



5-23-1854

Letter from John W. H. Baker to Julia Ann Baker, 1854 May 23

John W. H. Baker

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Mokelumne Hill, May 23, 1854

My dear Wife

I recieved your letter bearing the last date, Apr. 17th which gives me the pleasure of knowing that you and the children were in your usual health, only a few days more than one month past. I am always much rejoiced to hear that health is given you and the comforts of a good situation. I am so much more pleased with the idea that I have been thus far able to content myself to remain here without my little family for whom I have a much greater regard than to think of exposing them to all of thiw wickedness, that I always feel thankfull that you are willing for the sake of our dear children to remain with them while I am engaged in the effort to render you all more comfortable and happy when I return. I sometimes think the time runs slowly along and feel quite impatient of the delay, but when I think of my M. E. practice I am again fixed in my ~~anxxx~~ resolution to remain untill I shall be able to locate myself with a home of our own. I can but anticipate the prospect of such a home and the enjoyment we shall feel when we can again meet to enjoy our little family circle around a fireside of our own. I would that the time and means were now near at hand, but it is not so. I feel the necessity of making my sojourn in this country of a length sufficient to accomplish the object for which I first made up my mind to come to the country. I came as you know without the highest notions of my success, and with a resolve to remain some three years supposing it might be necessary to remain thus long to accumulate the means of placing me above the immediate effects of poverty. I think now as I have always thought since I first went into business here that in two years from the present time, if I have health and as good a business as we are having at present I shall be enabled to return and settle down in some quiet section of country and enjoy the

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result of my toil and affliction, for I can term it nothing nearer to correct than to call my separation from my family an affliction-- I have now been absent some over nine months and in that time I have seen many times when I have been strongly reminded of the comforts of my home more especially so when I have been a little unwell. I have been troubled with headache several times within some two months past and I then think if I was at home I should have some attentions that I do not obtain here. I should today have enjoyed having my head thoroughly combed and wet in order to remove a slight headache which has troubled me the whole day--but so slight a thing is not to be had here.

Wednesday morn. I have the pleasure of renewing my letter this morning feeling much better than I felt last evening. My headache has disappeared and the pure, invigorating air of the mountain country gives my new vigor and energy. This is the most delightful season of the whole year in Cal. Vegetation is in its prime of life and every portion of the country is now clothed with its mantle of green variegated with flowers. I had a very nice ride last week to a place called McKinney's Humbug. the place is some 15 miles from the "Hill". I started about 2 o'clock P.M. on horseback (the usual method of traveling in Cal) and went to Jesus Maria where I found one or two patients for whom I prescribed. We then took the trail for the Humbug, and crossing the creek near Jesus Maria, we commenced ascending the hills upon the opposite side, and by winding and turning first upon this side and then upon that side we at length reach an elevated position which gives us one of the characteristic views of California. below us is situated a village composed mostly of canvas houses although there are now quite a number of wooden houses, and where a little improvement is the owner's only care. we find a

wooden front with canvass roof and sides, making an appearance as we pass the street of a very well constructed wooden house. the view from the hill is quite advantageous for it shows the town much larger than it appears when one is within its street; we have a very extensive view of the country upon the opposite side of the creek, (when I speak of extensive views among the mountains I mean that you can see a large extent of mountain elevations, for we find but a few acres of what we term plain or prairie land in this section. In N. H. the hills would be considered moderate in comparison with the same here. the most difficult hills in Plainfield when compared with our mule trails are mere nothing. I was saying that we had a fine view of the mountains upon the opposite side of the creek from the elevation where we were. The hills were covered in many parts with a dense thicket called a correl, which consists of a small shrub having the resemblance of the willow growing some four to eight feet high and so closely together that it would be almost impossible for a horse or mule to penetrate to any distance among them, and sometimes among the latter growth men and animals are lost, and wonder for miles before they are able to extricate themselves from the many winding paths which are found among them. I never have seen so extended a piece of correl bushes as appeared from the place, where we stood. After leaving the height of land which descended so abruptly to the creek, we had just crossed, we passed over a region of country which was well timbered for California, and the surface of which presented a pleasant succession of hills and gulches of only moderate degrees of ascent and descent. We passed the cabins of some 2 or three rancheros who had located a claim of land for farming purposes among the most moist and level portions of these gulches. upon some of them the crops were looking very nice. Potatoes and other vegetables were

flourishing ~~wixth~~ well while the barley and wheat looked rich and rank. After riding for the space of about one hour among these hills which were in many places colored with the tinge of flowers in blossom, the fragrance of which filled the whole air with perfume, we came to a very steep descent which having descended brought us to a somewhat famous gulch called Salamander Gulch, where some few men have taken out a fortune in a short time, in this Gulch and along the side hills sloping toward it, I saw some of the largest and most beautiful specimens of the growth of trees which I have yet seen in California. Some of them were 10 or 12 feet in diameter and the pines and cedars were some of them 300 feet in height. These would be considered very large trees in N. H. But when we think of the diameter of what is called the "Big Trees" which is 33 feet, such trees as I saw were of moderate size only. Having passed over this portion of country I passed over some moderate hills and arrived upon a small gulch along which a small ditch is cut which leads the water contained in it over the next hill and into the vicinity of the Humbug. this place is fast gaining the reputation of a good mining region, although its name is significant of the opposite. at this place is a Mammoth Cave which was described in one of the papers which I sent you last week, but for fear you may not recieve the paper I put in an extract cut from another paper. I visited and went through the whole extent of this wonder. It is truly remarkable and to the geologist would form one of the most interesting sights in California. while it must impress him strongly with the idea of mighty convulsions of the earth, I can give you no idea of the beauty of the stalactitic formations, or of the curious forms of calcareous deposits in the different apartments but by reading the description of my friend Mr. Hamilton, the author of the discription, you can imagine somewhat the sublimity and

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beauty of the cave. Suffice it to say I remained at the Cave Hotel over night administering to my patient and in the morning left with an arrangement that he should be conveyed to my office at Mok. Hill in one or two days, and with a vigorous morning air loaded with flowery perfume I started on my return arriving at home about midday.

Saturday, May 27th

I conclude that I may as well finish my letter to-day for the mail which leaves on Monday morning as I may be so busy on the morrow as to make the writing of a letter an inconvenient thing. I am still enjoying a good degree of health and am feeling pretty well contented. As to Dr. H. of whom you seem to write and think so much you may give yourself no uneasiness for we get along well enough. Our business goes along about as usual and I am in no wise alarmed as to his every attempting to defraud me, as our matters are so arranged that there is no opportunity for either of us to be very great defaulters to each other. I wrote you sometimes since that I had paid my debt for the money which I borrowed to pay for my situation here. I did not then expect to be called upon to pay the money which I had of John Storrs on Oliver's acct. before I left home & so soon, but when O. left he gave the amount to Storrs and I have just made out the payment and am now free from any indebtedness in this country, and do not think of any debt to a single person with the exception of the note that Mother holds against me, and I have debts due which I expect paid in today or tomorrow enough to pay that if it were necessary. Tell Oliver that Mr. Holmes was in my office about two minutes since, looking healthy and dressed like a N. Y. Dandy. He arrived upon the John L. Stephens, gave us news of having met Oliver and others on the Isthmus.

I was much disappointed that Dr. H. should not have brought

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some medical books with him when he returned. I now wish you to have my numbers of Braithwaites Retrospects packed in good shape and if Oliver returns have them sent along by him, or if Oliver can by any means have a good opportunity to send them, I would like to have him do so immediately. (Perhaps he can send by H. M. Sturgess). You may put in my Medical Dictionary & Wilson's Anatomy likewise. If no other opportunity offers I would prefer you to send them by Adams & Co's. Express rather than not receive them. If sent by Express pay the charge through and take a receipt which receipt you will send me by letter. I should like many things in the way of Surgical instruments, such as a full apparatus for the treatment of fractures. a case of instruments for Amputations etc, but on account of bulk and the inconvenience of transportation I must do without them at present. I shall probably send another draft for money to you within a month or six weeks--as I prefer sending my money home rather than loan it here with the present uncertain security of loans--You will of course use what is necessary and let the rest remain quiet until I give orders for some disposition of the same. I shall send by express a small package containing a miniature of a certain Gent whom you may be able to recognize upon close examination, and in the same package is a small present for Fred & Maria--Tell Sarah I am much pleased with the lines she sent, and will endeavor to send a paper of flowers by mail in part payment. I am sorry to hear that Mrs. Shattuch is failing. Ere this comes to hand Mr. Wingate will have arrived and joined his family once more-- thus one by one the many families who have been separated for a long time are united again and in turn anticipate the time of my own is to come. I am happy to receive the kind considerations of any and all my old friends at Meriden, and to all who enquire please give them mine in return. In the mean time I remain as ever

Your Husband