the most lawless set of people in the country. They all sympathize for old J. Brown, who should have been hung years ago, indeed hanging was too good for him. May I never see a more contemptible people than those who sympathize for him. A murderer and a robber, made a martyr of; just think of it.

When you write let me know all that you have time to write about, for I feel anxious to know something about home and the village of my boyhood more than I have been heretofore and I cannot really say why it is so, but I think of it more, and have lately visited it in my dreams, which was quite rare before; it may be because my mind has become more settled, and my mind must be employed in some way, and I suppose that is the most natural. I wish to know all that has happened of note lately, and I would like well to be there and think I will be, (if I live) in the course of the summer. At least I have made up my mind to that point[.]

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I suppose all of the people about there think that I am never coming back again, and also that I have done wrong in going away at all; this I will acknowledge, but who could have made me believe it at that time, I think no one, for my brain ran so with wild thoughts that I was blind to every thing else. I think that I am not the only one, of that failing; only it has probably been carried to a greater extent in my case than others, and my situation has been different from theirs.

Though I have been quite foolish in my notions of the last three or four years, still I have been taught many a good lesson by them, and think I shall not regret it in after life so much as I do now; for it is now that I feel it the keenest, and can see the whole picture of my doings in one broad sheet, which may be rolled up and laid by to look upon in after life. I have seen a little of the world[.] I know how others manage to keep moving in the vast crowd which is moving ahead; I have seen the means used by different communities to keep body and soul together, I have compared them with each other and find in the end they all amount to the same [*text stricken through*], with only this difference, that their situations are different, and the ends accomplished are adapted to their situations. [*text stricken through*] this (is all) a good comfortable living, which any person of good health & mind can procure in any country for theirself and two or three others & still have plenty of time for amusement; and this is all we can have in this world.

Well I must bid you good by; for my sheet is about full, and when I receive an answer to my first one I will write again. Hoping that this may find you and all in fine health as the writer is. My love to you all.

Your Son
W.C. Quantrill.
Kansas.