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Letter from William McKinney to His Cousin Martha McKinney, March 10, 1862

William M. McKinney

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Camp Andy Johnson near Nashville.

March 10th 1862

My dear cousin Mattie.

We were within six miles of Nashville, arrived yesterday at 12, P.M. after hard marching since the morning of the 5th inst. The first and second days we marched 15 miles each day, the third day 20 miles and yesterday 10 miles by noon, making in all 60 miles, and through a splendid country. The plantations we have passed were usually large, having large and elegant houses on them and plenty of the "peculiar institution" I have seen as many as 100 at one single plantation, making rather large squads, and very cloudy ones I suppose you. But the relieving feature of the "dark" picture, almost always appeared in the person of some exceedingly beautiful young Lady. I thought that I had before this march, been about in the world to see about as beautiful "beings" as lived in it, but

I think I have been mistaken. And if you
never met my cousin and a very amiable
one at that, I would not write thus, but
I know you will not be offended, besides
you will bear patiently with the ramblings
of a very romantic young man, than
without joking, talking nonsense, or foolish-
ness on anything of the kind, I must be
permitted to say, that during the last
march, I have seen and talked with
three or four of the most beautiful
young Ladies I ever saw in my life.
Both beautiful and intelligent, and
you have no idea how much more
I felt like enquiring a peace, after
I had talked with them and heard
their high compliments upon the fine
appearance and gentlemanly bearing of
the Northern soldiers, in comparison
with the Southern ones, and particularly
the Officers. Those of the South, they
said, were cruel and haughty, and
treated no one they met, with any
kind of civility, while those of the
Northern army, as they call us all,

were kind to our men and courteous,
and gentlemanly to all citizens we met,
and not found in arms against the
Government. They said we had been
grossly misrepresented, that from the
descriptions of us, given them by Officers
of the Southern Army, they expected to
see a perfect horde of regular Barbarians,
and, uncut in our manners, killing
without mercy, every person we met and
destroying every kind of property that
came in our way. But instead of
such persons, as we had been represented
to them, they had found us courteous
and affable gentlemen, respecting the
rights of all and protectors of property
instead of destroyers, and they had con-
cluded that we were the real patriots,
instead of the others, although they
had friends and brothers in the Southern
Army. There is no doubt, but that
the North and Northern men have
been greatly scandalized and grossly
misrepresented, to those who know
no better, by those who did.