

Letters from Private Samuel Zinser, 1861-1864.

[S. Zinser writes to Elizabeth Means, a woman he had been courting back in Washington, Illinois.]

Camp Benton Mo. Sept. 22, 1861

My dear friend Lizzie,

Although you did not ask me to write to you at any time, yet I have no reason to believe, that a few lines from your humble friend would not be appreciated by you. On the contrary I believe it will bring an answer in due time; my faith is unwavering in that respect and shall be, until otherwise informed by you.

I will now give you a little history of our travels since yesterday until to day about two o'clock, when we arrived here in camp Benton almost wearied out, having marched about five miles; (this being the distance from where we landed, to our Camp)-

You can well imagine how we looked, after marching all the way from river through a perfect fog of dust, and having travelled from the time we started until we arrived here without any rest, the cars being crowded so full, and the seats but of little account for resting purposes. - We arrived at Alton this morning at six; there we got aboard the steamer City of Alton, and came to St. Lewis; this was an interesting trip to me, it being the first time I ever rode on a boat in my life. It was truly a grand sight to me to see that or in other words glide along down that grand stream, (the Mississippi) sometimes (and truly too) termed the Father of waters; and had not my thoughts wandered back home and friends (as I was gazing on its fair bosom) it would have been truly interesting to me; but as the boat was gliding along silently and everything seemed hushed in silence save the rustling of the waves which heaved to and fro and seemingly groaned under the heavy burthen they had to sustain, my thoughts naturally wandered back to Washington; and being Sabbath morning I imagined you were going to church, and for a moment I could hardly realize my situation (although surrounded with the beautiful sceneries of nature) and as I was thus meditating a tear silently started and I found that had almost allowed myself to weep; I then tried to banish such thoughts, thinking it did not become a soldier to weep; but this I could not well do, the scene of Saturday morning being to vivid in my mind to be so easily forgotten. I thought that I could brave almost everything but when Friend Charles informed me that you were there and wished to see me, I could not altogether command presence of mind at the time. I must confess; the train you will remember had started before I saw you or knew you were there; I had been looking for you on the other side all the time; I would have give anything, it seemed to me, to have the train stop a few minutes longer.

I felt like saying something; but the time was short and scene too impressive, so that I could not command myself entirely at the time; Rebecca was there too, I believe and I did get to bid her goodby; please tell her goodby for me when this reaches you. I did not see any of my folks at the train but Father and Bro. John and I did not regret it much, because I had seen enough, of parting with friends; I remarked to a friend of mine after we had gone that the severest battle was fought, and that I would rather face the cannons mouth than witness the parting scene of parting friends and realize it too.

But I must soon close for this time; a little more of our camp and &c, and bring this manuscript of miscellaneous items to a close.

We have a beautiful location for our quarters; it is by the old fair ground, I wish you could see the fair ground and our encampment; it is a beautiful place; so much so that I will not attempt to describe it this time, it being nearly drill time. With regard to the number of troops in camp here I can give you nothing definite as there are some going and coming all the time; I was told however that there were quarters prepared for 27,000 troops, and they are nearly all full. How soon we shall leave here of course I cannot tell, as we are not armed and equipped yet.

All the boys are well and in good spirits in our Co. When you write direct your letters in this form
Camp Benton St. Louis Mo.

47th Reg. of Ill. Vol. Company B

I will close by soliciting an answer from you, and giving you my best respects to you; also to Rebecca, in short all inquiring friends,

S.C. Zinser

From your true and sincere friend.



Beaufort County, Washington, N.C ' Bridge over Tar River near Washington (N.C.) – The draw open – A party of Negroes on the other side – Special correspondents gleaning information. '
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, June 14, 1862.

Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge Of Courage* (1895).

He expected a battle scene.

There were some little fields girted and squeezed by a forest. Spread over the grass and in among the tree trunks, he could see knots and waving lines of skirmishers who were running hither and thither and firing at the landscape. A dark battle line lay upon a sunstruck clearing that gleamed orange color. A flag fluttered.

Other regiments floundered up the bank. The brigade was formed in line of battle, and after a pause started slowly through the woods in the rear of the receding skirmishers, who were continually melting into the scene to appear again farther on. They were always busy as bees, deeply absorbed in their little combats.

The youth tried to observe everything. He did not use care to avoid trees and branches, and his forgotten feet were constantly knocking against stones or getting entangled in briars. He was aware that these battalions with their commotions were woven red and startling into the gentle fabric of softened greens and browns. It looked to be a wrong place for a battlefield.

The skirmishers in advance fascinated him. Their shots into thickets and at distant and prominent trees spoke to him of tragedies – hidden, mysterious, solemn.

Once the line encountered the body of a dead soldier. He lay upon his back staring at the sky. He was dressed in an awkward suit of yellowish brown. The youth could see that the soles of his shoes had been worn to the thinness of writing paper, and from a great rent in one the dead foot projected piteously. And it was as if fate had betrayed the soldier. In death it exposed to his enemies that poverty which in life he had perhaps concealed from his friends.

The ranks opened covertly to avoid the corpse. The invulnerable dead man forced a way for himself. The youth looked keenly at the ashen face. The wind raised the tawny beard. It moved as if a hand were stroking it. He vaguely desired to walk around and around the body and stare; the impulse of the living to try to read in dead eyes the answer to the Question.

During the march the ardor which the youth had acquired when out of view of the field rapidly faded to nothing. His curiosity was quite easily satisfied. If an intense scene had caught him with its wild swing as he came to the top of the bank, he might have gone roaring on. This advance upon Nature was too calm. He had opportunity to reflect. He had time in which to wonder about himself and to attempt to probe his sensations.

Absurd ideas took hold upon him. He thought that he did not relish the landscape. It threatened him. A coldness swept over his back, and it is true that his trousers felt to him that they were no fit for his legs at all.

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III. Dollars

All along the rails there were faces; in the port-holes there were faces. Leeward a stale smell came from the tubby steamer that rode at anchor listed a little to one side with the yellow quarantine flag drooping at the foremast.

"I'd give a million dollars," said the old man resting on his oars, "to know what they come for."

"Just for that pop," said the young man who sat in the stern. "Aint it the land of opportooinity?"

"One thing I do know," said the old man. "When I was a boy it was wild Irish came in the spring with the first run of shad. . . . Now there aint no more shad, an them folks, Lord knows where they come from."

"It's the land of opportooinity."

LEANFACED young man with steel eyes and a thin highbridged nose sat back in a swivel chair with his feet on his new mahogany-finish desk. His skin was sallow, his lips gently pouting. He wriggled in the swivel chair watching the little scratches his shoes were making on the veneer. Damn it I dont care. Then he sat up suddenly making the swivel shriek and banged on his knee with his clenched fist. "Results," he shouted. Three months I've sat rubbing my tail on this swivel chair. . . . What's the use of going through lawschool and being admitted to the bar if you cant find anybody to practice on? He frowned at the gold lettering through the groundglass door.

NIWDLAB EGROEG
WAL-TA-YENROTTA

Niwdlab, Welsh. He jumped to his feet. I've read that damn sign backwards every day for three months. I'm going crazy. I'll go out and eat lunch.

20 He straightened his vest and brushed some flecks of dust off his shoes with a handkerchief, then, contracting his face into an expression of intense preoccupation, he hurried out of his office, trotted down the stairs and out onto Maiden Lane. In front of the chophouse he saw the headline on a pink extra; JAPS THROWN BACK FROM MUKDEN. He bought the paper and folded it under his arm as he went in through the swinging door. He took a table and pored over the bill of fare. Mustn't be extravagant now. "Waiter you can bring me a New England boiled dinner, a slice of applepie and coffee." The longnosed waiter wrote the order on his slip looking at it sideways with a careful frown. . . . That's the lunch for a lawyer without any practice. Baldwin cleared his throat and unfolded the paper. . . . Ought to liven up the Russian bonds a bit. Veterans Visit President. . . . ANOTHER ACCIDENT ON ELEVENTH AVENUE TRACKS. Milkman seriously injured. Hello, that'd make a neat little damage suit.

Augustus McNiel, 253 W. 4th Street, who drives a milkwagon for the Excelsior Dairy Co. was severely injured early this morning when a freight train backing down the New York Central tracks . . .

40 He ought to sue the railroad. By gum I ought to get hold of that man and make him sue the railroad. . . . Not yet recovered consciousness. . . . Maybe he's dead. Then his wife can sue them all the more. . . . I'll go to the hospital this very afternoon. . . . Get in ahead of any of these shysters. He took a determined bite of bread and chewed it vigorously. Of course not; I'll go to the house and see if there isn't a wife or mother or something: Forgive me Mrs. McNiel if I intrude upon your deep affliction, but I am engaged in an investigation at this moment. . . . Yes, retained by prominent interests. . . . He drank up the last of the coffee and paid the bill.

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Should artists, you ask, take part in the class struggle?

There is no use adjuring them to take part in it or warning them to keep out of it; the adjurations and warnings are so much wasted breath. The artists will and do take part in it, because they are men before they are writers or painters, and because their human interests are involved...

And which side do you think the artists will choose?

I hope and trust that a great number of them will take the worker's side, and I think that doing so will make them better artists. On the other hand I realize that it will be hard for many others not to take the side of the classes now in power. On that side are most of their old friendships and childhood memories. On that side are all the institutions they have been depending on for a livelihood -the press, the stage, the movies, the radio, and, in the background, business, the schools and universities, the Army, the Church, the State. On that side, too, there seems to be all the culture inherited from the past, and with it all the mellowness and tolerance of a class grown old in power, the glamour that surrounds men and women in the habit of being served and obeyed. On the other side are ordinary people who never heard of Chaucer, and dress without taste when they don't dress shabbily, and eat their food with smacking noises...If they should win the struggle here as they have in Russia, there are likely to be years of deprivation and desperate inefficiency, and there are certain to be harshness, narrowness, fanaticism the eternal vices of a class struggling to power.

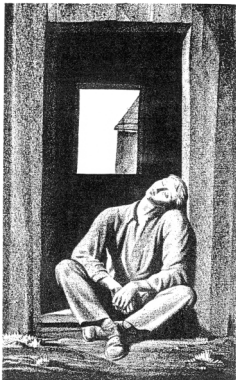
Yet the capitalists can in reality promise less than they seem to promise. The audience they offer to works of art is limited, not only in numbers, but also in capacity for appreciation -under capitalism, only a few people can afford to buy books or pictures or attend plays or concerts, and many of them are snobs who don't come to see or hear, but merely to be *seen* in a good theater, to be *heard* talking about the books they have read. (...) As for the other side, that of the factory workers and poor farmers and people now looking for jobs, it can actually promise much more than it seems to promise. First of all it can offer an end to the desperate feeling of solitude and uniqueness that has been oppressing artists for the last two centuries...It can offer instead a sense of comradeship and participation in a historical process vastly bigger than the individual. It can offer an audience, not trained to appreciate the finer points of style and execution -that will come later- but larger and immeasurably more eager than the capitalist audiences and quicker to grasp essentials. It can offer the strength of a new class.

Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return. A Narrative of Ideas*, New York, Norton, 1934

Excerpt from the epilogue of *Exile's Return*, a history of American intellectual life in the 1920's (p. 300-302)

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Resting, by Rockwell Kent, 1929

(Lithograph transfer on zinc. Published in the *American Magazine of Art*, January 1930)

Source: Dan Burns Jones, *The Prints of Rockwell Kent: A Catalogue raisonné*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 1975, p. 38